

Can Psychoanalysts Think About The Psycho-Societal?

Books reviews by Tom Wengraf

Neil Altman. 2010. *The analyst in the inner city: race, class and culture through a psychoanalytic lens*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge

Halina Brunning and Mario Perini (eds). 2010. *Psychoanalytic perspectives on a turbulent world*. London: Karnac

Nancy Hollander. 2010. *Uprooted minds: surviving the politics of terror in Latin America. Psychoanalysis, history, memoir*. London: Routledge

Lynne Layton, Nancy Hollander and Susan Gutwill (eds). 2006. *Psychoanalysis, culture and politics: encounters in the clinical setting*. London: Routledge

Mary Watkins and Helene Shulman, 2008. *Towards psychologies of liberation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

I intended to write a book review on just one of the above texts, Brunning and Perrini's *Psychoanalytic perspectives on a turbulent world*, a book I had looking forward to reading. Once I started reading it, I found myself appreciating some of the chapters in the book, but disliking others very intensely, in particular an article on 'the mind of the terrorist' by an Israeli psychoanalyst which I thought was truly appalling.

The chapter nagged at me like a 'critical fact': how had it come to be published at all, why was it given first place in the sequence of chapters, why was it so lauded in the brief celebrations of the book printed on the back cover, what did it signify about the book as a whole, of what was it a symptom or an indicator?

Trying to keep my head clear about what the volume was doing to my head, I decided to search for comparable texts.

Brunning and Perini was structured very carefully as a drama in three parts from the first chapter, 'A beam of darkness - understanding the terrorist mind' (by implication the

terrorist is a baddie as leader or follower), to a final 'act' with three chapters on (good or potentially improvable leaders: 'The funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales', 'Barack Obama' and 'Images of leaders'. The Brunning and Perini volume might have been called *Towards psychologies of good (executive) leadership*, in contrast with Watkins and Shulman's implicit *Towards psychologies of good (communal and individual) liberation*.

I then started to come across the other books on the list above, and started to think more and more about the differences between psychoanalytic writing which is explicitly thoughtful and critical about the tradition of psychoanalysis - which takes it as an 'object of study' before it is then used to study other things - and psychoanalytic writing which takes itself for granted, and has no sense of its history and limitations. To help the reader of this review make up their own mind, I attach a condensed list of sections and contents for the books.

Box Diagram of Sections and Chapters in 5 books

<p>Neil Altman – <i>Analyst in the inner city</i></p> <p>BACKGROUND</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clinical experiences from a public clinic 2. Theoretical, historical and sociological background <p>RACE, CLASS, AND CULTURE</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Social class 4. Whiteness 5. Psychoanalysis in black and white 6. Culture, ethnicity, and psychoanalysis <p>THINKING SYSTEMICALLY & PSYCHOANALYTICALLY AT THE SAME TIME</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. A look at the bifurcation of public and private practice 8. Thinking psychoanalytically and systemically at the same time: psychoanalysing the context 9. Overcoming the split between the psychic and the social: bringing PA to community-based clinical work 10. A psychoanalytic/systemic perspective on psychotherapy with children and adolescents <p>PSYCHOANALYSIS AND SOCIETY</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Manic society: towards the depressive position 12. Psychoanalysis in the political world: the case of the APA and torture 13. Psychoanalysis in the political world: suicide bombing 14. Psychoanalysis as a potential force for social change 	<p>Lynn Layton, Nancy Hollander and Susan Gutwill – <i>Psychoanalysis, class and politics</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 0. Introduction 1. Working directly with political, social and cultural material in the therapy session 2. Money, love and hate: contradiction and paradox in PA 3. That place gives me the heebie jeebies 4. The manic society 5. Despair and hope in a culture of denial 6. Class and splitting in the clinical setting: the ideological dance in the transference and counter-transference 7. Attacks on linking: the unconscious pull to dissociate individuals from their social context 8. The normative unconscious and the political contexts of change in psychotherapy 9. Racism, classism, psychosis and self-image in the analysis of a woman) 10. The beheading of America: reclaiming our minds (11. Psychoanalysis and the problem of the bystander in times of terror 12. Is politics the last taboo in Psychoanalysis: roundtable 13. Political identity: a personal postscript
<p>Nancy Caro Hollander – <i>Uprooted minds: surviving the politics of terror in the Americas</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scared stiff: social trauma and the post 9/11 political culture 2. Political culture and psychoanalysis in the Southern Cone: coming attractions of the dirty wars 3. A psychoanalysis for tumultuous times: the psyche and social revolution 4. The psychosocial dynamics of state terror 5. The culture of fear and social trauma 6. Exile: paradoxes of loss and creativity 7. Neoliberal democracy in Latin America: impunity and economic meltdown 8. US neoliberal/neo-conservative democracy: psychoanalysis without the couch 9. Impunity and resistance: saving democracy in the 10. heart of empire 10. The future's uprooted minds 	<p>Mary Watkins and Helen Shulman – <i>Towards Psychologies of Liberation</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. COMPASS POINTS 1. Beyond universals: local regeneration 2. Beyond ideology: dialogue 3. Beyond development: liberation 2. PSYCHIC WOUNDS OF COLONIALISM AND GLOBALISATION 4. Symptoms and psychologies in cultural context 5. From bystanding towards engaged witness 6. Pathologies of perpetration 7. Mourning and witness after collective trauma SPRINGS FOR CREATIVE RESTORATION 8. Rupture and hospitality 9. Non-subjects and nomadic consciousness 10. Dialogue PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES OF LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY 11. Communities of resistance: public homeplaces and supportive sites of reconciliation 12. Liberation Arts: amnesia, counter-memory, counter-memorial 13. Critical participatory action research 14. Placing dialogic ethics at the centre of psychological research 15. Dreams of reconciliation and restoration <p>Afterword: <i>Tikkun Olam</i> – The restoration and repair of the world</p>
<p>Halina Brunning and Mario Perini – <i>Psychoanalytic perspectives on a turbulent world</i></p> <p>Cast of Characters</p> <p>Invitation to the drama</p> <p>The myth that binds: the past and present as prologue to the future</p> <p>ON WAR AND CONFLICT</p> <p>A beam of darkness – understanding the terrorist mind</p> <p>Psychoanalysis, peace education and conflict literacy</p> <p>Large-group identity and the transgenerational transmission of trauma</p> <p>FINANCIAL CRISIS AND DISAPPEARING CONTAINERS</p> <p>Oedipus Rex at Enron</p> <p>Narcissism and corporate decay: General Motors</p> <p>Beneath the financial crisis</p>	<p>ON LEADERSHIP AND THE ILLUSION OF CONTAINMENT</p> <p>A dynamic reading of the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales</p> <p>Barack Obama's post-partisan dream: leadership and the limits of the depressive position</p> <p>Images of leadership</p> <p>The epilogue</p>

The above is designed not just as an empirical description which may be useful to those concerned for different topics; I produced it to help myself think about the ‘political conscious/unconscious’ of the respective books in question. For each of the above five books, what is the *form* of the book? Considering the flow of sections and chapters as a *free-associative sequence*, what do the differences in form and focus tell us about the political conscious/unconscious of the different volumes? This review only starts on answering this question, and in very simplifying form.

Freud’s contribution to psychoanalysis was most notably that of the ‘dynamically-repressed unconscious’, that which at any one point is not available to consciousness or even to the pre-conscious. The ‘dynamic unconscious’ could be inferred from the behaviour and from the slips of the tongue of the agent, the individual, but at any given moment was not available to that individual’s consciousness.

Under certain conditions, the psychoanalytic approach can make useful inferences about the workings of the conscious-unconscious, but these conditions require acute sensitivity by the psychoanalyst to his or her inevitable counter-transference. This concern for the counter-transference means explicitly and continually focusing on

(i) the ways in which the *history of the psychoanalytical agent has deposited in the analyst* particular sensitivities and insensitivities, hotspots and blindspots, which are liable to be at work, falsifying what they think they see, and falsifying their inferences; and

(ii) the way in which *the interaction with the psychoanalytical analysand generates an intersubjective field* out of which the analyst must constantly struggle to extract themselves to avoid collusion with the unconscious of that analysand (Thomas Ogden).

I will call these two types or components of counter-transference the ‘internal-historical’ and the ‘interactive-intersubjective’ counter-transference.

Without acute concern for the workings of ‘transference/counter-transference’ of both sorts, the psychoanalytic project may fail subtly and disastrously.

Three questions arise when trying to think psychoanalytically about psycho-societal realities:

(i) *what is the unconsciousness of a given regime of society at a given historical time in a global context, and how can we see their basic ‘appetites or drives’ in motion, driving the action and the self-serving rationalisations of the conscious thinking of the falsely-conscious mind?;*

(ii) *what is the unconsciousness of a given regime of psychoanalysis at a given historical time in a global context, and how can we see their basic ‘appetites or drives’ in motion, driving the action and the self-serving rationalisations of the conscious thinking of the falsely-conscious mind?;*

(iii) *what is it in the analyst and in the ‘analysand’ of both the above two questions that is likely to lead to the subtle and disastrous failure of the psychoanalytic project through any failure to think seriously enough or at all about the inevitable effects of the internal-historical and the interactive-intersubjective counter-transference effects?*

These are properly *psychoanalytic* questions about the consciousness of a given historical regime of society and about the consciousness of a given historical regime of psychoanalysis, and a psychoanalysis of a turbulent world that fails to pose and respond adequately to them in some such form will inevitably fail subtly and disastrously *as psychoanalysis*. If there is a failure to pose such questions and provide good-enough answers to them, then the unconsciousness of a given regime of society will be not troubled but reinforced in its rationalisations, and the unconsciousness of a given regime of psychoanalysis will not be troubled but reinforced in its rationalisations.

I contrasted Brunning and Perini with two of the others - Altman's *Analyst in the inner city* and Watkins and Shulman *Towards psychologies of liberation* - the latter's titles and section headings were very much concerned with the societal-historical matrix of doing psychoanalytic or psychotherapeutic work with oppressed people or categories of people. They explicitly consider the societal and institutional matrix of doing or not doing 'psycho' work, and by doing so help to make more conscious the two components of counter-transference I spelled out above: the internal-historical and the interactive-intersubjective.

Psychoanalyst Altman is firmly concerned with race and class as illuminated by work in an inner-city public clinic, and reflects on whiteness, on class and on handling a 'manic society'. He looks illuminatingly at his own experience of the bifurcation between public and private practice and bringing psychoanalysis to community-based clinical work. His section on "race, class, and culture", including chapters on social class, whiteness, and psychoanalysis in black and white weaves clearly and thoughtfully between historical and macro-societal determinants of situations and relationships, and the dilemmas of himself as a white middle-class Jewish professional.

Psychotherapists Watkins and Shulman consider the psychic wounds of colonialism and globalisation (including perpetration and bystanding) before going to explore participatory practices of liberation psychology (considered broadly as 'depth psychology'). The critical understanding of doing practical 'psycho' work is an explicit concern of many chapters and sections, including notions of communities of resistance, liberation arts, counter-memory and the struggle against collective amnesia via participatory action research through community action from below.

But a different facet is also needed: one that explores the 'institutions' in the societal-field. The first of Altman's chapters is concerned with very personal practice (Chapter 1. Clinical experiences from a public clinic); one of his last is concerned with the collective practice of struggling to change institutions (Chapter 12. Psychoanalysis in the political world: the case of the APA and torture). This details how he and other psychoanalysts

and psychologists engaged in a (currently successful) institutional struggle against the American Psychological Association leadership's attempt to maintain permission for professional psychologists to collude in imperial torture. A referendum was organised and a change of APA policy achieved.

The role of psychoanalysis in understanding the mutual implication of the social and the psychic is taken further in Nancy Caro Hollander's *Uprooted minds: surviving the politics of terror in the Americas*. These uprooted minds are both ordinary clients of psychoanalysis but also the psychoanalysts themselves as both are subjected to state terror, a much more frightening thing than the 'anti-state terrorist' that so concerns Ehrlich in the Brunning and Perini volume.

Hollander is both a psychoanalyst and a historian, and this double professionalism makes her book very powerful. *Uprooted minds* is mostly based on long biographic interviews with Latin American psychoanalysts from countries subjected to USA-sponsored military dictatorship and state terror (Chile, Argentina, Uruguay) in the 1970s and 1980s. The analysts (the oldest of whom had their first experience of Right-wing state terror in Nazifying Europe and Nazi Austria) recounted their experiences, personal and professional, and the experiences of their clients under these regimes of state terror, and the ways in which they struggled to understand the experiences of their clients in a way informed by psychoanalysis. Hollander describes how she came to feel that being a professional historian was not enough, and how she had to turn to psychoanalysis as a further way to understand better the varying response of the analysts and their clients to the military dictatorships and their practice of state terror, and the struggles within the post-military 'aftermath regimes' that were allowed to follow. As a historian she can provide a full understanding not only of 'the psychodynamics of state terror' (title of one of her chapters) but also of the politics and economics of the USA-regimes that required and sponsored such terror at a particular moment in Latin American history.

Firmly rooted in an understanding of the fluctuating fortunes of psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts under different regimes, the multi-level nature of her account of clients

having their lived experiences in their respective worlds, of her changing psychoanalytical understandings of those experiences, and her changed understanding of the exploratory and defensive aspects of any given psychoanalysis are invaluable.

The subtitle of her book indicates her concern for rolling-back the use of developing state terror elsewhere in the USA-empire, namely in the USA itself. She is concerned for the USA-elite's centralisation of power and the opportunist dissemination of fear among the general population of the USA, another formation of state terror., so far not accompanied by explicit suspension of the rule of law within the USA-homeland, although the juridical means for doing so are, as she points out, already at least partly in position. Did you know that Bush passed legislation allowing the President to designate anybody in the USA as an 'enemy', which would thus enable them to be treated like those in Guantamano Bay and have no recourse ever to the courts? Rather like Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine*, her book – addressed to readers in the USA – is devoted to 'saving democracy in the heart of empire'. Her book is firmly psycho-societal, in which a professional knowledge of politics in history, of political economy, and a psychoanalytic practice come together. A model.

A more micro-approach to a use of psychoanalysis is the volume edited by Lynne Layton, Nancy Hollander (again), and Susan Gutwill, *Psychoanalysis, class and politics: encounters in the clinical setting*. As well as a fascinating round-table discussion at the end, the focus of most of the pieces here is on how class and politics are imbricated in clinical encounters, and the complexities for the analyst of handling them in a therapeutic fashion. The general approach of the majority of the papers can be summed up in the title of one of them, Lynne Layton's *Attacks on linking: the unconscious pull to dissociate individuals from their social context*, and in the question discussed in the roundtable *Is politics the last taboo in psychoanalysis?*

Watkins and Shulman's *Towards Psychologies of Liberation* is, for people who are not practising psychoanalysts, or committed exclusively to the psychoanalytic tradition of depth-psychology particularly interesting. If we start from Hollander's 'surviving state

terror' and move towards the understanding of the psycho-societal counter-transference of professional psychoanalysts and their fear of class and politics, race and gender others' in the inner cities (Altman) and elsewhere (Layton et al), then Watkins and Shulman's focus on not-just-individual practice at the heart of not-just-psychoanalytical psychologies of 'poor community' liberation is very stimulating.

To all these, what does the volume of Brunning and Perini *Psychoanalytic perspectives on a turbulent world* bring? It brings a definite explicit desire - to understand the other (as Stapley puts it in his Epilogue). It brings a denunciation of the greed and pathologies of some large corporations (failed ones, Enron and General Motors) and a strong study by Burhard Sievers of the financial crisis as a whole (this latter does note that a certain 'we' is plunged into ideology ('we have accepted capitalism as the only possibility', but firmer regulators and more self-awareness of good leaders are the recommendations).

Looking at the thinking regarding the financial crisis and its aftermath from the perspective chosen here [his chapter], there is ample evidence to suggest that vast parts of the world and its economy are in a state of globalised collusion of psychotic thinking....hidden behind the 'rationality' of the market.

However, there is no serious focus on self-situating psychoanalysis as a historical phenomenon, or understanding its functioning in different societies at given moments. In that sense, it has no awareness of societal location in the histories of psychoanalysis and of the societies from which the authors are assembled. In that sense, it betrays an 'unawarely uprooted mind'. There is no index reference under Europe, UK, Britain, Great Britain, or England - compare the society-consciousness of the chapters of American volumes. You could easily think that the volume comes from 'Anglophonia' unrooted in any real history or geography.

The volume is obsessed by bad underpeople (the terrorist, chapter 1) and potential good leadership (Obama and 'images of bewildered leaders') at the top of society. It firmly avoids any history much earlier than 1990 to avoid any understanding of oppression and

liberation. The only reference in the index under terrorism and bombing is Islamic terrorists and suicide bombing; no reference to military terrorism or state terror or state bombing (see Sven Lundqvist's *Short History of Bombing* and William Blum's *Killing Hope* for details) or even, or especially given the Israeli author's hopeless lead chapter on terrorism, any entry under colonialism. Under 'ideology' we find that only terrorists have 'ideology', or those who (perhaps like Palestinians) have 'entitlement ideologies'. Its avowed and explicit concern to foster a sense of 'external reality' can only be supported. Brunning and Perini write that there is evidence that:

Official psychoanalysis has had problems with resistance to addressing the question of *external reality* and to drawing a consistent theoretical and practical framework for a dynamic understanding of social processes and organisations (Brunning and Perini, xxii).

It speaks truth about failed economic corporations (such as Enron and General Motors). Volkan's discussion of his practice of bringing members of antagonistic 'ethnic-national' elites together for sustained discussion is interesting, as is the discussion by Perini of how psychoanalysis might be applied to manage violence. These good intentions are not enough however, and the 'drift' moves steadily away. If 'external reality' is societal, then only a 'theoretical and practical framework' which is sufficiently psycho-societal will do. However, a deeply conservative 'political unconscious' and its lack of awareness of being a WAAPZI (white Anglo-Atlantic Protestant Zionist Israeli) product living in a closed mental world from which serious and self-critical history is completely absent makes it a product to be read against the lines, psychoanalytically. The contrast with the other volumes brings out the fact that (i) more truth about the macro-societal's implications for psychoanalytic work may emerge in the heart of the empire than in its major military satellite, and (ii) more truth may emerge from psychological work in the inner cities or with minority race/class community groups (or even by collecting and understanding the histories of oppression, exile and return of 'periphery' psychoanalysts in Latin America) than in individual executive coaching of members of the professional-managerial establishment in the Anglo-Atlantic-Israeli corporate imperial community.

Evidence suggests that the lived experience of psychoanalysts capable of overt self-critical analysis of the macro-societal and institutional location and a grasp of the histories in which they find themselves can provide a very powerful grip on their own, institutional and societal practice. Contrariwise, writers, however psychoanalytical, who fail to look at their collective and individual social locations and counter-transference phenomena will produce deeply misleading readings of reality, when they look out of the 'psychoanalytic window'.

All the books repay reading for understanding the psycho-societal!

Tom Wengraf: Born in London of parents from Vienna, studied Modern History at Oxford, Sociology at the London School of Economics and Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham and then sociologist and social researcher at what became Middlesex University (1966-2003). Interested in methodology, I helped to develop the methodology of interviewing for lived experience known as BNIM (Biographic narrative interpretive method). I contributed chapters to and joint-edited *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science* (Routledge 2000), *Biography and Social Exclusion in Europe* (Policy Press 2002), and wrote the textbook *Qualitative Research Interviewing: Biographic Narrative and Semi-structured Method* (Sage 2001). This is supplemented by a free electronic *BNIM Short Guide and Detailed Manual*. In the 1960s, I was on the editorial board of *New Left Review* and helped to write the May Day Manifesto; in the 1970s was involved with the Conference of Socialist Economists; and in the 2000s am on the editorial board of the *Journal of Social Work Practice*, have been Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the Birkbeck Institute for Social Research (Birkbeck College, London University), and am involved in a new UK Psychosocial Studies Network. I am currently writing a book on 'the psycho-societal'.

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