
Original Article

Editor's introduction to special section on Psychoanalysis and Politics

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Abstract I introduce the conference series Psychoanalysis and Politics and the three papers presented there that make up the special section on the series in this issue.

Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society (2015) 20, 323–325. doi:10.1057/pcs.2015.58; published online 15 October 2015

Keywords: psychoanalysis; politics; democracy; perspectival plurality; listening; non-verbal communication

Psychoanalysis and Politics (www.psa-pol.org) is a conference series that addresses how crucial contemporary political issues may be fruitfully analysed through psychoanalytic theory and vice versa – how political phenomena may reflect back on psychoanalytic thinking. Since the first conference in Copenhagen in 2010, three-day symposia have been held each spring in Oslo, Stockholm, London, Helsinki, Budapest and Barcelona, with next year's conference planned for Vienna. The series arose from a need for a dialogue with others who make use of psychoanalytic ways of understanding to think about social and political problems, past and present. Perhaps due to its provocative and radical potential, psychoanalysis is marginalised in most social institutions today and in most academic fields, save for literature departments. Thus the series brings people together who spend most of their time alone in thinking psychoanalytically beyond the consulting room. Due to the fit with the aims of *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, I am delighted to have been asked to contribute this special section of the journal with contributions presented in our conferences.

Psychoanalysis and Politics is the general title of the series, which rules out non-psychoanalytic accounts (that do not draw on a notion of a dynamic unconscious) on the one hand and purely clinical papers (that do not

investigate a social/political theme) on the other. Each symposium also has a more specific theme: thus far we have focused on social exclusion, discrimination and ‘othering’; fantasies and affects involved in neo-nationalist developments; shared traumas and social and politicized practices of mourning or its avoidance; riots, revolts and political upheavals; the role of action in psychoanalysis within and beyond the clinic; rhetorics of power, proto-totalitarian formations and their opposite in conditions for freedom of thought; and migration and exile as states leading to questions of how to understand culture and cultural complexity. The choice of topics is governed both by an inner and an outer logic. Questions arising out of the theme of one symposium have often led to the outline of the next one. The topics have also been stimulated by recent or current political events, often troubling ones that lead to a need to try to understand what is happening around us.

Bridging a range of divisions continues to be an aim of the series. The participants represent a variety of psychoanalytic schools as well as different academic fields and practices. Only in the very first symposium was there a tendency to fall into discussions about ‘this versus that psychoanalytic school’. Since then the forum has evolved as a space for listening to, and learning from, other perspectives. Perhaps this is due to the combination of clinicians and non-clinicians; perhaps also to the fact that the symposia move between different countries, where we most often rely on friendly psychoanalytic societies to lend us their rooms for the occasion. As a result, there is no clear centre of power, but rather a range of different perspectives.

Since psychoanalysis is about what lies beyond words, what is communicated non-verbally and implicitly, a conference’s form is as important as its content. Whilst many conferences present pro-democratic papers and simultaneously stage culturally entrenched hierarchies by targeted idealisation, denigration and exclusion, coherence between what is argued and what is done or performed carries weight in this forum. A psychoanalyst friend advised me that the most central effect of saying a few opening words is to set a tone – think about what mood you would want to create. The mood we aim to create is democratic, inclusive and welcoming – to friends and to strangers. This is communicated in giving the same time to each speaker, whether more or less famous, familiar or experienced (30 min for the paper itself and 20 for discussion). Since there are no parallel sessions – all papers are held in plenary – participants are not made to choose between one presenter and another, but strongly encouraged to stay for all the speakers and for the duration of the conference. The seating in a u-shape facilitates active participation by all, presenters and non-presenters. Furthermore, two shared dinners (for all the participants) enable relaxed and informal dialogue. These non-verbal elements are central to fostering a community of thought in which one is present not just for one’s own sake but for the sake of mutually engaged and thoughtful understanding.

The three articles included here are centred on three different continents. Starting from German cinema, Fassbinder’s *Fear Eats the Soul*, Lene Auestad

makes use of Winnicott's thought to present a phenomenology of racism. In the aftermath of the Egyptian Revolution, Amal Treacher Kabesh reflects on identification and intergenerational transmission that takes place within the context of colonialism. Finally, in the US, Jay Frankel revisits Ferenczi's theory of trauma to account for the appeal of right-wing politics.

About the Author

Lene Auestad holds a PhD in Philosophy from The University of Oslo. She is editor of *Psychoanalysis and Politics: Exclusion and the Politics of Representation* (Karnac, 2012), *Nationalism and the Body Politic: Psychoanalysis and the Growth of Ethnocentrism and Xenophobia* (Karnac 2013) and a book on Hannah Arendt in Norwegian (Akademika, 2011). Her monograph *Respect, Plurality, and Prejudice: A Psychoanalytical and Philosophical Enquiry into the Dynamics of Social Exclusion and Discrimination* was published by Karnac in 2015. She founded and runs the international and interdisciplinary conference series Psychoanalysis and Politics, www.psa-pol.org.