

Working directly with political, social and cultural material in the therapy session

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What shall we do about politics?

I am going to explore how the practice of psychotherapy might become more sensitive to political issues as these affect therapists and their clients. The hope is that therapists and analysts who seek to work directly in a responsible way with the whole person, including the social and political dimensions of the experiences of their clients, may do so with greater confidence and clarity. I believe this detailed work has not really been done yet, though there is by now a major shift in awareness concerning the social, cultural and political aspects of the subject positions of both therapist and client.

In spite of an interest in how these differing subject positions evolve in practice and the consequent recognition that everyone, not just members of sexual, ethnic or economic minorities, belongs to a “culture” and has a subject position, I shall not focus much on the external and internal political dynamics of the therapy encounter itself (see Samuels 2002). Equally, I will say almost nothing about the politics of the profession, though this remains a concern of mine. Instead, I present some ideas about addressing politics in therapy practice. Although these ideas derive from work with individuals, they may be even more pertinent and useful in group analysis and psychotherapy. The group matrix may facilitate the politicization of the practice of therapy rather well (see Brown and Zinkin 1994: *passim*).

In referring to “politics,” I have in mind the crucial interplay to which feminism introduced us between formal and institutional economic power and power as expressed on the domestic, private level. One implication of this reading is that power is understood as a process or network as much as a stable factor. Political power is experienced psychologically: in family organization, gender and race relations, and in religious and artistic assumptions as they affect the lives of individuals.

Where the public and the private, the political and the personal, intersect, I think there is a special role for analysis and psychotherapy in relation to political change and transformation. The tragicomic crisis of our *fin de siècle*

civilization incites clinicians to challenge the boundaries that are conventionally accepted as existing between the external world and the internal world, between life and reflection, between extroversion and introversion, between doing and being, between politics and psychology, between the political development of the person and the psychological development of the person, between the fantasies of the political world and the politics of the fantasy world. Subjectivity and intersubjectivity have some political roots; they are not as “internal” as they seem.

There is little point in working on the orientation of psychotherapy to the world of politics if its own basic theories and practices remain completely unaltered.

I support the continuing practice of therapy and analysis with individuals and small groups. This is because I do not agree that analysis and therapy inevitably siphon off rage that might more constructively be deployed in relation to social injustices. In fact, I think that it is the reverse that often happens: experiences in therapy act to fine down generalized rage into a more constructive form, hence rendering emotion more accessible for social action. Even when this is not what happens, the potential remains for a move from private therapy to public action – and I propose to discuss that potential in this chapter.

The idea is to develop a portrayal of the clinical setting as a bridge between psychotherapy and politics, rather than as the source of an isolation from politics. Critics of the clinical project of depth psychology (e.g. Hillman and Ventura 1992) have noted the isolation – and this is not a totally wrong observation. But I want us also to see the potential links and to create a truly radical revisioning of clinical work, not a simplistic huffing and puffing aimed at its elimination.

One of the most potent criticisms of therapy and analysis is that the client is encouraged or even required to run away from external concerns – for example, political commitments or actions – and focus exclusively on the “inner world.” This, it is argued, makes any statement about therapy engaging the whole person an absolute nonsense. Most textbooks of therapy and analysis continue to accentuate the introspection by making it clear that exploration of outer world issues is simply not done in “proper” therapy and analysis.

Over a period of time – from about 1980 to 1990 – I sensed that this professional consensus, derived from psychoanalysis, was collapsing and that therapists and analysts were indeed beginning to pay more attention to what could be called the political development of their clients (Samuels 1993:134–137). In my own practice I noticed that many clients seemed to be introducing political themes more often than they had before. Talking to colleagues confirmed that this was also going on in their work, so it was not all due to suggestion on my part. We tended to put it down to the fact that, since the mid-1980s, the pace of political change in the world appeared to

have quickened. At times, I still felt that the usual formulation – that such material needs to be understood as symbolic of what is going on in the client – worked pretty well. At other times it turned out that the clients had a need to talk about some public issue, maybe to work out what their true feelings and opinions were. But the clients might also have learned that you are not supposed to do that in therapy or analysis. For example, during the first Gulf War there were certainly some clients who used war imagery to tell me something about their inner state. Yet, there were others who were hiding a profound need to talk about the Gulf War behind the flow of regular, ordinary clinical material.

I decided that what was needed was a large-scale investigation, by means of a questionnaire, to see if analysts and therapists were experiencing something similar in significant numbers. I therefore obtained the cooperation of 14 professional organizations with differing theoretical orientations in seven different countries and sent out 2,000 survey forms. I got a return rate of almost exactly one-third (quite high for a cold-calling survey on which the respondents had to spend some time and write fairly lengthy and thoughtful answers).

In the survey, I asked which themes of a list of 15 possibilities were the most frequently introduced by clients. This produced a worldwide league table as follows: (1) gender issues for women, (2) economic issues (e.g. distribution of wealth, poverty, inflation), (3) violence in society, (4=) national politics, and gender issues for men, (4=) racial or ethnic issues, (6) international politics.

There were some striking departures from the order. For instance, the German analysts placed “the environment” at the top of the list as the most frequently introduced issue, while for the British psychoanalysts economic issues came in seventh. This enables us to make all kinds of speculations about whether there is or is not something like a “national psyche” or “collective consciousness,” at least as evidenced in the political themes the clients of therapists and analysts bring to their sessions.

I asked the participants how they reacted to, handled or interpreted the material. Seventy-eight per cent of the respondents mentioned that they understood the material as referring in some sense to reality. For many, this was in conjunction with a symbolic interpretation or an exploration of why the client was interested in that particular theme at that particular moment. The replies – thoughtful and extensive – showed considerable struggle by the respondents as they endeavored to mark out their positions.

I went on to ask if the respondent “discussed” politics with his or her clients. Of course, I realized the explosive nature of the question and deliberately did not define what might be covered by the word “discuss.” Worldwide, 56 per cent said they did discuss politics and 44 per cent that they did not. American Jungian analysts do the most discussing (72 per cent) and British psychoanalysts the least (33 per cent). However, it is

interesting to note that the implication of the one-third “yes” of the British psychoanalysts is that 43 of them admit to discussing politics with clients (one-third of the 129 respondents).

I asked the respondents the obvious question: “Have you ever been/are you politically active?” Sixty-seven per cent said they had been politically active at some time – a figure which, unsurprisingly, dropped to 33 per cent at the present time. My intuitive impression, just from talking to colleagues, that a good many of them had been politically active at some time was borne out. The stereotype of a profession composed of introspective, introverted, self-indulgent types was challenged.

So what might it all mean? In the most down-to-earth terms, it could mean that if a person is contemplating analysis or therapy, and if that person is interested in politics (however defined), it would be as well to explore with a potential therapist or analyst what they are likely to do if one brings political material to the consulting room. For the profession is clearly divided about it. Even if everyone who did not return the survey forms abhors politics in the consulting room, there is still a significant minority of practitioners who do not. This other, hitherto unknown, group of clinicians sees that involvement in and concern for the world is part of growing up, of individuation, and maybe even part of mental health. The split in the therapy profession is at its most destructive when it is between the public, apolitical, hyperclinical face of the profession – something that has quite rightly been criticized – and a much more politically aware, private face of the profession. Many therapists and analysts seem all too aware that they are citizens too, that they have political histories themselves, that they too struggle to find the balance between inner-looking and outer-looking attitudes. As a British psychoanalyst put it when replying to the questionnaire: “We are political animals. Everything we are and do takes place within a political framework. It is impossible to divorce this from the inner world of either our patients or ourselves” (see Samuels (1993:209–266) for a fuller account of the survey).

Politicizing therapy practice

When attempting to link psychoanalysis or psychotherapy with political and social issues, we need to establish a two-way street. In one direction travel men and women of the psyche, bringing what they know of human psychology to bear on the crucial political and social issues of the day, such as leadership, the market economy, nationalism, racial prejudice and environmentalism. Going the other way down this street, we try to get at the hidden politics of personal life as broadly conceived and understood: the politics of early experience in the family, gender politics, and the politics of internal imagery, usually regarded as private. The dynamic that feminism worked upon between the personal and the political is also a dynamic

between the psychological and the social. It is so complicated that to reduce it in either one direction (all psyche) or the other direction (all socio-political), or to assert a banal, holistic synthesis that denies differences between these realms, is massively unsatisfactory. There is a very complicated interplay, and this chapter trades off the energy in that interplay. One hope is to develop a new, hybrid language of psychology and politics that will help us to contest conventional notions of what “politics” is and what “the political” might be. The aspirations of so many disparate groups of people worldwide – environmentalists, human rights activists, liberation theologians, feminists, pacifists and peacemakers, ethnopoliticians – for a reinvigorated and resacralized politics would gain the support of the psychological and psychotherapy communities (see Samuels (2001) for a fuller statement of this position).

It is worthwhile focusing on therapy and on clinical work for two main reasons – first, because the results of the survey show that this is a hot issue for practitioners; second, because exploring the politicization of practice might help to answer the awkward question: why has the political world not shown up for its first session with the therapists who are so keen to treat it? Freud, Jung and the great humanistic pioneers such as Maslow and Rogers truly wanted to engage with the institutions and problematics of society. But they, and even more their followers, did this in such an on-high, experience-distant, mechanical fashion, with the secret agenda of proving their own theories correct, that the world has been, quite rightly, suspicious. Objecting to psychological reductionism in relation to the political and social is reasonable – not resistance. But what if clinical experience were factored in? At the very least, there would be a rhetorical utility. For, without their connection to the clinic, to therapy, why should anyone in the world of politics listen to the psychotherapeutic people at all? What do we have to offer if it does not include something from our therapy work? Therapy is certainly not all that we have to offer, but it is the base.

The professional stakes are very high. In certain sectors of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, clinical work is becoming more overtly politicized so that the whole client may be worked with. But this is still very much a minority view in the psychodynamic and psychoanalytic sectors of psychotherapy. Politically speaking, most clinical practice constitutes virgin territory. The stakes are so high because what people like me are trying to do is to change the nature of the field, change the nature of the profession – that which we profess, believe and do. As the survey showed, this attempt is part of a worldwide movement in which the general tendency is to extend the nature of the psychotherapy field so as to embrace the social and political dimensions of experience.

If we do want to treat the whole person, as some of us do, then we have to find detailed ways of making sure that the social and political dimensions of experience are included in the therapy process regularly, reliably, and as

a matter of course. We must try to achieve a situation in which the work is political always, already – not unusually, not exceptionally, not only when it is done by mavericks, but when it is done in an everyday way by Everytherapist.

I feel that we are at the earliest stages of this project, and are handicapped by the lack of a much-needed new language. These thoughts and speculations are my best shot. I want to discuss the politicization of therapy practice under the following headings:

- 1 The therapeutic value of political discussion in the session.
- 2 Exploring the political myth of the person in therapy.
- 3 The hidden politics of internal, private imagery.
- 4 Working out a socialized, transpersonal psychology of community.

However, as the project of creating a responsible way to work directly with political material has developed, I have found it useful at the outset to attempt to deal with, or at least discuss, the objections to what is being proposed. In this way, readers are alerted to my own awareness of the radical and often risky nature of these ideas. Moreover, dealing first with the objections resembles good psychoanalytic technique whereby resistance is analyzed before content. Of course, the objections are not only resistance and I am convinced that an ongoing engagement with objections (and objectors) to the politicization of therapy practice is enhancing for all sides in the debate.

The first objection is that removing the focus of the clinical enterprise away from the internal world and onto the political world constitutes bad clinical practice. The reply to that objection can be equally assertive. Foreclosure on politics, the privileging and valorizing of the internal over the external, may, as we stagger through the first decade of the new century, itself constitute bad clinical practice. From today's perspective, maybe I do want or need to do some bad practice as I change my practice. Those who do not or cannot change their practices may, from tomorrow's point of view, be the ones guilty of bad practice. What is or is not "on" in clinical technique has evolved strikingly over the first psychoanalytic century. These matters are not definitively settled.

The second objection concerns the problem of suggestion and undue influence on the part of the therapist. This is a sensitive issue these days, given the moral panic surrounding psychotherapy stemming from the notion of false memory syndrome. Is there a risk that a politicized therapy practitioner will foist his or her own political ideas, principles, and values onto the vulnerable, open-to-suggestion client? Would not that be a shattering objection to the politicization of therapy? In reply, I would ask if we are really supposed to believe that a practitioner who sticks to the way he or she was trained and keeps the political out of the consulting room is

thereby devoid of the sin of ever suggesting anything to the client. Many studies show that an enormous amount of influencing by the therapist of the client goes on, and in fact may be essential for some kind of psychological movement to happen. At times, even Freud equates transference and suggestion, making a defensive point that also serves me well: you cannot suggest something into somebody unless they are ready for it, unless it “tallies” with what is already alive in them. I would use Freud against the objection. Suggestion is going on already. There is no reason to suppose that a politicized practitioner would necessarily be intruding his or her own values more than somebody whose interest was in object-relations, sexuality, aggression, spirituality or the soul.

Of course, there is always a risk of discipleship in the psychotherapy situation, as those who have had training therapy know. But I feel confident in saying that there is today a huge amount of uncritically accepted suggestion in clinical practice and that, from a certain point of view, the more “bounded,” “contained” and “disciplined” the behavior of the practitioner, the more suggestion is taking place in his or her practice. I think this is inevitable. The technical rules of analysis are not politically or culturally neutral; they do more than “facilitate” the unfolding of the self. They have themselves cultured depth psychology in a permanent way, and they have themselves done it to a certain extent by suggestion. On the basis of the replies received to the questionnaire on political material that is brought to the consulting room, it is clear that a good deal of rule-breaking goes on in ordinary therapy and analysis – probably much more than is revealed in supervision, wherein words like “discussion” are dirty words. If psychotherapists and analysts are already discussing politics with the client, then it is clear that the hygienic sealing of the consulting room from politics is a virginal fantasy on the part of practitioners.

The third objection concerns what is to be done when the therapist is confronted with somebody with political views he or she finds repulsive. Discussing my ideas at a meeting of the British Association of Psychotherapists, I was once asked: “what would happen if Hitler came into your consulting room?” Well, psychodynamically speaking, I think I have seen quite a few Hitler-types in my consulting room already. Although this point cannot settle the very real worries that working with somebody whose views you find repulsive creates, surely we can agree that, from time to time, every practitioner will meet a version of this problem. Moreover, politics is not the only source of repulsion.

A fourth objection concerns the alleged elitism of what I am proposing. Do I have some kind of fantasy that we are going to send a well-analyzed vanguard of the psychopolitical revolution out into the world? Of course I have had that fantasy from time to time but, in a more moderate vein, and in terms of developing an argument about changing the field, I do not for one minute think that a person who has had psychological analysis or

therapy is in some kind of elite vanguard. However, as indicated, I do recognize that there is some strength in this objection, and I try to stay conscious of the problem.

The fifth objection is extremely subtle and hence difficult to deal with. This objector claims that he or she is carrying out a political therapy practice already. Sometimes I feel that this is undoubtedly the case. At other times, when I am told that the mere practice of therapy, or even just the making of interpretations, is a political act, I must demur. Similarly, when it is blandly observed that all of inner life obviously involves the outer world, including politics, and there is no point in going on about it, I feel I need to know about the fate of the outer world in therapy done by such an objector. I think it is a sign of the times that many practitioners do not want to admit to working oblivious to the world of politics. The rules of the game are changing. And, as the survey shows, it is clear that many people are trying to work in a more politically attuned way. But the mere recognition that inner and outer are connected cannot constitute a politicization of practice.

A sixth and final objection concerns the scope and timing of political work in therapy. I am often asked if these ideas are applicable to every client. Of course, they are not. There is a further question in connection with timing and it is certainly important to wait and see where the client is headed. This is easy to say, but I think there may be a smear in the way this objection is sometimes posed, in that the not-so-secret intent is to characterize political work as inappropriate and likely to be done in a clumsy way. Sometimes, a politicized therapist will mis-time or misplace his or her interventions. But therapists often take ideas derived from object-relations or archetypal theory or psychosexuality and make use of them in situations where these ideas turn out to be woefully inappropriate and irrelevant. It happens all the time and it is not meant as damaging to the client. Somehow “politics” is singled out as more likely to lead to such an abuse of the client.

While there is little doubt that political action outside the therapy entered into by a client can be defensive or resistant, this is surely not always the case. Sometimes, when working with politically active clients, there has come a move from within the client to withdraw from politics for a while – and this is, of course, respected. Nevertheless, we might perhaps question the psychoanalytic (or maybe the bourgeois) depreciation of action in general and political action in particular. Political action is psychologically valid, positive and creative. Not to act would sometimes constitute a special form of repression – a repression supported by the institutions of therapy and analysis themselves.

The therapeutic value of political discussion

Now I want to move on to the first of my positive proposals concerning the therapeutic value of political discussion in the session. Here, I will bring in

the experiences of important practitioners in other fields who sought to politicize the practices of their own fields.

The German dramatist Bertolt Brecht conceived of the idea of a politicized theatre and developed a whole body of practices to go with that notion. Some of his practices, which constitute a sort of Brechtian clinical theory, are relevant to psychotherapy. For example, consider his well-known idea of the alienation effect, or “distanciation effect.” Via certain technical theatrical devices, the audience is encouraged to step back and to distance itself from the drama going on onstage in order to apperceive more clearly what the social, political and economic dynamics of the drama are. The intention is that the audience should not only identify emotionally with the characters in the play but should also try to understand and analyze what it is that those characters are doing. Brecht replaces involvement in theatre with what I would call “exvovement.” In psychotherapy practice, it is possible to conceive of a therapeutic situation in which therapist and client get exvolved, without worrying that this could be a transgression of the principle that requires maximum emotional involvement and identification with the issues being processed in the therapy. Brechtian exvovement serves, in very general terms, as a helpful model for the introduction of political discussion in the session as a therapeutic tool.

Another parallel is even more pertinent, and it concerns certain developments in feminist art practice, in particular what could be described as the framing of the everyday. For example, in 1976 the feminist conceptual artist Mary Kelly produced a work that became notorious, called *Post-Partum Document*. This was a record of her evolving relationship with her son over the first few years of his life. The part that everybody remembers, and on which I will concentrate, is the first room of *Post-Partum Document* in which the only works on show were the feces – and urine-stained nappy (diaper) liners of this little boy, backed by white vellum, well framed and hung on the walls of the Hayward Gallery in London. The condition of the nappy liner showed how ill or healthy the baby (or his bowels) were at any one moment. Kelly could therefore track and comment upon her ‘success’ as a mother. The irony and political pointedness were deliberate.

A similar art work was created by Care Elwes in 1979, called *Menstruation 2*. Seated on a clear perspex stool in a clear perspex booth in a white, diaphanous dress with no underwear or sanitary towels during the time of her period, she would allow the menstrual blood to flow, staining the garment, all the while dialoguing with an audience that surrounded this booth about what the wider implications of her female bodily processes were, what they meant to her, and about what the audience thought was going on.

Mentioning these art works is not intended to start a discussion about conceptual and feminist art. But these works worked because the ordinary

was framed, whether in the traditional frame of a picture or by the frame of the perspex booth in which a bleeding woman stains her garments before spectators and discusses it with them. My argument is that political discussion within the therapy frame will be different from ordinary political discussion in a bar, living room or workplace. Just as menstruation, framed in the way I described, ceases to be menstruation and becomes conceptual art and has an impact in the cultural sphere, so, too, a discussion of politics in a therapy situation that, if transcribed, would look ordinary, takes on a wholly other significance. Contained within the therapy vessel or frame (itself a therapy term), the ordinary becomes something other, and enters the psychological processes of therapist and client in a way that may be profoundly unsettling, possibly clarifying, and occasionally transformative. If we seek to explore the meaning and relevance of the political for ourselves and our clients, then an espousal of political discussion, in which the therapist has to make all the usual therapist's decisions about his or her degree of involvement, openness and about the timing, is one way to proceed. Perhaps it is necessary to try it to see what happens. For a practitioner reading this who already discusses politics with clients, maybe these thoughts will help to theorize what is at present being done on an intuitive or ethical basis.

The political myth of the person

The next proposal concerns what I call the political myth of the person. Is there such a thing as a person's political development? Just as we refer to psychological development generally, or people talk about how they have or have not developed over a lifetime, might there not be a way of approaching politics on the personal level that can make use of the idea of development without getting hooked up on linear, normative and mechanistic notions of development?

How does the political person grow and develop? An individual person lives not only her or his life but also the life of the times. Jung told his students that "when you treat the individual you treat the culture." Persons cannot be seen in isolation from the society and culture that have played a part in forming them – as much feminist thinking has demonstrated.

Once we see that there is a political person who has developed over time, we can start to track the political history of that person – the way the political events of her or his lifetime have impacted on the forming of his or her personality. So we have to consider the politics people have, so to speak, inherited from their family, class, ethnic, religious, and national background, not forgetting the crucial questions of their sex and sexual orientation. Sometimes, people take on their parents' politics; equally often, people reject what their parents stood for. Social class often functions

within the unconscious and sometimes I have found that it is the social class issues of the socially mobile client's parents that are truly significant.

But all this is a bit too rational. If there is something inherently political about humans – and most people think there is – then maybe the politics a person has cannot only be explained by social inheritance. Maybe there is an accidental, constitutional, fateful and inexplicable element to think about. Maybe people are just born with different amounts and kinds of political energy in them. If that is so, then there would be implications both for individuals and for our approach to politics. What will happen if a person with a high level of political energy is born to parents with a low level of it (or vice versa)? What if the two parents have vastly different levels from each other? What is the fate of a person with a high level of political energy born into an age and a culture that does not value such a high level, preferring to reward lower levels of political energy? The answers to such questions shape not only a person's political myth but the shape and flavor of the political scene in their times.

The questions can get much more intimate. Did your parents foster or hinder the flowering of your political energy and your political potential? How did you develop the politics you have at this moment? In which direction is your politics moving, and why? I do not think these questions are at present on either a mainstream or an alternative political agenda. Nor are they on the agenda of many therapists or analysts.

My interest is not in what might be called political maturity. No such universal exists, as evaluations by different commentators of the same groups as “terrorists” or “freedom fighters” shows. My interest is in how people got to where they are politically and, above all, in how they themselves think, feel, explain and communicate about how they got to where they are politically – hence my reference to the political myth of the person. From a psychological angle, it often turns out that people are not actually where they thought they were politically, or that they got there by a route they did not know about.

In therapy, we can explore how the client got to where he or she is politically and, above all, how the clients themselves think, feel, explain and communicate about how they got to where they are politically – a subjective narrative of political development.

When a client describes his or her formative or crucial political experiences, an analyst or therapist would listen with the same mix of literal and metaphorical understanding with which he or she would listen to any kind of clinical material – but with the ideas of political myth and political development in mind as permanent heuristic presences. Sometimes, the most productive path to follow would be to accept the client's account of his or her political history; at other times, what the client may have to say may be understood as image, symbol and metaphor; at other times, as defensive and/or distorted; sometimes, it will be a *mélange* of these ways of

understanding; sometimes, a tension or competition may exist between them. In a sense, all of this moves us towards a conception of what could be called the “psychological citizen.”

The implications for depth psychology of taking in these ideas about political development could be profound. In 1984 I suggested to my fellow members of the training committee of a psychotherapy organization that we should start to explore with candidates something about their political development – its history, roots, antecedents, patterns, vicissitudes and current situation – just as we looked into sexuality, aggression and spiritual or moral development. At that time, the idea was regarded as a bit way out, but more recently it has evoked a favorable response. Similarly, if political and social factors are part of personality and psychological development, should not analysts and therapists explore those areas in initial interviews with prospective clients?

Incidentally, here, as so often, I have found that what looks like new theory is really only a necessary theorization of cutting-edge practice. In the survey, when I asked the respondents to say something about their own political histories and what had influenced their own political development, they tended to cover the same ground as I have covered in this section of the chapter, though with very wide linguistic, conceptual and hermeneutic variations.

One last point about political myth and political development is that it is crucial to challenge the psychoanalytic assumption that the citizen is always in the baby role *vis-à-vis* the state or its leaders. Elsewhere (Samuels 2001) I have detailed how citizens might make use of analytical methodology to recast themselves as “citizens-as-therapist” who see their role as offering therapy to the political world in which they find themselves. Of course, they are “in” that world – but so, too, is the therapist “in” the therapy with her patient or client.

The hidden politics of private, internal imagery

The image of the parents in bed

My first proposal about the hidden politics of private, internal imagery concerns the primal scene – the image of father and mother together, the image of their intimate relationship, whether in bed or not. I have suggested on several occasions (e.g. Samuels 1989) that primal scene imagery functions as a kind of psychic fingerprint or trademark. Now I want to extend that idea in a political direction, to argue that the kind of image held of the parents’ relationship to each other demonstrates, on the intrapsychic level, a person’s capacity to sustain conflict constructively in the outer world – a crucial aspect of the person’s political capacity. In the image of mother and father in one frame, the scene can be harmonious, disharmonious, one side

may dominate the other side, one parent could be damaging the other parent, there will be patterns of exclusion, triumph, defeat, curiosity or total denial. These great and well-known primal scene themes are markedly political. How they work out in the patient tells us something about that patient's involvement and investment in political culture and his or her capacity to survive therein.

I see the primal scene as a self-generated diagnostic monitoring of the person's psycho-political state at any moment. The level of political development is encapsulated in the primal scene image. This is why images and assessments of the parental marriage change so much in the course of therapy or analysis. The parental marriage is not what changes in the majority of instances. Nor is it merely an increase in consciousness on the part of the patient that makes the image change. The image changes because the patient's inner and outer political styles and attitudes are changing. And the specificity of the image communicates what the new styles might be. The parents stand for a process as well as for particular attributes and capacities.

The experience of primal scene imagery may be additionally understood as an individual's attempt to function politically, coupling together into a unified whole his or her diverse psychic elements and agencies without losing their special tone and functioning: a sort of universalism versus multiculturalism on an individual level. What does the image of the copulating parents tell us about the political here-and-now of the client? The image of the parents in bed refers to an unconscious, pluralistic engagement by the client with all manner of sociopolitical phenomena and characteristics, many of which appear to him or her as so unlikely to belong together (to be bedfellows) that they are "opposites," just as mother and father, female and male, passive and active sexual partners are said to be opposites, or "whites" and "blacks," or Israelis and Palestinians, or Catholics and Protestants, or rich and poor are regarded as irreconcilable political opposites.

Thus the question of the image of the parents in bed as a harmonious coming together of conflicting opposites can be worked on in more detail, according to the degree and quality of differentiation a person makes between the images of mother and father. For a primal scene only becomes fertile when the elements are distinguishable.

In plain language, it is not a stuck image of parental togetherness that we see in a fertile primal scene, but something divided and unstuck, hence vital – but also linked, hence politically imaginable. The psyche (society) is trying to express its multifarious and variegated nature (multiculturalism) – and also its oneness and integration (universalism). Primal scene images can perform this pluralistic job perfectly and the message they carry concerns how well the job is going. Via primal scene imagery, the psyche is expressing the patient's pluralistic capacity to cope with the unity and the diversity

of the political situation he or she is in. As Aristotle said, "Similar do not a state make."

I do not think that the reproductive heterosexuality of the primal scene should be taken as excluding people of homosexual orientation. Far from it: I am convinced that the fruitfulness signified in the primal scene, and the problems therein, are completely congruent with homosexual experience. I also think that there is a set of cultural and intellectual assumptions that need to be explicated. Why is it that psychological fecundity, variety and liveliness do not yet get theorized in homosexual terms? Why is psychological maturity still envisaged in a form of complementary wholeness that requires heterosexual imagery for it to work at all? Why do we not refer to a conjunction of similars? One could easily defend the thesis that heterosexual primal scene imagery works quite happily for persons of a homosexual orientation by recourse to metaphor, saying that primal scene heterosexuality refers not to the fact of reproduction but to the symbol of diversity, otherness, conflict, potential. Similarly, one could also point out that, since everyone is the result of a heterosexual union, heterosexual symbolism is simply inevitable and not excluding of a homosexual orientation. But I am dubious about these liberal maneuvers because they still leave a question mark in my mind concerning the absence of texts replete with homosexual imagery that would perform the psychological and political functions of primal scene imagery. We might begin a search for the homosexual primal scene. Though this idea may sound controversial, it merely involves a recognition that the primal scene is about processes and functions and not about the actual parents. Hence the proposition that there could be a primal scene couched in gay or lesbian imagery will only cause problems to homophobic members of the psychotherapy world. We know by now how much psychoanalytic theory about homosexuality is little more than dressed-up prejudice, marching in step with the moral majority.

Personal narratives of primal scene imagery, and their working through, demonstrate to a considerable extent a person's capacity to sustain political conflict constructively. This general point about politics becomes more pertinent when applied to the professional politics of the field of depth psychology. Stuck parental imagery fits the field's symptoms of intolerance, fantasies of superiority, and difficulties with hearing the views of others. If depth psychology's primal scene imagery could be prodded into vigorous motion, perhaps by active ideological dialogue, I would feel more optimistic about its future.

One specific reason for choosing to focus on the primal scene is that we are then invited to address the conventional twinning of man with active and woman with passive sexual behavior. This twinning both reflects and, I think, inspires many gender divisions. When individuals access and work on their primal scene imagery, often in fantasy or via the transference in

analysis, it is remarkable that the conventional male/active–female/passive divide does not invariably appear. Quite the reverse. In fact, it often seems as if the unconscious “intention” of the sexual imagery associated with the primal scene is to challenge that particular definition of the differences between men and women. The challenge to the sexual *status quo* symbolizes a kind of secret challenge to the political *status quo*.

From the standpoint of gender politics, this discussion of the political relevance of a primal scene enables us to introduce the mother in a transmogrified and politicized form, as an active player in the sexual game and hence, potentially, as an active player in the political game.

Here, I am reminded of the Midrashic story of Lilith. She was, as readers will recall, the first consort of Adam, who was created from the earth at the same time as Adam. She was unwilling to give up her equality and argued with Adam over the position in which they should have intercourse, Lilith insisting on being on top. “Why should I lie beneath you,” she argued, “when I am your equal, since both of us were created from dust?” But when Lilith saw that Adam was determined to be on top, she called out the magic name of God, rose into the air, and flew away. Eve was then created. Lilith’s later career as an evil she-demon who comes secretly to men in the night (hence responsible for nocturnal emissions) and as a murderer of newborns culminated, after the destruction of the temple, in a relationship with God as a sort of mistress. The importance for us of Lilith’s stories is that the woman who demands equality with the man is forced to leave the Garden and gets stigmatized as the personification of evil.

Dream imagery

An Italian client dreamt of a beautiful lake with clear deep water. He said this represented his soul and then immediately associated to the pollution on the Italian Adriatic coast. The image of the lake, and the association to coastal pollution, suggested, in the form of one symbol, the client’s unconscious capacity for depth and his present state, of which he was all too conscious – a state of being clogged up by “algae,” like the coastal waters of the Adriatic. When disparate psychological themes are thrown together like this, the symbolic image makes a powerful impact on the individual, who cannot ignore it. In this particular instance, the notion that there was possibly a “solution” for the clogging up of his lake/soul potential, and the idea that being clogged was a state he had gradually gotten into over time and was not a witch’s curse, together with the vision that depth and clarity and beauty were options open to him, were powerful and liberating thoughts. He made a choice to return to Italy, to tell his father that he was homosexual, and, in his words, to “get more involved,” perhaps in environmental politics.

Returning to the dream of the lake, I would like to suggest an alternative reading, couched in more political terms. I think that this re-reading constitutes a further statement about the political properties of private, internal imagery. The images of the dream can be approached via their individual presence, or via their political presence, or via the movement and tension between the two. In the dream of the lake, the tension between the individual and the political presences of the image was prominent and insistent; after all, the client was Italian. What, the client and I asked together, is the role of pollution in the soul, or even in the world? What is the role of pollution in the achievement of psychological depth? Can the soul remain deep and clear while there is pollution in the world, in one's home waters? Did the lake, with intimations of mystery and isolation, clash with the popular, extroverted tourism of the Adriatic? Eventually, the patient's concern moved onto the social level: who owned the lake? Who should have access to such a scarce resource? Who would protect the lake from pollution? These were his associations. From wholly personal issues, such as the way his problems interfered with the flowering of his potential, we moved to political issues, such as the pollution of natural beauty, not only by industry but also by the mass extroversion of tourism. And we also moved back again from the political level to the personal level, including transference analysis. I do not mean to foreclose on other interpretations, but rather to add a more "political" one so that the client's unconsciously taken up political commitments can become clearer.

I think much imagery in therapy performs this particular kind of transcendent or bridging function, transcending and bridging the gap between the apparently individual, private, subjective and the apparently collective, social, political. Much of this chapter argues for the general thesis that there is a constant relationship and articulation between the personal/subjective and the public/political dimensions of life. Can we discriminate these separate dimensions in such a way that eventually we can, on a more conscious level, better bring them together? I think we do find that private, internal imagery carries a public and political charge. Moreover, we need to be better placed to make practical, clinical use of the by now conventional observation that the external world, particularly its social and power relations, has an effect on our subjective experience.

Applying this approach to imagery to a psychological analysis of the politics of the client, we would try to discriminate the individual and the social aspects of an image and see whether they can be brought to an equal level of consciousness. This process would increase the range of choices available to the client, rather than collapse them into a solution. In the example, the question of ownership of the lake at first seemed a distant "political" concern. But gradually the client's social sensitivity came to the fore: he asserted that the lake, like his soul, was not a commodity to be owned by anyone. Then a celebration of his social conscience came to the

fore. He addressed the fate of his “Italian-ness” on a personal, individual level. Finally, as the hidden politics of his imagery continued to pulse, he discovered more collective, cultural and political associations to pollution on the Adriatic. I hope it is clear that the public/political and private/subjective dimensions were both thoroughly alive.

This interpretive reworking of the imagery onto a sociopolitical level provides the beginnings of a model by which therapists and clients can track moves between individual and social realms and a means of studying conflicts and harmonies between culture and individual as these appear in the session. For individual and culture are not the crude opposites that many, including Freud, have taken them to be. Both terms enjoy the complex interaction produced by their dynamic relationship; the relationship changes the nature of the original “opposites.” The more deep and personal the experience, the more political and public it may turn out to be.

A socialized, transpersonal psychology of community

In contemporary Western politics the buzz word is “community.” Aside from the politicians, many clients also speak in therapy of a sense of pulling together that used to exist and is now lost. They feel the loss keenly. For other clients, the idea of community is more proactive, referring to a new kind of egalitarian politics based on their belief in what is shared, held in common, faced together. Communitarian thinking will (hopefully) refresh our ideas both of the state and, for many among this group of clients, of the power dynamics of the therapeutic relationship. It is extraordinary that in the many lucid discussions about community that are taking place, there has been little space for a psychological contribution. Communitarian politics requires an overtly socialized psychology and when we try to create one we find that it will, at some level, have to be a transpersonal psychology. Politics is also a transpersonal activity and, like most transpersonal activities, politics points in what can only be described as a spiritual direction. Psychotherapy is not a religion, though it may be the heir to some aspects of conventional religion. The project of factoring the psychological into the political seems to want to be done in quasi-religious language. Perhaps this is because psychotherapy, politics and religion all share, at some level, in the fantasy of providing therapy for the world. The very word “fantasy” must, I am sure, create problems for some readers. Fantasy is not in itself pathological and there is a necessarily Utopian role for fantasy in political discourse.

Sometimes I see psychotherapy as a new monasticism, meaning that just as the monks and nuns kept culture in Europe alive during the so-called “Dark Ages,” so, too, in their often equally rigorous way, the therapists and analysts are keeping something alive in our own age. However, the values that psychotherapy keeps alive are difficult to classify. They do not

always have the ring of absolute Truth (though such a possibility is not ruled out); nor are they based on a fixed account of human nature (though that is what is invariably being attempted, time and again). In its discovery of values and value in that which other disciplines might reject, psychotherapy helps to keep something alive in the face of threats ranging from state hegemony, to vicious market forces, to nostalgic longings for a return to a past in which it is assumed that the old certitudes of nation, gender and race would still hold. We sometimes hear calls for a global ethic or a global sense of responsibility to be placed at the heart of political theory and the political process. My question is: how can this be done without some kind of psychological sensitivity and awareness? Such sensitivity and awareness may not be easily measurable by the sturdy tools of empiricism but reveal themselves in dream, in parental and primal scene imagery, in an understanding of a person's own political history, development and myth. Hence, clinical work on oneself coexists with political work in one's society. My working out of a "clinical" model with which to engage political problematics is intended to make every citizen into a potential therapist of the world. An active role for the citizen-as-therapist is highlighted, and nowhere will this be more apparent than in relation to experts (myself included). People's active, generative, inventive, compassionate potential is not being tapped and, as I see it, in order to tap into that kind of energy we need a reinvention of politics inside and outside the therapy session.

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Money, love, and hate

Contradiction and paradox in psychoanalysis

Muriel Dimen

Taking up the question of money in the spirit of the Marx–Freud tradition (a project already called for by Rendon (1991)) but adding a postmodern spin, I consider money’s vicissitudes in the psychoanalytic relationship. Freud may discuss money as a practical (1913) and a psychological matter (e.g., 1908) in separate essays (see Whitson 1989:3), but in light of recent psychoanalytic and social thought, its clinical, political, and theoretical locations are quite proximate. Developments in psychoanalytic theory (i.e., the Kleinian understanding of love and hate, the Winnicottian notion of paradox, the interpersonal assessment of countertransference, and relational arguments about the simultaneity of one-person and two-person psychologies) and developments in social theory (i.e., social constructionism, critical theory, and postmodernism) permit a synthetic and evolving interpretation of money in the psychoanalytic relationship that is clinically relevant, socially located, and theoretically responsible.

Freud’s approach to money is, however, rather one-dimensional. Psychosexuality is his guide. Although money has a narcissistic dimension, being “in the first instance . . . a medium for self-preservation and for obtaining power . . . powerful sexual factors are [also] involved in the value set on it” (1913:131). Therefore, money is to be approached with the same matter-of-factness as sex, a modeling that furthers psychoanalysis’ educative project. Freud says that his attitude toward money counters the familiar fact: “Money matters are treated by civilized people in the same way as sexual matters – with the same inconsistency, prudishness and hypocrisy” (1913:131). By “voluntarily telling [patients] the price at which he values his time,” he shows them that “he himself has cast off false shame on these topics” (1913:131).

As for setting fees and session hours, Freud speaks from “ordinary good sense” (1913:131) – no theory or deep thought required here. He speaks as a practical man of the world who must consider his material existence by charging for all time leased and regularly collecting his debts (1913:131–132). The arrangement of “leasing” one’s time, he observes, is “taken as a matter of course for teachers of music or languages in good