

INTERROGATING THE SOCIAL PSYCHOANALYTIC

Gülerce, Aydan (ed) (2012) **Re(con)figuring psychoanalysis: Critical juxtapositions of the philosophical, the sociohistorical and the political**. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN 978-0-230-29375-5 hbk. Pages xv + 283.

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This edited volume is a welcome addition to a growing body of work that aims to employ psychoanalysis “outside of the clinic” (Frosh, 2011) to rework philosophical, social, historical and political issues of our contemporary world. The contributions demonstrate how psychoanalysis can be taken up to relook at socio-historical issues relevant to our lives, from the use of metaphors in the Philippines to attendance at a psychoanalytic congress, from HIV/AIDS to motherhood, and violent crime in South Africa. As such, this book belongs firmly in the Psychosocial Studies library, where the semantically separated “social” and “psychical” are re-visioned through a particular binocularity (Frosh & Saville Young, 2008). Certainly, the focal point is psychoanalysis, as the title suggests, which the contributors demonstrate is particularly rich in conceptual and theoretical tools to aid us in this psychosocial vision. Significantly too, Gülerce argues that the authors offer not only re-visions of issues relevant to our current lives but re-visions of psychoanalysis itself, and perhaps it is precisely this call for a critical relook of psychoanalysis itself, alongside its employment, that makes this work engaging and productive.

The book begins with two chapters presented side by side by contemporary “fathers” of Psychosocial Studies: both Ian Parker and Stephen Frosh have, for decades, written extensively on how psychoanalysis can be thought about in ways that enliven the contemporary project. Their chapters provide wonderfully succinct tasters of their current work, albeit Parker has more recently taken a Lacanian turn (see Parker, 2010) and his chapter is noticeably Freudian. In this book, Parker (Chapter 1) examines what Freud wrote about training, group psychology, mythology, worldviews, politics, religion and civilization and argues that Freud’s psychoanalysis is “a cultural practice, a cultural achievement” (p 57). He argues this in two senses, firstly, in the sense that Freud drew heavily on collective cultural resources to think about how subjectivity is structured, both consciously and unconsciously. Secondly, and in line with much of Parker’s work, he argues that those working clinically and employing psychoanalysis need to recognise the extent to which psychoanalytic knowledge has structured culture and subjectivity itself. Frosh (Chapter 2) also queries psychoanalysis’ structuring of itself, particularly the extent of its own blind spots to anti-Semitism. Frosh offers a fascinating analysis of historical events that are part of a very particular psychoanalytic history –

attendance at two IPA congresses (1985 and 2007). Frosh is interested in thinking about the group processes at the congresses as a way of taking seriously “the relationship of psychoanalysis to its own Jewish origins, to its treatment of its Jewish origins, to its treatment of its Jewish membership, and to the existence of anti-Semitism in its own institutional body” (p 61). Frosh asks the reader to question psychoanalysis’ encounter with its own “Jewishness”, inviting us to think through the ways in which psychoanalysis can be used in the service of both oppressive and resistant practices, opening up pathways for the re(con)figuration of psychoanalysis.

Paredes-Canilao (Chapter 3), a philosopher from the Philippines, takes up this reformation of psychoanalysis in a different way, through the field of metaphor studies. She traces the semiotic and sociohistorical manifestations of the concept of *kulo* (boiling), as it appeared in an old Filipino proverb and as it is employed in today’s context, likening the concept to the unconscious but also pointing to ways in which it might allow for a rethinking of the dynamic unconscious. In this sense the chapter contributes to an overall aim of the book, which is to point to the constructed nature of psychoanalytic knowledge and the extent to which our employment of it might open up new directions. A focus on knowledge, particularly within the context of science, is also taken up by Ror Malone and Kelly (Chapter 4) who employ psychoanalysis alongside a feminist epistemology. The first author’s previous works have looked at the constructions of the body, race and gender in scientific settings (eg, Ror Malone, Nersessian & Newstetter, 2005; Ror Malone & Barabino, 2008) and this chapter interrogates the notion of objectivity within science. In particular, the work points to a theorization of subjective moments in scientific settings and relooks at the relationship between the subject and the object, something that has been at the centre of the psychoanalytic project from the very beginning.

The book has a largely Lacanian emphasis which continues through a chapter by Vanheule and Geldhof (Chapter 5), who write very lucidly about Lacan’s shifts in the way in which he conceptualised the subject. Their clear historical tracing of Lacan’s view of subjectivity is extremely valuable, as is their application of Lacan’s knot theory to the case of David Nebrada, a Spanish photographer. The extent to which this artist’s life and work are made sense of through Lacan’s knot theory brings with it a satisfying pragmatism that is sometimes absent in Lacanian influenced work. Neill (Chapter 6) continues with Lacan contrasted to Husserl and Kierkegaard in his discussion of Freud’s “horror” at the biblical injunction to ‘Love thy neighbour as thyself’. In particular, Neill is interested in the “place of identification in the approach to the other” (p. 130) and his chapter teases out the ethics of subject-subject relations, a topic now very familiar through the work of Jessica Benjamin, Judith Butler and others, and the importance of the other as “truly other, the incomprehensible, the ungraspable, the abhorrent” (p 145).

Breaking the prominence of Lacan is a chapter co-authored by Branney, Gough, Madill and Morgan (Chapter 10) and situated within the cultural context of New Zealand employing a Kleinian perspective. Taking the family violence policy in New Zealand and reading this using Kleinian concepts, the chapter provides an exciting applied example of Kleinian theory outside of interview transcripts, and powerfully demonstrates the critical value of applying Kleinian concepts to policy documents.

As with any edited book, some chapters tend to be denser than others and, while some are definitely aimed at experts in the field, fully emerged in a psychosocial language, other chapters provide a very helpful orientation to the field of Psychosocial Studies and are very accessible to newcomers. Hayes (Chapter 7) writes one such chapter in which he outlines the value of taking psychoanalysis outside the clinic, and in particular, applying a psychoanalytic gaze to the issue of sexuality and HIV/AIDS, the latter issue being one that, he argues, has been too frequently desexualised. Hayes' chapter presents a strong argument for the centrality of psychoanalytic concepts such as pleasure and desire, taboo and myth, in a context where "discourses around HIV/AIDS are mostly about infection, about health, about medication, about prevention interventions, about condoms and sanitized notions of safe sex" (p 153). Tackling another highly relevant issue for post-Apartheid South Africa in particular, Bert Olivier writes in his chapter (9) about the relevance of Lacan's theory for thinking about violent crime in this context. Olivier has an uncanny ability to translate Lacan's theory in a highly coherent way. Specifically, he argues that the brutality accompanying violent crime in South Africa can only be adequately comprehended if we consider the extent to which individuals in South Africa are excluded from the domain of economic symbolic activity. His chapter is a psychoanalytic rendering of the oft cited inequality so prevalent in South Africa.

Many of the contributors to this book have authored their own books recently in this area and as such its chapters serve as a taste of the work that is being individually crafted, work that is shaping this new field in exciting and interesting ways. For example, Baraitser's chapter (11) on maternal publics captures her unique theorisation of maternal subjectivity in which she pushes for the psychoanalytic mother to be seen in a new light (see Baraitser, 2009). Focusing on the notion of maternal time, her chapter argues for the way in which maternal subjectivity introduces unqualified time or time without qualities into the public realm, a realm of productivity and "best use of time". Finally, Hook (chapter 8) provides a thought provoking chapter which showcases his concern in recent work (see Hook, 2012) with the "*affective logic* of racism" (p 28), in other words, he is interested in what is outside of racist discourse, in what cannot be spoken. His chapter points to the notion of libidinal economy as a means through which we might begin to theorise and make visible these "extra-discursive" factors, extending Fanon's work.

It is tempting, when immersed in the sophisticated psychosocial arguments that are represented in this edited volume, to forget the extent to which psychoanalytic ideas are very much still encased within the four walls of the therapy room. This is not to say that psychoanalytic work in this more familiar clinical context should not continue, but **Re(con)figuring psychoanalysis** is a reminder that psychoanalysis needs to be open to its current context in order to remain relevant. At times, the style of writing (particularly in the introduction) may deter interested newcomers to this field. However, I would urge readers to push beyond this to the creative applications of psychoanalytic theory represented in individual authors' contributions in ways that are at times highly sophisticated for the seasoned social psychoanalytic researcher and at others readily accessible for the interested newcomer. Certainly, the enormous value of this volume lies in the richness of presenting together different voices, drawing on different psychoanalytic theories or the same theories in various ways; applying psychoanalysis to diverse aspects of our social contexts; and significantly, remaining reflexive of the

extent to which psychoanalysis is re(con)figured by its social extensions, and the extent to which psychoanalysis really does offer something to social analyses.

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