Alfred Lorenzer and the depth-hermeneutic method

Mechthild Bereswill^a, Christine Morgenroth^b and Peter Redman^{c,*}

^aUniversität Kassel, Fachbereich Sozialwesen, Arnold-Bode-Str. 10, 34131 Kassel, Germany.

E-mail: bereswill@uni-kassel.de

^bInstitut für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, Im Moore 21, 30167 Hannover, Germany.

E-mail: c.morgenroth@htp-tel.de

^cDepartment of Sociology, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UK.

E-mail: p.redman@open.ac.uk

*Corresponding author.

Abstract This article aims to introduce an Anglophone audience to the work of Alfred Lorenzer. It has three main components: it outlines some of Lorenzer's central concepts (the scenic, interaction forms, engrams, symbolisation and desymbolisation, language games and scenic understanding); explores the dialectical relations through which, for Lorenzer, unconscious, bodily and social processes are mutually constituted; and sketches some of the principles informing the depth-hermeneutic method, the tradition of social, cultural and social psychological research to which his ideas gave rise. Throughout, Lorenzer is viewed as seeking to put psychoanalysis on a materialist footing and concerned to assert its critical potential.

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Introduction

Alfred Lorenzer's work is little known in the Anglophone world. In consequence, we aim, in what follows, to introduce some of his major ideas – in particular, the scenic, interaction forms, engrams, symbolisation and desymbolisation, language games and scenic understanding. Collectively,

these underpin Lorenzer's attempt to place psychoanalysis on a materialist footing. They also constitute his distinctive understanding of human being, an understanding that is at once profoundly embodied, individual, relational and social. Indeed, it is possible to argue that, for Lorenzer, these dimensions exist only in and through each other. Although inherently in tension, they are, so Lorenzer argues, mutually constitutive – this is to say, they are made and remade in ongoing dialectical relations.

In attempting to explain some of the core aspects of Lorenzer's thinking, we have had to confront a number of problems. The first lies in the fact that his metapsychological reflections are dispersed over a wide body of work. Rather than attempting a comprehensive survey of this literature, we have chosen to focus on those aspects of his output that are closest to our own concerns. In consequence, we have taken our lead from a relatively small number of texts, in particular 'Depth-hermeneutic cultural analysis' [*Tiefenhermeneutische Kultur-analyse*], which provides a condensed statement of some of Lorenzer's more significant ideas on the relationship between individuals, the unconscious and the social, and on how a psychoanalytically informed method might inform non-clinical research (Lorenzer, 1986). Clearly, given that his career spanned more than 40 years, this strategy cannot be expected to do justice to the richness and range of Lorenzer's interests. Nevertheless, we hope that our approach brings into view some of the major contours of his thought and introduces a number of concepts of direct concern to those interested in the psychoanalysis of culture and society.

The second problem we faced relates to the rather forbidding nature of Lorenzer's prose, which not only renders translation problematic but also means that many of his most significant ideas are not readily accessible, even in the original German. We, therefore, decided to rely on commentary rather than extensive quotation from Lorenzer's work. Where we have quoted, we have adopted a 'free' approach to the task of translation, aiming for clarity of meaning over close fidelity to Lorenzer's voice. Our having done so may, at times, leave readers familiar with the original texts feeling uneasy and is clearly no substitute for a formal translation by a well-qualified academic translator. In the context of an article that aims to introduce Lorenzer's ideas to a wider audience, however, we believe our approach has the merit of practicality.

The third and final issue we have sought to address has to do with the way in which Lorenzer's concepts have been taken up in the tradition of social, cultural and social psychological research that has emerged from his work – the so called depth-hermeneutic method [*tiefenhermeneutische Methode*]. Other contributions in this special issue draw on and illustrate the depth-hermeneutic method in action. To contextualise these contributions, however, it is necessary to have some preliminary sense of the method's underlying principles and the steps that constitute it. Consequently, we begin our discussion with a vignette taken from an audience research study conducted by our colleague Joanne Whitehouse-Hart (Redman and Whitehouse-Hart, 2008). The vignette has to do with a

female viewer's surprisingly volatile reaction to an incident that occurred in the UK version of the TV reality game show *Big Brother*. We then move on to an extended exploration of Lorenzer's ideas on the relationship between the individual, the unconscious and the social and, finally, returning to the vignette, we apply his ideas more systematically to it and, in so doing, sketch the outline of the depth-hermeneutic method itself.

'I just wanted her out!'

In the course of an audience research project, a respondent, Lou, related a story about her viewing of an episode of the television show *Big Brother*. *Big Brother* is a reality game show in which a group of contestants live together, cut off from the outside world but under almost constant scrutiny from an unseen viewing public and a largely invisible production crew. Over a number of weeks, viewers phone the show to vote out their least favourite contestants until, eventually, one of them emerges as its overall winner.

Lou's story concerned an apparently mundane incident in the show. One of the contestants, Jonny, had offered a second, Adele, a cup of coffee. Adele refused in a friendly enough fashion but, as Jonny walked away, mouthed the words, 'Fuck off' to his retreating back. As Lou explained, she was so outraged by what she took to be Adele's hypocrisy that she felt impelled to vote for Adele's eviction and, moreover, to do so as a matter of urgency. Her own phone being out of order, she rushed from the house to use a nearby public phone box. Unfortunately, it was already occupied, and, unable to control her irritation, Lou started to bang angrily on the phone box door. 'I just wanted her [Adele] out', she explained.

What exactly happened in this incident? A conventional psychological interpretation might suggest that Lou's outburst indicates a degree of emotional immaturity or perhaps even of psychological disturbance. Alternatively, someone for whom *Big Brother* is symptomatic of wider cultural degeneration might be inclined to view her actions as reflecting exactly the sort of debased behaviour we would expect the show to promote. It is likely that Lorenzer would have taken issue with both interpretations if for no other reason than that both read something into the data rather than letting the data speak to us. Indeed, Lorenzer (1986) was particularly critical of approaches that, instead of attending to the ways in which a text works on or plays with a reader's subjective experience (unconscious and otherwise), impose on it a psychoanalytic interpretation, as it were, from the outside (pp. 28–29). The claim that cultural (and other) texts work on or 'provoke' the reader – and that attending to this process is an important aspect of a researcher's task – is central to Lorenzer's thesis. In fact, it is at the heart of the depth-hermeneutic method itself.

If the reader is provoked, what is he or she provoked by? Lorenzer's answer is that texts house an 'autonomous level of meaning'. This does not imply something separate from conscious life or language but rather an unconscious register that, although pressing upon and implicated in consciousness, is nevertheless irreducible and subject to its own laws.

The distinguishing feature of psychoanalytical cultural analysis as a 'depth hermeneutic' derives from ... the recognition of an *autonomous level of meaning* below the manifest level present in language. If the manifest meaning of the text operates on the level of configurations of consciousness that are socially recognised, the latent meaning is, in some sense, beyond language but is nevertheless present within it and is consequential in its own right. (Lorenzer, 1986, p. 29)

Although Lorenzer was writing specifically about literature in that passage, one might argue that cultural texts of all kinds (including research data and everyday conversations) contain an autonomous level, a distinctive register that presses on and is present in language but that is excluded from or only partially accessible to consciousness.

Lorenzer's argument does not stop there, though. He went on to claim that this register of meaning 'goes beyond the individual' (p. 46). This is to say, the autonomous level of meaning present in the text and the way in which a reader, viewer or listener experiences it have dimensions that – in however uneven, disparate or fragmented a fashion – are social and collective in character. This is not to deny that they also have dimensions that are biographical and individual. Indeed, Lorenzer viewed these various dimensions as being inseparable or, as we have said, as mutually constituted in ongoing dialectal relations. However, that both the latent meaning present in the text and the individual's subjective experience of this latent meaning have dimensions that are collective in nature opens the door to a specifically social and cultural research agenda – that is, to one that is distinct from the analysis of unconscious phenomena in the clinical setting. Indeed, Lorenzer (1986) was adamant that, if both clinical work and social research can be understood as involving a depth-hermeneutic approach, the aims and methods of each are very different (p. 67). If the function of clinical work is to identify what an individual patient finds difficult or troubling to symbolise, and to make a therapeutic response to this difficulty, the function of social research is to identify the specifically social factors present in failures of symbolisation and to reflect on the consequences of these failures for social life. For Lorenzer, an important aspect of this socially orientated task lay in uncovering that which resists the unsatisfactory character of existing social arrangements. In particular, he was concerned to identify the 'utopian potential' present in scenic material that is excluded from symbolisation: the

'conceptions of life' [*Lebensentwurf*] that indicate the possibility of a better world (p. 28).

These claims have a number of implications for our understanding of Lou's behaviour. First, they suggest that her narration – the story she told to Joanne Whitehouse-Hart in the course of the research project – is likely to contain a latent meaning, something that was excluded from or only partially available to her consciousness but that nevertheless pressed upon conscious thought and was present in her use of language. Second, they suggest that this latent meaning is likely to provoke us as readers – to play on our subjective experience of Lou and her story – and that, in attending to this process, we may gain some insight into a dimension of Lou's story that she herself found difficult to think. Third, they point to the possibility that, as well as containing dimensions that were biographical (and probably unknowable to us in the absence of much more detailed information), some aspect of this latent meaning was collective in nature, perhaps relating to forms of life that are excluded from representation in the wider culture.

We shall return to these arguments later, but, to prepare the ground for this discussion, we need first to introduce some of the major elements of Lorenzer's conceptual apparatus. Before moving on, though, it is useful to make one additional point. Just as Lorenzer assumed that something in our subjective response to Lou's story is liable to reprise a dimension of it that was difficult for Lou to think, so he would argue that this dimension was itself likely to have reprised something latent in the events that formed the basis of Lou's account. In fact, he would see this process as going on, as it were, *ad infinitum* (Lou's reaction to watching the incident in *Big Brother* is apt to have reprised some aspect of the latent meaning present in this incident and so on). This means that the original events, Lou's story and the reader's subjective response to this story are all connected in some way. Potentially, something of significance is being transmitted through these, albeit outside conscious awareness.

Scenes, Specific Interaction-Forms and Engrams

Perhaps the most obvious place to begin an overview of ideas central to Lorenzer's thought is with his concept of the 'scenic', an affective and embodied register of meaning and experience that is said to have its origins in the earliest phases of life. For Lorenzer, as for many other commentators, a neonate's experience of the world is multidimensional, embodied and inherently holistic in character. It combines, simultaneously and with little distinction, multiple sensory registers, affective tones, bodily responses and so forth. (It will be noted that Lorenzer's argument has clear parallels with that of, for example, Stern, 1985). All being well, as the infant develops, this relatively undifferentiated mass of affect and bodily sensation will, Lorenzer argued, be overlain

by an increasing sense of time and duration, as well as by a more sharply delineated awareness of self and other, inside and outside. For the neonate, however, it is the largely undifferentiated mass that constitutes experience in its entirety. Lorenzer (1986) referred to experience of this kind as being scenic in character. For instance, he wrote, '[I]t is the *scene* which is the ... subject of the infant's experience. An awareness of individual objects only emerges from the scene gradually' (p. 42). It is noteworthy that, although early scenic experience is said to develop in subsequent months into a more differentiated awareness of the world, the scenic – understood as an ongoing register of affective and embodied experience and meaning – does not disappear. Rather, it persists throughout life, infusing, animating and, importantly, resisting what is consciously known. As this argument implies, Lorenzer viewed this scenic register as being closely allied to the unconscious. It is, in some sense, that on which the unconscious works or the language through which it speaks.

Lorenzer's conception of the nature of early scenic experience brings us to a second of his central ideas: 'interaction forms' or, more precisely, 'specific interaction-forms' [*bestimmte Interaktionsform*]. Early scenic experience will, of course, contain elements that are random and contingent. An important and distinctive part of Lorenzer's argument, however, concerns the ways in which much early scenic experience is highly patterned. For example, the practices of care and nurture that punctuate a baby's daily life (feeding, soothing, cleaning, 'conversations' with caregivers, mirroring games of various kinds, and so on) involve interactions that are repeated and, to some extent, routinised. In the same way, wider practices of 'socialisation'¹ – including the imposition of the incest taboo – are also inculcated through interactions that are, to a greater or lesser extent, recurring. Lorenzer (1986, p. 44) argued that the routinisation of these interactions is achieved only by way of processes of negotiation or 'agreement' [*Zusammenspiel*] between mother and infant – ones that, structured around the twin poles of the pleasure principle, are likely to involve struggle and conflict on both sides and that require each party to come to terms over the degree and content of emotional attunement and physical cooperation that is established. These routinised interactions (and, we should add, their failed counterparts) constitute what Lorenzer referred to as 'specific interaction-forms'. For Lorenzer, it is the scenically structured experience of specific interaction-forms that is central to the largely undifferentiated mass of affect-laden, multiple sensations characteristic of a neonate's subjective relation to the world.²

In another distinctive feature of his thought, Lorenzer conceived of an infant's scenically structured experience as being profoundly embodied. Clearly, this has much to do with the fact that many specific interaction-forms centre on the infant's bodily needs, and its experience of them is therefore significantly composed of bodily sensations. Indeed, Lorenzer (1972, p. 50) famously compared the mother to a factory worker, 'moulding' the child's bodily needs

and desires. Lorenzer also argued, though, that the neonate's scenically structured experience of specific interaction-forms is quite literally inscribed in the neurophysiological structure of its brain and nervous system. This inscription occurs through engrams. Speculating on the nature of this process, Lorenzer (1986) wrote

The terms 'visual', 'tactile' and 'acoustic' denote modes of sensory reception, which are directed by the central nervous system from the periphery of the body and which are then stored in precisely defined 'areas of the brain'. ... The inscription of these visual, tactile and acoustic impressions happens via 'engrams'. In Freud's terms these are 'memory traces'. Although this process is common to all infants, it is of course the case that the engrams of a single person constitute the memory traces of his or her experience as a particular individual. They have an individual profile. As Freud pointed out in his work 'On Aphasia', cerebral physiological functions and 'psychological' content cannot be separated. This means the content of memory (which is, of course, social) modifies the brain's physiological structure which in turn influences the nervous system. (pp. 41–42)

If, as that quotation suggests, scenic experience is necessarily embodied experience, it also indicates that, for Lorenzer, the body and the social are not easily separable. In fact, in a move characteristic of his dialectical thought, Lorenzer viewed them as both irreducible and in tension and, at the same time, as being inextricably entwined, indeed mutually constitutive. As Lorenzer noted, engrams (or 'memory traces'), despite incorporating physical sensations, are essentially 'social'. That is, in registering scenic experience (Lorenzer described them as having an 'internal scenic composition', p. 43), engrams register the routinised practices of caretaking and socialisation from which specific interaction-forms derive, practices that are inevitably marked by the meanings and conventions common to the social worlds in which they are located. In consequence, the scenically structured experience of the world from which engrams are constituted is necessarily social experience: the social is always present within it. It is this experience that, by way of the engram, is said to enter into and shape the neurochemistry of the brain so that, as the neonate encounters the social world, this world enters into and actively shapes the neonate's neurophysiological development. In fact, Lorenzer argued that a version of this process takes place from the very earliest stages of development. Even in utero, he suggested, the foetus's development occurs through interaction with the uterine environment, each new development incorporating within it the neurophysiological traces of prior interactions (p. 44).

The corollary of this argument is, perhaps, obvious. If we accept Lorenzer's point that neurophysiological development is shaped by and carries the external

world within it, then we must also accept that this external world is shaped by (and comes to carry within it) the neonate's neurophysiological responses to it. In other words, if specific interaction-forms can, in some sense, be said to leave in the brain a precipitate that then shapes the nervous system and the reactions it promotes, new scenic experiences, as these emerge in ongoing interactions, will include, as one of their constituent elements, the bodily responses that arise from this physiological development. The specific interaction-forms produced by these new scenic experiences will, in turn, be inscribed in the brain through fresh engrams, which will then modify future scenic experiences, and so on, as it were, *ad infinitum*. This is what Lorenzer meant when, somewhat opaquely, he wrote:

If not from the first moment then certainly from very early on, situational engrams repeatedly transcend the inevitable dialectic that exists between bodily sensations and the impulses to which these give rise. A simple illustration of this scenic composition of sensorimotor experience is to be found in the banal fact that the stimulus is sure to provoke its reaction. For example, the noise of a mouse 'results' in the cat turning its head. (p. 43)

In other words, even a cat responding to the noise of a mouse cannot be said to turn its head in a simple reflex response to an external stimulus. Rather, this sensorimotor act is already scenically structured – it carries within it the neurophysiological trace and consequences of prior scenic experience.

Sensual-Symbolic and Symbolic Interaction-Forms

In a human infant, this making and remaking of neurophysiological structures and responses is soon incorporated into a process of mental development in which scenic experience begins to have a representational dimension. As already noted, for Lorenzer our ability to perceive objects – including our capacity for experiencing self and other, inside and outside – emerges from a prior state of largely undifferentiated scenic awareness. Central to this process, Lorenzer argued, is the development of, first, 'sensual-symbolic' [*sinnlich-symbolische*] and, then, 'symbolic interaction-forms' [*symbolische Interaktionsformen*].

Sensual-symbolic and symbolic interaction-forms alike involve an increasing capacity on the part of the young child to associate the largely undifferentiated and immediate affective and embodied experience of a specific interaction-form with something else that is able to stand in for it. Simply put, sensual-symbolic interaction-forms represent an interim stage on the path to full symbolisation. For instance, Lorenzer (1981) cites the example of the *fort/da* game which, he argues, stands in for the affective and embodied scenic experience of the specific interaction-forms associated with the mother's going away and returning

(Freud, 1920; Lorenzer, 1981, p. 159). In other words, the little boy's game (which consisted of throwing and then retrieving a reel) has a clear symbolic function (it stands in for two specific interaction-forms) while at the same time continuing to be primarily sensual and preverbal in character. With the child's entry into language, he or she is said learn how to link the scenic qualities associated with specific interaction-forms to sound-symbols. For example, a mother cuddling her small child may say the word, 'Mum', thereby linking an abstract sound-symbol to the embodied and affective qualities of an existing specific interaction-form (being cuddled). Lorenzer (1972) argued that, through repetition, the sound-symbol will come to 'contain' these scenic qualities for the child (p. 67).

Once this link is forged, the specific interaction-form will be transformed into what Lorenzer referred to as a symbolic interaction-form. The idea of the symbolic interaction-form and its relationship to ongoing scenic experience plays a central role in Lorenzer's conceptualisation of the unconscious. Its immediate importance, however, lies in what it can tell us about young children's developing ability to differentiate and thereby to reflect on their behaviour, whether current or anticipated. For Lorenzer, children's increasing ability to inhabit and deploy symbolic interaction-forms enables them to make connections across interaction forms – that is, across configurations of scenic experience – and thus between the 'poles' or objects emerging within each. For example, the 'Mum' of a positively experienced specific interaction-form – perhaps that of being fed – can be connected to the 'Mum' of a similarly positive specific interaction-form such as 'being cuddled' and so on. Equally, the various 'Mums' of negatively experienced interaction-forms become connected, as do the 'Mums' of interaction-forms that combine good and bad sensations (Lorenzer, 1972, pp. 101–104).

This process of differentiation also suggests that, as these me–not me poles emerge from a largely undifferentiated state of scenic experience, the young child's world will be increasingly characterised by a sense of what is inside and what outside. Equally, because sameness, difference and change are now more able to be registered, it further suggests that the child will come to have a nascent awareness of time and duration. These emerging capacities and perceptions are said to equip the child with a developing ability to reflect on his or her actions. Progressively more able to differentiate self from other and past from present, the child can begin to engage in self-reflection, undertake courses of action that are tentative in nature ('try things out'), and, crucially, test his or her feelings and perceptions against reality (Lorenzer, 1986, p. 53).

The drives, Symbolic Interaction-Forms and the Unconscious

Lorenzer's formulation of these core concepts – the scenic, interaction-forms and engrams – though significant in themselves, also provided him with the

resources with which to rethink classical notions of the drives and the unconscious or, as we have previously described, to put these on a materialist footing. In common with many subsequent commentators (see, for instance, Laplanche, 1999a; Kernberg, 2001), Lorenzer took issue with the traditional Freudian view of the drives as purely autochthonous or internally arising states (see Freud, 1915a, 1920). As Lorenzer (1981) argued, '[T]he drive is not external to the content of experience' (p. 21) but instead reflects 'the unity of biology and culture' (p. 19).³ What he meant is that, although profoundly embodied, drives are not given in nature – distinct and fully formed entities that are then brought into interrelationship with a separate external reality. Instead, drive and external reality help constitute each other. As Lorenzer wrote, this does not mean that drive and external reality can be dissolved into a single phenomenon: 'Both positions have to be acknowledged in their fullest depth' (p. 18). Although drive and external reality can be said to have their own levels of determination and effects, however, they cannot, from Lorenzer's point of view, be understood as existing independently of each other: the one exists only in relation to the other.

As might be guessed, for Lorenzer, this process of mutual constitution takes place within the 'interplay' between the infant and its primary caregiver(s) – that is, in the process of negotiation and 'agreement' by which interaction forms are established and become sedimented into the infant's developing inner world. Such 'agreements', he wrote, have 'an imperative character' that necessarily tunes the infant into 'historical-cultural-social forms' (p. 20). In other words, a specific 'agreement' (for example, around feeding), although including a dimension particular to the relationship between mother and infant, will nevertheless reflect the social conventions regulating feeding practices in that particular historical time and cultural location. Lorenzer wrote that interaction forms constitute a 'collective inheritance ... passed on, one has to stress once more, by means of concrete ... forms of practice and concrete ... interactions' (p. 19). As this statement implies, the drives, formed in the interplay between inherent bodily capacities and the external environment, should be seen as having a social component: the social is always present in the drive just as the drive is always present in the social.

If Lorenzer offered us a practice-based rereading of the formation of the drives, his thinking on symbolic interaction-forms has further implications for our understanding of the unconscious. The connection forged between the scenic and the symbol in the formation of symbolic interaction-forms can, Lorenzer argued, be ruptured. Indeed, it can fail ever to occur. The consequence of such phenomena is that language is either stripped of its scenic content or is pressed on and interrupted by something that remains 'outside' or in excess of it. As this claim suggests, to understand how Lorenzer thought about unconscious processes as they relate to symbolic interaction-forms, we need to return to his account of their relationship to scenic experience.

It will be recalled that, for Lorenzer, a symbolic interaction-form is made when a specific or sensual-symbolic interaction-form is successfully linked to language. Drawing on Freud's (1891, 1915b) distinction between 'thing-presentations' and 'word-presentations', Lorenzer (1986) argued that, when a specific interaction-form (thing-presentation) is successfully joined to language, the resultant symbolic interaction-form (word-presentation) 'assumes the character of language that has the scenic fully present within it' (p. 52).

The idea that the scenic is 'fully present' within language has at least two dimensions. From a subjective point of view, it suggests a state of mind in which, infused with scenic experience, the symbol is more alive to us, lending our encounters with other people and objects a greater affective richness and depth, allowing us to respond to them in a more creative and open manner, and enabling unconscious life to unfold and be metabolized. By the same token, the symbol itself is energised. Indeed, Lorenzer (1986) wrote that, in such moments, 'practice is – via language – fully at our disposal' (p. 50). That is, the moments when we are most able to inhabit symbolic interaction-forms are those when we are also most able to act in and on the world: to use language and the social practices in which it is embedded in a creative and effective manner and thereby to effect change. For Lorenzer, who was, of course, a Marxist, this latter point was of decisive importance. The corollary of this argument is that we also occupy states of mind (ones that are everyday and inevitable) in which the scenic has been stripped from language or, conversely, states in which scenic experience has failed to find its place. For Lorenzer, these phenomena, together with their consequences for the symbol, constitute an important component of the unconscious. As Schaffrik (2002) writes, in Lorenzer's view 'the unconscious is built from interactionforms [sic] that have not been symbolised, i.e. that have not been linked to a word-presentation, and from interactionforms that have lost their connection to a word-presentation' (p. 9).

There seem to be at least two main reasons why, for Lorenzer, scenic experience may resist or fail to achieve symbolisation. The first concerns scenic material that is so troubling in nature as to render its assimilation problematic. For example, when the negotiation of a specific interaction-form – around feeding, say – may have proven to be particularly conflict ridden or anxiety laden. Following Laplanche (1999b), we might also speculate that, because the mother's or other caregiver's unconscious will be brought into play in interaction with the baby (including repressed elements of the mother's or caregiver's infantile sexuality), a dimension of the baby's experience of a specific interaction-form is always likely to be puzzling, excessive or traumatic and will, thereby, lay the foundation of something fundamentally resistant to symbolisation.

The second reason why scenic experience may fail to find a place in language relates to the unavailability of the means by which symbolisation might be

achieved, frequently because of some limitation of or failure in the immediate environment. For instance, the symbolic resources may not be available to help a child think about and come to terms with a bout of ill-health, a period of parental absence, or the death of someone significant in his or her life. Of potentially greater significance for Lorenzer, however, is that symbolic resources can also be absent from or prohibited by the wider culture. This injunction applies not only to scenic experience that is troubling or difficult in nature but also to those aspects of it that have a 'utopian potential' (Lorenzer, 1972, p. 82; 1974, p. 277; 1986, p. 28). For example, Lorenzer (1974) argued that limitations in the cultures of capitalism will tend to mean that aspects of scenic experience embodying the potential for a more creative and open collective life will struggle to find symbolic expression and are liable to remain outside what it is readily possible to think and feel (p. 216). As might be imagined, however, for Lorenzer, specific interaction-forms that have failed to achieve symbolisation do not lie dormant. On the contrary, unsymbolised scenic experience is said to press on or make itself felt within spoken life in the form of somatised symptoms, enactments, projective identifications, repetition compulsions and so forth (Lorenzer, 1974, p. 283; 1986, p. 53). As previously indicated, for Lorenzer, the disruption that ensues is not always unwelcome inasmuch as, in however inchoate a fashion, it expresses a resistance to 'things as they are' and a desire for a better world.

If this claim accounts for scenic experience that has never (or not yet) achieved symbolisation, what of scenic content that has been symbolised but that has lost its connection to word-presentations, a process Lorenzer (1986) described as 'language destruction' (p. 51)? Lorenzer argued that language destruction occurs as a result of conflict in the present, whether triggered by internal or external factors or, indeed, by both. In such moments, overwhelmed by anxiety, the connection previously forged between thing- and word-presentation is liable to be severed. Explaining this process, Lorenzer wrote:

When the word is separated from the interaction engram the latter once again becomes an unconscious interaction-form ... [that is] the interaction engram becomes unconscious again losing all the characteristics that it had gained from its relation to the word, i.e. through its introduction into the meaning system of language. (p. 53)

As that passage suggests, once desymbolised, scenic experience is said to revert to its immanent, bodily state (ie, it becomes an 'unconscious interaction-form') and is no longer available for creative thought or such things as self-reflection and reality testing. As with scenic experience that has not (yet) achieved symbolisation, however, desymbolised scenic content does not disappear from social life. As Lorenzer argued, the now unconscious interaction-form retains its

energetic, dynamic qualities if in a form that, because it is divorced from symbolisation in language, promotes actions that tend to be repetitive and 'stuck' (what Lorenzer (1970, pp. 72ff) referred to as 'cliché').

If language destruction results in the stripping away and repression of language's scenic content, it is also important to recognise the consequences of this process for the word itself. Commenting on this issue, Lorenzer (1986) wrote:

The word, for its part, loses its relation to sensual practice, it becomes an emotionless, empty sign. ... Desymbolised language signs ... remain in the conscious, where they can be easily manipulated ... In this state they are no longer capable of embodying the specific quality they originally contained and which was originally experienced. As a result, they lend themselves to behaviour that is little more than calculating and coldly rational. (p. 53)

In that passage, Lorenzer referred to at least two significant features of desymbolised language. First, he stated that desymbolised language loses its connection to sensual and affective experience. In such moments, we are likely to be less open and less creative in our capacity for thought (something perhaps close to what Christopher Bollas (1987), called 'normotic' states of mind). As the extract indicates, though, Lorenzer also viewed desymbolised language as lending itself to 'manipulation'. This contention clearly derives from Lorenzer's use of critical theory and suggests that individuals and groups inhabiting states of mind characterised by desymbolisation will be less able to think for themselves and will, therefore, be prey to the appeal of ideology. It also suggests that ideology may, in part, work through language destruction – through systematic attacks on forms of thought in which the scenic is fully present (Hinshelwood, 2009).

Language Games

Before moving on to summarise some of the implications of Lorenzer's ideas, we must say something briefly about a final concept that is central to his thought: the 'language game'. Lorenzer, of course, borrowed this term from Wittgenstein's (1953) late work, where it refers to the idea that meaning resides in language use as such use takes place within concrete activities that are themselves part of and express wider 'forms of life'. It is not difficult to see why this concept appealed to Lorenzer. In emphasising the way in which meaning arises from a process that is simultaneously specific (language as it is used in concrete interactions) and general (expressive of wider 'forms of life' or 'world views'), the concept appears to occupy a position on the boundary between the individual and the social.

As such, it can be thought of as paralleling Lorenzer's own preoccupation with the dialectical relations through which the individual and the social are constituted. Moreover, since the concept implies that meaning (through language use) is also closely bound up with the performance of concrete activities (ones that constitute a particular 'form of life'), it promises to tie individual experience to social practice. We can easily imagine that Lorenzer saw in this idea something akin to his own attempt to ground scenic experience in the individual's necessary participation in and negotiation of everyday social practices (prototypically in the infant's experience of being cared for).

As the last point suggests, before adopting the concept of the language game, Lorenzer had to import into it an understanding of the scenic and, with it, an understanding of the unconscious (see, for instance, Lorenzer, 1977, pp. 31–36). Thus equipped, the language game can be viewed as something in which meaning arises from language use as it takes place within concrete activities that are themselves part of wider 'forms of life', and as it incorporates, strips out or bars the scenically structured interaction forms the interaction's participants bring to it. Indeed, Lorenzer (1970, p. 161; 1977, p. 35) used the term 'intact language-game' to refer to symbolic interaction-forms, that is, language games in which scenic experience achieves symbolisation and is 'fully present'. Similarly, he used the term 'split language-game' to refer to desymbolised language or language games disrupted by scenic experience that has never been symbolised (Lorenzer, 1977, p. 51). These arguments are fundamental to the way in which Lorenzer's ideas have been taken up in social, cultural and social psychological research. However, before discussing these points we need to draw out some of the major themes and implications arising from Lorenzer's attempt to reconceptualise the psychoanalytic project in a more materialist vein.

Some Implications of Lorenzer's Central Ideas

Perhaps the first point to draw from Lorenzer's arguments is his insistence on the centrality of embodiment – of sensual and affective experience – to human life. As we have suggested, for Lorenzer, sensual and affective experience constitutes an autonomous register of being – the scenic – which, although always implicated in conscious, spoken existence, is in some sense in excess of and radically opposed to it. Said to constitute the entirety of experience in early infancy, Lorenzer argues, this register continues to shadow and infuse being and meaning throughout life. As previously suggested, when 'fully present in language', the scenic is said to animate our experience of the world, rendering it subjectively meaningful and more alive than it would otherwise be. Able to think and learn, we are, in such circumstances, also most able to effect change: to act in accordance with emotional and objective realities and to wield

the cultural resources available to us in ways that are most likely to realise new possibilities. In contrast, stripped from language or barred from symbolisation, scenic experience is said to press upon and interrupt spoken life, often in ways that are destructive or repetitive.

If scenic experience is always embodied, a second point worth re-emphasising is that, for Lorenzer, it also *makes* bodies. As we have seen, in a move that anticipated more recent debates between psychoanalysis and neuroscience and, indeed, more recent arguments in the sociology of embodiment, Lorenzer argued that – through engrams or memory traces – scenic experience is inscribed in and reconfigures the material structure and propensities of the brain and nervous system (cf. Damasio, 1994; Leuzinger-Bohleber, 1998; Latour, 2004; Connell, 2005). This claim, in turn, brings into view the deeply dialectical nature of Lorenzer's thought; as we have argued, scenically structured engrams can be understood as marking an interface between two entities (the body and the social) that, although remaining distinct, are nevertheless mutually constitutive and might be better conceived as levels or moments in a single process. Even in the stimulus-response relations characteristic of intrauterine development, physiology and environment are intertwined. In this view, the body does not exist prior to or outside the social. Instead, we can properly talk only of a 'socialised nature' – that is, of a nature (or body) that is in part constituted by the social and has the latter always present within it – just as we can properly talk only of a social that is, in part, constituted by and through bodies and nature.

This emphasis on the mutually constitutive relations among the body, the scenic and the social also draws our attention to what for Lorenzer is the equally dialectical character of the relations that exist between the past and the present and the individual and the social. One reading of Lorenzer's ideas about the relationship between past and present suggests that interactions in the present are in some sense determined by pre-existing interaction-forms that, because they are unconscious (whether through language destruction or exclusion from symbolisation), therefore lie 'behind' or 'beneath' the interaction in question. It is certainly the case that, for Lorenzer, emotional configurations in the present can, in some sense, be said to be provoked by a pre-existing unconscious interaction-form. (For example, one of the individuals involved may have unconsciously set up the situation to elicit and thereby reconfirm the partial or 'deformed' experience associated with desymbolised or not-yet symbolised scenic experience.) However, Lorenzer is equally at pains to emphasise that a particular scenic configuration in the present is apt to *evoke* an existing unconscious interaction-form, which will then be acted out in and help constitute the interaction in the present.

In this sense, we can say that the relational and affective shape of social interactions in the present set in motion interaction forms originally generated in the past, thereby drawing them into and making them active within a current

interaction. In any given interaction one or other of these tendencies may be in the foreground, but it would be a mistake to believe that, in consequence, only one is present. Instead, we should think that the pressure or 'pull' exerted on the unconscious by an interaction in the present is *always* met by scenic experience that already exists and, similarly, that the pressure exerted on interactions in the present by pre-existing de- or not-yet symbolised scenic experience is *always* accompanied by a pressure or stimulation coming from the other direction, that is, from the interaction itself. In short, we can say that, for Lorenzer, social interactions evoke and are simultaneously provoked by unconscious interaction-forms: they combine both at the same time.

This brings us to the question of how Lorenzer viewed the relationship between the individual and the social, between – as he would see them – the objective structures of society and the subjective structures of the individual (including those which are unconscious). As the preceding discussion implies, Lorenzer viewed these as two sides of the same coin. To paraphrase Adorno (1967, p. 77), we can say that, for Lorenzer, the psychodynamics of the individual subject reproduce social tensions but not in a form that is their mirror-image. The principal implication of this claim is, of course, that the subjective life of the individual (conscious, preconscious and unconscious) is inseparable from wider societal relations and conflicts – is, in fact, one moment or relay in a larger circuit through which these relations and conflicts circulate. Indeed, Lorenzer (1974) suggested that the individual should be viewed as the 'subjective anchor-point' for these circulating relations. He urged that psychoanalysis' insistence on treating individuals should not be mistaken for subjectivism but should instead be seen as the mechanism by which the analyst uncovers objective structures as they appear in their subjective moment of existence (pp. 105ff).

With all that in mind, we might be forgiven for imagining that Lorenzer believed individual psychology to be little more than the internal expression of external – in fact, societal – possibilities and constraints. But that claim is far from being the case. As we have seen, although Lorenzer viewed interaction forms as inherently and irreducibly social in character, they are not equivalent to more abstract and arguably oversocialised categories, such as 'social roles' or the notion of 'subject positions' made available by discourse (Mead, 1934; Henriques *et al*, 1998). Similarly, they cannot be considered fully commensurate with more concrete concepts, such as Mauss's notion of 'bodily dispositions' as inculcated in the individual through the habitus (Mauss, 1935; Bourdieu, 1977).

These various concepts are not equivalent to interaction-forms in part because the latter are never purely reflective of the wider social relations and conflicts in which they are located and on which they draw. Instead, interaction forms necessarily register the specific, contingent and local 'agreements' we arrive at in negotiation with those with whom we interact. More important, however,

they also contain within them something fluid but obdurate that resists and exceeds the demands of socialisation: the drives and scenic experiences that have been stripped or barred from language. Consequently, although interaction forms never escape the social and necessarily bear its mark, something of them cannot be assimilated to it – and this ‘something’ can be said to provide the grounds for human resistance, creativity, change and, just as importantly, destructiveness (Lorenzer, 1977, pp. 58–101; Busch, 2009, pp. 4, 6–8).

If individuals and society are, in this view, inherently bound together in a relationship of dialectical tension, to understand the implications of Lorenzer’s ideas for this relationship fully we also need to say something more about interaction forms themselves. As we have seen, from a Lorenzerian point of view, social interactions as instances of language games contain (that is, are in part made from) the unconscious interaction forms that the individuals involved bring to them. Because social interactions, as dimensions of a wider social structure, help build everyday social life, we can say that everyday life is, in part, constantly made and remade from unconscious interaction forms that are subjective and individual. As this idea suggests, from a Lorenzerian perspective, everyday life-worlds are partially constituted by the individual and subjective and always contain these.

Having said this, we need to remember that the unconscious interaction forms that help constitute social interactions themselves bear the imprint of the social interactions from which they derive (that is, they are themselves as much social as they are individual); moreover, unconscious life unfolds within and in response to the ongoing social interactions in which individuals participate. These interactions take place on the terrain of wider social relations and are necessarily shaped by them. We, therefore, can say that the conflicts, prohibitions and taboos of the wider society necessarily impinge on and are present in the processes of language destruction by which scenic experience is stripped from spoken life. In the same way, they impinge on and are present in the processes by which desymbolised and not yet symbolised interaction forms are barred from the individual’s conscious expression. In addition, as we know from studies of the social life of organisations and institutions, such processes of ‘making unconscious’ can become routinised – sedimented into an institution’s arrangements and practices – and thus are relatively durable and widespread (albeit uneven and not wholly predictable in their effects). As Erdheim (1988) has written, in these instances we are confronted by ‘the societal production of unconsciousness’ (p. 269; see also Menzies Lyth, 1959). For all these reasons, it is as true that individual experience – including what is unconscious – is, in part, made out of the social dimensions of everyday life, as the social dimensions of everyday life are, in part, made out of unconscious processes.

The processual – indeed, dialectical – nature of scenic experience implied in that argument takes us to the heart of Lorenzer’s thought. As Lorenzer (1986) wrote, ‘[A] scenic composition lies between the “inside” and “outside”, between

the organism and its environment. ... It remains the basic model on which we base all further assumptions' (p. 43).

In other words, for Lorenzer, a particular 'scene' – a concrete interaction and the subjective scenic experience it both constitutes and is constituted by – is necessarily an 'in between' phenomenon. It lies at the boundary of – or, better, is a dialectical relation between – internal and external dimensions. Each of these dimensions is understood as being nonidentical, and irreducible and the relations between them are therefore seen as tension filled and contradictory. Nevertheless, for Lorenzer, they exist only in relation to each other. Thus, from a Lorenzerian perspective, the successive scenes we 'pass through' and that make up our lives simultaneously bind together and hold in tension the internal and external in a process that is ongoing and that results in the endless modification of the one by the other.

Language Games, Scenic Understanding and Social Research

As we have noted, language and language-use are central to Lorenzer's materialist and embodied reinterpretation of our understanding of unconscious processes. It is precisely this dimension of his thought that has been taken up in the 'depth hermeneutic' tradition of social, cultural and social psychological research engendered by his work (see, for example, Leithäuser and Volmerg, 1988; Morgenroth, 1990, 2010; Bereswill and Ehlert, 1996; Mansfeld, 1998; Haubl, 1999; Salling Olesen and Weber, 2001, 2002; Salling Olesen, 2004, 2006; König, 2006; Bereswill, 2007, 2008; Günther, 2008, 2009; Prokop *et al*, 2009; Braun, 2010). The reason Lorenzer's ideas might appeal to psycho-analytically minded qualitative and biographical researchers is not difficult to discern. If research of this kind generates data on the language games that constitute people's life-worlds, Lorenzer's arguments hold out the prospect of being able to identify in these data traces of symbolisation and language destruction. In other words, his arguments suggest the possibility of following unconscious processes as they provoke and help constitute social interactions and life-worlds and as they are simultaneously evoked and constituted by them.

As this argument implies, the depth-hermeneutic method places considerable emphasis on the need to pay close attention to the scenic dimensions of a research text: the moments when scenic content erupts into spoken life or is excluded from it. The method's emphasis on textual analysis could be mistaken for something purely technical, perhaps involving little more than the detailed scrutiny of the language used in a particular interaction to identify moments of scenic rupture. The depth-hermeneutic method does indeed involve reading of this kind (see Liebsch, this issue). However, as we noted earlier, depth-hermeneutic studies also frequently involve the use of the researcher's affective

and embodied responses to a research text as a means to understand its latent meaning, what Lorenzer referred to as 'scenic understanding'.

As Morgenroth's contribution later in this issue illustrates, in the depth-hermeneutic tradition the task of tracing the scenic dimensions of a text is typically allocated to data-interpretation panels, small groups of researchers who meet to analyse the data generated by fieldwork. The main reference point for a group's interpretation is the language used in the data in question, with particular attention paid to moments when panel members are excluded from a shared sense of meaning or when something unspoken, undigested or otherwise in excess of language seems to be present. Such moments are often signalled by gaps, inconsistencies, unusual or disjointed language, narrative leaps and abrupt changes of subject; but they are also to be found in episodes or remarks whose emotional tone or resonance feels in some way distinctive. For example, they may be troubling, cause confusion, provoke irritation or seem oddly affectless.

As we suggested earlier, from a Lorenzerian point of view the significance of such moments lies in the fact that the scenic experience emerging in the interpretation group is thought to be linked to, and in some sense provoked by, the scenic register present in the research text. As Bereswill and Ehlert (1996) have written, 'Understanding [the] ... scene in the interpretation group can provide a possible key to comprehending [what is] unconscious [in the] scene in the text itself' (p. 87). For this reason, the particular mood or set of feelings that arise in the interpretation group – particularly when this mood is conflictual or anxiety laden – is taken as an important resource in coming to understand a text's latent meaning. In other words, the configuration of feelings that arise in the interpretation group is read as corresponding in some way to the configuration of scenic content as it occurred in the original setting in which the data were generated.

At this stage, the text is read with evenly suspended attention; that is, the interpreters' reactions, moods, bodily sensations and moments of irritation are noted without their coming to any immediate conclusions and without reaching for theoretically informed explanations. Passages that seem particularly resonant or otherwise provocative are then subjected to in-depth analysis. This analysis proceeds in the form of a dialogue, a constant movement back and forth among detailed investigation of segments of data, further reflection on the scenic experience they generate in the members of the interpretation panel, and more theoretically informed speculation. By these means, the panel's emerging interpretations are tested and modified until they are either abandoned or accepted as plausible and productive.

In the course of this more detailed analysis, the interpretation group will generally ask itself three sets of related questions. These move from a largely descriptive, 'surface' level to an 'underlying' level, the primary content of which can be said to be scenic in character (the depth metaphor being limited by the

fact that, in reality, no level precedes any other and even the 'deepest' can sometimes be in the foreground of what is happening). These questions are: 1) In straightforward terms, *what* exactly is going on or being said? 2) *How* is this happening or expressed (for example, what is the emotional tone of what is being said; which rhetorical strategies are being used)? and 3) *Why* is what is going on or being said happening in this way; what might explain it? (Leithäuser and Volmerg, 1988, pp. 256ff; Lorenzer, 1971, p. 35; see also Bereswill and Ehlert, 1996, pp. 85ff; Morgenroth, 1990, pp. 41ff). It is, of course, the third question that focuses attention on the unconscious scenic content of the text in question. To explore these points further, we need to return to the case vignette with which this article began: Lou's somewhat surprising response to the reality game show, *Big Brother*.

'I just wanted her out': A Lorenzerian Language Game?

Space constraints preclude our making a full, depth-hermeneutic analysis of Lou's story, but, in what follows, we aim to give some flavour of a depth-hermeneutic interpretation. As we have mentioned, in the depth-hermeneutic tradition, data analysis is usually conducted by an interpretation panel, which, in our case, consisted of the authors of this article. In our initial reading of Lou's story, our attention was drawn to its extraordinary conclusion: when Lou described pounding on the door of the phone box and made her final comment on this behaviour ('I just wanted her out'). Given that this was the climax of the story and the actions involved were more than a little bizarre, its drawing our attention is perhaps not surprising. It seemed possible, though, that we were responding to something in the story other than its more spectacular dimensions. We were certainly amused and a little shocked by Lou's actions, but, reading her account, we also had feelings of bewilderment and exasperation. One of the assumptions of the depth-hermeneutic method is, of course, that a panel's affective and embodied responses to data can, among other things, indicate moments of scenic disturbance in a text, for example, moments when desymbolised scenic experience presses upon or when it is being stripped from spoken life. With that point in mind, our sense of being provoked by the climax of Lou's story seemed to merit further consideration, and, for this reason, we decided to subject it to a more thorough investigation.

Following the principles of the depth-hermeneutic method, we first asked ourselves what, in straightforward terms, was going on in this part of the narrative? Although the normal complexity of social life can sometimes make this question a difficult one, in this instance the answer seemed clear enough. In the original events that formed the basis of Lou's story, she banged on the door of a phone box she herself wanted to use. In narrating these events in the present, she told a story to a researcher as part of a research project. We did

not disagree about any of this, so we next asked ourselves how the original events and how Lou's narration of them could best be characterised. The most obvious feature of the former question seemed to be the surprising depth of frustration that Lou betrayed as she pounded on the phone box's door. Given that her reasons for doing so (her desire to participate in a television game-show vote) can hardly be considered an emergency, her actions clearly constituted a breach of the normal conventions governing public behaviour. If this much was self-evident, the character of the story as it was told in the present was more ambiguous. It seemed to belong to a speech genre of the 'Can you believe what I'm like?!' variety in which the interlocutor is invited to laugh with the speaker at the depth of her or his folly. Although the climax of Lou's story certainly left us open mouthed – as, presumably, it did the researcher, Joanne Whitehouse-Hart – there also seemed to be something unresolved about it. Indeed, the evaluative coda to Lou's narrative ('I just wanted her out') – something that purports to explain everything – in fact, explains very little. The act (banging on the phone box door) remains in excess of the explanation. Could it be that the coda's apparent inadequacy represented some kind of failure in symbolisation, an attempt to think about or put into words something that nevertheless remained beyond Lou's reach?

This sense of ambiguity in Lou's story – a feeling that something remained unspoken – took us straight to the third level of depth-hermeneutic textual analysis, the question of why the events and talk identified at the first two levels took the precise form they did. From a Lorenzerian point of view, we might readily conclude that, at the time they occurred, the actions that Lou narrated were largely, and perhaps wholly, unsymbolised. Indeed, the excessive nature of Lou's behaviour seems to indicate that she had little, if any, ability to verbalise, think about or reflect on what she was doing. By the time she came to narrate the story to Joanne, Lou seems to have gained some distance on these events, sufficient at least to put much of what happened into words. Our sense, though, that something remained unspoken in her narrative suggests that some element of it remained unsymbolised. This, of course, suggests the presence of scenic experience rendered unconscious either by language destruction or because it had never achieved symbolisation in the first place. What might the content of this scenic material be?

Our initial attempts to think about this question revolved around interpretations of the sort raised earlier in this paper. For instance, we first toyed with the idea that Lou's behaviour in the original scene had to do with an expression of infantile omnipotence, as if, through her actions, she were saying, 'What I don't like, I will make disappear'. We wondered, too, if, although partially verbalised in the account she gave to Joanne, this sense of omnipotence remained only half-digested, lending the narrative its sense that something had been left unspoken. Despite its superficial attractions, this reading of Lou's behaviour did not seem to take us very far. It not only risked positioning Lou as

emotionally immature – and doing so on the basis of very little evidence – it also, and more important, located what was unspoken in the text inside Lou as a person. In so doing, it failed to tell us anything of the relational dynamics that, from a Lorenzerian perspective, we would expect to find in the situation.

With all that in mind we reversed our argument. Perhaps, we reasoned, Lou was somehow responding to the show's imperatives? For instance, could it be that her actions were evoked by the way in which the show's format plays on fantasies and desires of an archaic nature? After all, contestants are progressively evicted from the *Big Brother* house on the basis of a weekly popular vote, and we might reasonably assume that therefore the show arouses anxieties about inclusion and exclusion, self-worth and self-loathing among contestants and viewers alike. Moreover, for viewers, part of the pleasure of voting to evict a contestant might well lie in the fact that, in so doing, they are licensed to indulge aggressive feelings towards things they experience as bad. Indeed, the voting system arguably allows the direct expression of instinctual impulses in a manner that is simply not tolerated in everyday life: if you do not like Adele, evict her. In this sense, perhaps Lou was merely an exemplary viewer – an extreme instance of that which underlies popular fascination with the show?

That argument has a pleasingly Lorenzerian ring to it. It implies that something about *Big Brother* (perhaps even something unconscious in the show's format) evoked in Lou an interaction form that she then enacted in her ongoing interaction with the programme, part of which involved her attempt to evict the phone box's unfortunate occupant. Once again, though, we did not feel that the argument constituted a satisfactory or complete interpretation. Whatever its merits, it seemed too obvious, too close to highbrow disdain towards a popular television format and its viewers. As such, it seemed inadequately alive to our experience of the text's more troubling dimension and, possibly, to Lou's own experience in the moment. In short, it left something unsaid.

At this point, our thinking came to a standstill and the mood in the group deteriorated. Several additional readings were offered but none with any conviction. Indeed, the discussion seemed increasingly to be circling round an invisible core, unable to make any progress and unable to make any meaningful sense of the data. This air of hopelessness was lifted only when we began to wonder if the atmosphere in the group could tell us something about the scenic dimension of the text itself. Was Lou's narrative circling around something that she herself found difficult to think, something that felt oppressive and hopeless? Was it this that was missing from and unsymbolised in her story?

Armed with this possible insight, we returned to the data and began to see in them a theme that had previously eluded us: a yearning for belonging and community and a sense of hopeless despair over the possibility of ever achieving these aims. For instance, as she narrated it, Lou's angry outburst followed in the

wake of something that could be viewed as an act of betrayal, specifically, a betrayal of community. Recall that Lou had been watching an episode of *Big Brother* in which a seemingly innocent and friendly act (Jonny's offer of a cup of coffee) was openly welcomed but covertly disparaged (having politely declined the offer, Adele mouthed the words 'Fuck off' to his retreating back). Adele's words can be read as a deliberate attack on a moment of harmonious communal life, of peaceful belonging.

Recall, too, that, in response to Adele's actions, Lou felt compelled to vote for her eviction. Whereas in our previous interpretation of this behaviour we viewed it as an act of retaliation – part of the pleasure we thought Lou might be taking in acting out fantasies of omnipotence or instinctual impulses – we now began to wonder if it was better seen as one of restoration or, at least, protection: an attempt to make good the damage done to the community by, as it were, cutting away something that threatened to poison it from within. Indeed, it seemed possible that the communal nature of the show's voting procedure might have lent added symbolic power to an act of restoration. Perhaps, we reasoned, Lou would have felt herself to be acting in the name of, and in concert with, a community of like-minded viewers intent on protecting what was harmonious and good in the communal life of the *Big Brother* house.

That theme also seemed to suggest a different interpretation of the narrative's climax. As we know, since her own phone was broken, Lou rushed out to use a local pay phone and it was in response to the booth's being occupied that she exploded into anger. In the light of the preceding argument, we now began to wonder whether – in however counterproductive a fashion – Lou's outburst could be understood as a reaction to what might have felt like a failure in collective life: the experience, not uncommon in an era of neoliberal reform, of being confronted in one's hour of need with the inadequacy of public provision. With this possibility in mind, we asked ourselves if Lou's aggression could perhaps be viewed as expressing an unspoken desire for a more generous, expansive and harmonious collective life, one less characterised by conflict, competition and constraint. If this were so, her response would, of course, contain a distinct irony; in banging on the phone-box's door, she would have undermined the sort of harmonious communal relations that she was seeking to defend. It seems at least possible that – counterproductive and contradictory as it undoubtedly was – Lou's desire to evict Adele and Lou's subsequent anger faced with a phone-booth that was already occupied – articulated what, in Lorenzerian (1986) language, would be termed a hidden utopian wish: a desire for a better world (p. 28).

In the absence of any opportunity to corroborate or confound this interpretation (such as might be afforded by re-interviewing Lou), it necessarily remains speculative. It has not, however, been plucked from thin air. It emerges from the scenic experience of an interpretation panel – its members' response to

something that was seen as particularly provoking or irritating in the data – and from a careful rereading of those data. As panel members, we certainly had a sense that the interpretation began to bring into view a dimension of the data whose presence could be felt but that was otherwise difficult to articulate or think about.

If, in Lorenzerian terms, we had responded to something in the data that was eluding symbolisation, how can this something be best understood? As argued earlier, the unverbaised quality of the events that formed the basis of Lou's story and the sense that there was something unspoken in Lou's narration point to the presence of scenic content that either had been subject to desymbolisation or had never achieved this. The exact character of this scenic content remains a matter of conjecture, but, as we have said, the analysis produced by our interpretation panel suggests that it may have had something to do with an intense yearning for community or belonging. In addition, as the sense of hopelessness among our interpretation panel suggests, it seems possible that this yearning was accompanied by a sense of despair: a belief that what was most desired could never be attained, that it would be spoiled or taken away (just as Adele had spoiled the moment of peaceful belonging in the house, and the phone box's unknown occupant threatened to spoil Lou's ability to participate in a community of *Big Brother* voters). Indeed, from this vantage point, Lou's anger as she banged on the phone-box door can perhaps be seen as primarily defensive, an unconscious attempt to spoil that for which she truly yearned: a containing sense of community.

If that were so, why might Lou's yearning for a containing sense of community have remained beyond symbolisation? It is possible that there was a strong biographical element to her inability to bring her desire for community to conscious thought – that for reasons unknown to us the scenic material in play provoked in her such anxiety as to be unthinkable. Nonetheless, this possibility should not blind us to the likelihood that circumstances in the present also militated against Lou's utopian desire's being easily thought. One possible factor here seems likely to have been the format of *Big Brother* itself. On one hand, the show can be seen as celebrating the ability of complete strangers to build community, to make meaningful connections to others even in quite adverse circumstances. On the other hand, its competitive nature systematically undermines and belittles this ability. Contestants and viewers alike are never sure whether housemates are being authentic or are merely game-playing; relationships in the house are continuously broken by the eviction process, and viewers (who participate in their own *Big Brother* community through, among other means, the show's voting system) are pitched into open competition with each other as they vie to secure victory for their preferred contestants. This ambivalence at the heart of the show is perhaps most starkly revealed at its climax. The show's ultimate winner ends up alone, the soul occupier of an otherwise empty house.

If the show's own ambivalent relationship to community may have had something to do with Lou's apparent difficulty symbolising her desire for belonging, from a Lorenzerian perspective we should consider the possibility that this difficulty may also have been related to wider social and historical processes (indeed, that the *Big Brother* phenomenon may itself be part of these). During the last 30 years, neoliberal discourses have increasingly marginalised notions of community and the public good. As Lynne Layton (2007, 2010) has suggested, one consequence of this marginalisation has been a growing tendency on the part of patients in psychoanalysis to blame themselves for what are, in reality, failures in collective life and to experience their own needs and vulnerabilities as shameful. We might imagine that, seen in this light, Lou's utopian wish for a containing sense of community (if this is what it was) will have come into conflict not only with *Big Brother's* game show format but also with a public sphere in which notions of the collective good have little currency and in which human vulnerability and failure have increasingly become the subject of shame.

As we have suggested, our analysis of Lou's story and the events on which it is based remains tentative and preliminary. To lend it greater authority – particularly the claim that it was a form of utopian desire that remained unsymbolised in her narrative – we would need to look for sources of information that might falsify it. For example, we could seek to re-interview Lou to gauge whether or not the interpretation proved at all effective at generating associations for her (Hoggett *et al.*, 2010). Alternatively, we could contrast our own responses with those of separate interpretation groups. Such processes have achieved their most developed form in the work of Ulrike Prokop and her colleagues (2009). As Prokop (Bereswill and Morgenroth, this issue) explains, the depth-hermeneutic method as she and her colleagues have developed it involves mapping the affective responses and associations of very different audiences as they consume popular media texts. This technique establishes not only the range of associations that texts generate but also the points of overlap between them. In so doing, it lays the basis for a better understanding of what is collective about both the 'autonomous level of meaning' in the text itself and in what this provokes in people's responses to it.

Conclusion

In the course of this paper, we have sought to introduce a number of ideas central to Lorenzer's thought and, in a preliminary fashion, to sketch how these have been taken up in the depth-hermeneutic tradition of social, cultural and social psychological research. It is not our intention to make grandiose claims about either Lorenzer's ideas or the depth-hermeneutic method. As an established body of psychoanalytically informed theory and research, there are

certainly grounds for taking both seriously. Their usefulness, however, lies less in any capacity to 'solve' unresolved issues in existing Anglophone debates than in their potential for shedding new light on existing ideas, opening up fresh dialogues and provoking previously unseen lines of inquiry. Some sense of this can be gained from Froggett and Hollway's contribution to this issue, which indicates the strength with which the idea of the scenic resonates with psychoanalytically orientated psychosocial research methods as they are currently developing in the UK.

What, then, should an Anglophone readership take from Lorenzer and the depth-hermeneutic method? Inevitably, a variety of responses can be made to this question. For instance, as well as Lorenzer's relevance to psychosocial research, the concept of interaction forms seems to speak directly to ongoing debates around subjectivity, not least because it points towards an understanding of self and other experiences in which the biographically inflected impact of the social world is not only acknowledged in the abstract but also specified in concrete detail (see, for instance, Blackman *et al*, 2008). Similarly, it seems likely that anyone concerned with questions of embodiment, the interface between psychoanalysis and neuroscience, or the so-called affective turn in the social and human sciences will find much that is prescient and, indeed, thought provoking in Lorenzer's ideas about engrams and their relation to neurophysiological development and about scenic experience more generally (see, for example, Damasio, 1994; Clough and Halley, 2004; Peled, 2008).

Perhaps the fundamental challenge that Lorenzer poses us all, Anglophone or otherwise, is to be found in two related features of his thought: first, his requirement that we understand unconscious, bodily and social phenomena as being so deeply implicated in each other that we are obliged to address them as dimensions of a single process; and, second, his insistence that, being nonidentical, these dimensions are in permanent tension or conflict. It is this second claim that underlines Lorenzer's belief that, ultimately, psychoanalysis must be a critical enterprise. 'The unconscious', he reminds us, 'is not a shadow of the conscious, it is not subject to the latter's formative influence. Instead it evolves "pre-verbally", functioning according to rules of its own. It exists as a counter-system to the ruling consciousness of the language community and the prevailing conditions' (Lorenzer, 2002, p. 219).

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About the Authors

Mechthild Bereswill, Dr Phil. is Professor of Sociology at the University of Kassel, Germany. Her most recent publication is 'Inside-out: Transitions from prison to every day life. A qualitative longitudinal approach' in *Escape Routes: Contemporary Perspectives on Life after Punishment*, edited by S. Farrall, R. Sparks, S. Maruna and M. Hough, Routledge (forthcoming).

Christine Morgenroth, Dr Phil. is Professor of Social Psychology at the Leibniz-University of Hannover, Germany, and a practising psychotherapist. Her most recent book *Die Dritte Chance: Therapie und Gesundung von Jugendlichen Drogenabhängigen* was published by VS - Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften earlier in the year.

Peter Redman, PhD is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the Open University, UK. He is co-editor of *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* and a member of the steering group for the Psychosocial Studies Network (<http://www.psychosocial-network.org/>).

Notes

- 1 'Socialisation' is a slightly misleading term since, as is argued in the subsequent paragraphs of the main text, processes of socialisation always make and are made from bodies and embodied, affective experience. In Lorenzerian terms it would therefore be more appropriate to talk of the production of a 'socialised nature' or similar (see also the discussion in the section 'Some Implications of Lorenzer's Central Ideas' in this article).
- 2 It should be noted that 'interaction form' is widely used in the literature to refer to the 'internal' as well as the 'external' dimensions of these processes of negotiation. Although this usage renders the concept somewhat slippery, it has the advantage of unsettling the tendency to think in terms of an external, social practice that is then taken 'inside' in the form of subjective scenic experience. Instead, the interaction form should be viewed as *simultaneously* internal and external: both social practice (itself containing subjective dimensions) and subjective experience (though having dimensions that are social).
- 3 The version of Lorenzer (1981) quoted here is Schaffrik's (2002) 'working' translation, given as an appendix to his own introduction to Lorenzer's thought. The German original was published in Schöpf (1981, pp. 213–224) under the title 'Was ist eine "unbewußte Phantasie"?'

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