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Alfred Lorenzer and the depth-hermeneutic method

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Abstract

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

Key-words: Lorenzer, depth-hermeneutic method, psychoanalysis, unconscious and society, social research.

As the Introduction to this special issue has argued, Alfred Lorenzer's work is little known in the Anglophone world. With this in mind, in what follows we aim to introduce some of his major ideas – in particular, the scenic, interaction forms, engrams, symbolisation and desymbolisation, language games and scenic understanding.

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

In attempting to explain some of the core aspects of Lorenzer's thinking we have had to confront a number of problems. The first of these lies in the fact that his metapsychological reflections are dispersed over a wide body of work. Rather than an attempt a comprehensive survey of this literature, we have, instead, chosen to focus on those aspects of his output that are closest to our own concerns. As such, we have taken our lead from a relatively small number of texts, in particular 'Depth-hermeneutic cultural analysis' [*Tiefenhermeneutische Kulturanalyse*] which provides a condensed statement of some of Lorenzer's more significant ideas on the relationship between the

individual, the unconscious and the social and on how a psychoanalytically-informed method might inform non-clinical research (Lorenzer, 1986a). Clearly, given that his career spanned some forty plus years, this strategy cannot hope to do justice to the richness and range of Lorenzer's interests. Nevertheless, we would argue that it brings into view some of the major contours of his thought and introduces a range of concepts of direct concern to anyone interested in the psychoanalysis of culture and society.

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

The third and final issue we have sought to address relates to the way in which Lorenzer's concepts have been taken up in the tradition of social, cultural and social psychological research that has emerged from his work – the so called 'depth-hermeneutic method' [Tiefenhermeneutische Methode]. Other contributions in this special issue draw on and illustrate the depth-hermeneutic method in action. However,

in order to contextualise these, it is necessary to have some preliminary sense of the method's underlying principles and the steps that constitute it. In consequence, in what follows, we begin our discussion with a vignette taken from an audience research study conducted by our colleague, Joanne Whitehouse-Hart (Redman and Whitehouse-Hart, 2007). As we will go on to explain, this relates to a female viewer's surprisingly volatile reaction to an incident in the third UK series of the reality game show *Big Brother*, which aired in 2002. Having introduced the vignette and said something briefly about what it might tell us about Lorenzer's theories, we then move on to an extended exploration of his ideas on the relationship between the individual, the unconscious and the social. In the article's later sections we return to the vignette, applying his ideas more systematically to this and, in so doing, sketching the outline of the depth-hermeneutic method itself.

“I just wanted her out!”

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

Lou's story concerned an apparently mundane incident in the show. One of the contestants, Jonny, had offered a second, Adele, a cup of coffee. Adele refused in a

friendly enough fashion but, as Jonny walked away, mouthed the words ‘Fuck off’ to his retreating back. As Lou explained, she was so outraged by what she took to be Adele’s hypocrisy she felt impelled to vote for her eviction and, moreover, to do so as a matter of urgency. Her own phone being out of order, she rushed from the house to use a near by public phone box. Unfortunately, this was already occupied and, unable to control her irritation, Lou started to bang angrily on the phone-box door. ‘I just wanted her (i.e. Adele) out’, she explained.

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

Needless to say, this raises the question of what exactly the reader is being provoked by. Lorenzer's answer to this question is that texts house an 'autonomous level of meaning'. This does not imply something separate from conscious life or language but rather an unconscious register that, although pressing upon and implicated in consciousness, is nevertheless irreducible and subject to its own laws. He writes

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

(Lorenzer, 1986a, p. 29, emphasis in the original)

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

However, Lorenzer's argument does not stop here for he goes on to claim that this register of meaning 'goes beyond the individual' (Lorenzer, 1986a, p. 46). This is to say, in however uneven, disparate or fragmented a fashion, the autonomous level of meaning present in the text and the way in which the reader, viewer or listener

experiences this have dimensions that are social and collective in character. This is not to deny that they also have dimensions that are biographical and individual. Indeed, as we will go on to argue, Lorenzer views these various dimensions as being inseparable or, as we have said previously, mutually constituted in ongoing dialectal relations. However, the fact that both the latent meaning present in the text and the individual's subjective experience of this have dimensions that are collective in nature opens the door to a specifically social and cultural research agenda – i.e. to one that is distinct from the analysis of unconscious phenomena in the clinical setting. Indeed, Lorenzer was adamant that, if both clinical work and social research can be understood as involving a depth hermeneutic approach, the aims and methods of each are very different (Lorenzer, 1986a, p.67). If the former's function is to identify what a patient, as an individual, finds difficult or troubling to symbolise and to make a therapeutic response to this, the latter's is to identify the specifically social factors present in failures of symbolisation and to reflect on the consequences of these failures for social life. As we will explore later, for Lorenzer, an important aspect of this socially-orientated task lies in uncovering that which resists the unsatisfactory character of existing social arrangements. In particular, he is concerned to identify the 'utopian potential' present in scenic material that is excluded from symbolisation: the 'conceptions of life' [*Lebensentwurf*] that indicate the possibility of a better world (ibid. p. 28).

These claims have a number of implications for our understanding of Lou's behaviour. First, they suggest that her narration – the story she told to Joanne Whitehouse-Hart in the course of the research project – is likely to contain a latent meaning, something that

was excluded from or only partially available to her consciousness but which, nevertheless, pressed upon and was present in her language. Second, they suggest that this latent meaning is likely to provoke us as readers – to play on our subjective experience of Lou and her story – and that, in attending to this process, we may gain some insight into a dimension of Lou’s story that she herself found difficult to think. Third, they point to the possibility that, as well as containing dimensions that were biographical (and probably unknowable to us in the absence of much more detailed information), some aspect of this latent meaning was collective in nature, perhaps relating to forms of life that are excluded from representation in the wider culture.

We will be returning to these arguments later on in this article but, in order to prepare the ground for this discussion, we need first to introduce some of the major elements of Lorenzer’s conceptual apparatus. However, before moving on it will be useful to make one further point. Just as Lorenzer assumes that something in our subjective response to Lou’s story is liable to reprise a dimension of it that was difficult for Lou to think, so he would argue that this dimension was itself liable to have reprised something latent in the events that formed the basis of Lou’s account. In fact, he would see this process as going on, as it were, *ad infinitum* (Lou’s reaction to watching the incident in *Big Brother* is liable to have reprised some aspect of the latent meaning present in this incident and so on). The importance of this is that, although temporally removed from the original events, Lou’s story and the reader’s subjective response to them are not discrete. Potentially, something of significance is being transmitted through them, albeit ‘beneath’ conscious awareness.

Scenes, specific interaction-forms and engrams

Perhaps the most obvious place to begin an overview of ideas central to Lorenzer's thought is with his concept of the 'scenic', an affective and embodied register of meaning and experience that is said to have its origins in the earliest phases of life. For Lorenzer, as for many other commentators, the neonate's experience of the world is multi-dimensional, embodied and inherently holistic in character. It combines, simultaneously and with little distinction, multiple sensory registers, affective tones, bodily responses and so forth (an argument that has obvious parallels with, for example, Stern, 1985). All being well, as the infant develops, this relatively undifferentiated mass of affect and bodily sensation will, Lorenzer argues, be overlain by an increasing sense of time and duration, as well as by a more sharply delineated awareness of self and other, inside and outside. However, for the neonate it is the largely undifferentiated mass that constitutes experience in its entirety. Lorenzer refers to experience of this kind as being scenic in character. For instance, he writes, '... it is the *scene* which is the ... subject of the infant's experience. An awareness of individual objects only emerges from the scene gradually' (Lorenzer, 1986a, p. 42, emphasis in original).

Importantly, although early scenic experience is said, in subsequent months, to develop into a more differentiated awareness of the world, the scenic – understood as an ongoing register of affective and embodied experience and meaning – does not disappear.

Rather, it persists throughout life, infusing, animating and, importantly, resisting what is consciously known. As this implies, Lorenzer views this scenic register as being closely allied to the unconscious. It is, in some sense, that upon which the unconscious works or the language through which it speaks.

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

In a further distinctive feature of his thought, Lorenzer conceives of the infant's

scenically-structured experience as being profoundly embodied. Clearly, this has much to do with the fact that many specific interaction-forms centre on the infant's bodily needs and its experience of them is therefore significantly composed of bodily sensations. Indeed, Lorenzer (1972, p. 50) famously compares the mother to a factory-worker, 'moulding' the child's bodily needs and desires. However, Lorenzer also argues that the neonate's scenically-structured experience of specific interaction-forms is quite literally inscribed in the neuro-physiological structure of its brain and nervous system. This occurs via what he terms 'engrams'. Speculating on the nature of this process, Lorenzer writes

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

(Lorenzer, 1986a, pp. 41-42)

If, as this suggests, scenic experience is necessarily embodied experience, it also indicates that, for Lorenzer, the body and the social are not easily separable. In fact, in a move characteristic of his dialectical thought, Lorenzer views them as both irreducible and in tension and, at the same time, as being inextricably entwined, indeed mutually constitutive. As Lorenzer notes, engrams (or ‘memory traces’), despite incorporating physical sensations, are essentially ‘social’. This is because, in registering scenic experience (Lorenzer describes them as having an ‘internal scenic composition’, *ibid.* p. 43), engrams register the routinised practices of care and socialisation from which specific interaction-forms derive, practices that are inevitably marked by the meanings and conventions common to the social worlds in which they are located. In consequence, the scenically-structured experience of the world from which engrams are constituted is necessarily social experience: the social is always present within it. It is this experience which, via the engram, is said to enter into and shape the neuro-chemistry of the brain so that, as the neonate encounters the social world, so this world enters into and actively shapes the neonate’s neuro-physiological development. In fact, Lorenzer argues that a version of this process takes place from the very earliest stages of development. Even in utero, he suggests, the foetus’s development occurs via interaction with the uterine environment, with each new development incorporating within it the neuro-physiological traces of prior interactions (Lorenzer, 1986a, p. 44).

The corollary of this argument is, perhaps, obvious. If we accept Lorenzer’s point that neuro-physiological development is shaped by and carries the external world within it then we must also accept that this external world is shaped by (and comes to carry within it) the neonate’s neuro-physiological responses to it. In other words, if specific

interaction-forms can, in some sense, be said to leave a precipitate in the brain which then shapes the nervous system and the reactions it promotes, it is obvious that new scenic experiences, as these emerge in ongoing interactions, will include, as one of their constituent elements, the bodily responses that arise from this physiological development. The specific interaction-forms produced by these new scenic experiences will, in turn, be inscribed in the brain via fresh engrams which will then modify future scenic experiences, and so on, as it were, ad infinitum. This is what Lorenzer means when, somewhat opaquely, he writes

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

(Lorenzer, 1986a, p. 43)

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

Sensual-symbolic and symbolic interaction-forms

Needless to say, in the case of the human infant, this making and remaking of neuro-

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

Both sensual-symbolic and symbolic interaction-forms involve an increasing capacity on the part of the young child to associate the largely undifferentiated and immediate affective and embodied experience of a specific interaction-form with something else that is able to stand in for it. To simplify somewhat, sensual-symbolic interaction-forms represent an interim stage on the path to full symbolisation. For instance, Lorenzer cites the example of the fort/da game which, he argues, stands in for the affective and embodied scenic experience of the specific interaction-forms associated with the mother’s going away and returning (Lorenzer, 1981, p. 159; Freud, 1920). In other words, the little boy’s game (which consisted of throwing and then retrieving a reel) has a clear symbolic function (it stands in for two specific interaction-forms) while at the same time continuing to be primarily sensual and pre-verbal in character. With the child’s entry into language, he or she is said learn how to link the scenic qualities associated with specific interaction-forms to sound-symbols. For example, a mother cuddling her small child may say to it the word ‘Mum’, thereby linking an abstract sound-symbol to the embodied and affective qualities of an existing specific interaction-form (being cuddled). Lorenzer argues that, through repetition, the sound-symbol will

come to 'contain' these scenic qualities for the child (Lorenzer, 1972, p. 67).

Once this link is forged, the specific interaction-form will be transformed into what Lorenzer refers to as a symbolic interaction-form. As we will go on to discuss shortly, the notion of the symbolic interaction-form and its relationship to ongoing scenic experience play a central role in Lorenzer's conceptualisation of the unconscious. However, its immediate importance lies in what it can tell us about the young child's developing ability to differentiate and thereby to reflect on her/his behaviour, whether present or anticipated. For Lorenzer, the child's increasing ability to inhabit and deploy symbolic interaction-forms enables him or her to make connections across interaction forms – that is, across configurations of scenic experience – and, thus, between the 'poles' or objects emerging within each of these. For example, the 'Mum' of a positively experienced specific interaction-form – perhaps that of being fed – can be connected to the 'Mum' of a similarly positive specific interaction-form such as 'being cuddled' and so on. Equally, the various 'Mums' of negatively experienced interaction-forms become connected, as do the 'Mums' of interaction-forms that combine good and bad sensations (Lorenzer, 1972, pp. 101-104).

This also suggests that, as these me/not me poles emerge from a largely undifferentiated state of scenic experience, the young child's world will be increasingly characterised by a sense of what is inside and what outside. Equally, because sameness, difference and change are now more able to be registered, it further suggests that she or he will come to have a nascent awareness of time and duration. Importantly, these emerging capacities and perceptions are said to equip the child with a developing ability to reflect on his or

her actions. Progressively more able to differentiate self from other and past from present the child can begin to engage in self-reflection, undertake courses of action that are tentative in nature ('try things out') and, crucially, test his or her feelings and perceptions against reality (Lorenzer, 1986a, p. 53).

The drives, symbolic interaction-forms and the unconscious

Lorenzer's formulation of these core concepts – the scenic, interaction forms and engrams – though significant in themselves, also provided him with the resources with which to rethink classical notions of the drives and the unconscious or, as we have previously described this, to put these on a materialist footing. In common with many subsequent commentators (see, for instance, Kernberg, 2001; Laplanche, 1999a), Lorenzer takes issue with the traditional Freudian view of the drives as purely autochthonous or internally-arising states (see, Freud 1915a, 1920). As Lorenzer (1981, p. 21) argues, 'the drive is not external to the content of experience' but instead reflects 'the unity of biology and culture' (ibid., p. 19). What he means by this is that, although profoundly embodied, drives are not given in nature – distinct and fully-formed entities that are then brought into inter-relationship with a separate external reality. Instead, drive and external reality help constitute each other. As Lorenzer writes, this does not mean that drive and external reality can be dissolved into a single phenomenon. 'Both positions', he argues, 'have to be acknowledged in their fullest depth' (ibid., p. 18). However, although drive and external reality can be said to have their own level of determination and effects, they cannot, from Lorenzer's point of view, be understood as existing independently of each other: the one exists only in relation to the other.

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

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

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

The notion of the scenic being 'fully present' within language has at least two dimensions. From a subjective point of view, it suggests a state of mind in which, infused with scenic experience, the symbol is more alive to us, lending our encounters with other people and objects a greater affective richness and depth, allowing us to respond to them in a more creative and open manner, and enabling unconscious life to unfold and be metabolized. By the same token, the symbol itself is energised. Indeed, Lorenzer writes that, in such moments, 'practice is – via language – fully at our disposal' (ibid., p. 50). In other words, the moments in which we are most able to inhabit symbolic interaction-forms are ones in which we are also most able to act in and on the world: to use language and the social practices in which it is embedded in a creative and effective manner and thereby to effect change. As a Marxist, this latter point was, of course, of decisive importance for Lorenzer.

However, the corollary of this argument is that we also occupy states of mind (ones that are everyday and inevitable) in which the scenic has been stripped from language or,

conversely, ones in which scenic experience has failed to find its place in it. For Lorenzer, these phenomena, together with their consequences for the symbol, constitute an important component of the unconscious. As Schaffrik (2002, p. 9) writes, in Lorenzer's view 'the unconscious is built from interactionforms [sic] that have not been symbolised, i.e. that have not been linked to a word-presentation, and from interactionforms that have lost their connection to a word-presentation.'

There seem to be at least two main reasons why, for Lorenzer, scenic experience may resist or fail to achieve symbolisation. The first concerns scenic material that is so troubling in nature as to render its assimilation problematic. For example, this may occur when the negotiation of a specific interaction-form – around feeding say – has proved particularly conflict-ridden or anxiety-laden. Following Laplanche (1999b), we might also speculate that it will often be the case that a dimension of the baby's experience of a specific interaction-form will be puzzling, excessive or traumatic and, thereby, lay the foundation of something fundamentally resistant to symbolisation. This is because the mother's or other care-giver's unconscious will be brought into play in interaction with the baby, not least as this relates to his or her own infantile sexuality.

The second reason why scenic experience may fail to find a place in language relates to circumstances in which the means through which symbolisation might be achieved are simply not available. Frequently this will have to do with some limitation of or failure in the immediate environment. For instance, the symbolic resources may not be available to help a child think about and come to terms with a bout of ill-health, a period of parental absence, or the death of someone significant in its life. However, of

potentially greater significance for Lorenzer is the fact that symbolic resources can also be absent from or prohibited by the wider culture. This applies not only to scenic experience that is troubling or difficult in nature but also to those aspects of it which have a 'utopian potential' (Lorenzer, 1972, p. 82, 1974 p. 277, 1986a, p. 28). For example, Lorenzer argues that limitations in the cultures of capitalism will tend to mean that aspects of scenic experience embodying the potential for a more creative and open collective life will struggle to find symbolic expression and will be liable to remain outside what it is readily possible to think and feel (Lorenzer 1974, p. 216). However, as might be imagined, for Lorenzer, the fact that a specific interaction-form has not achieved symbolisation does not mean that it lies dormant. On the contrary, unsymbolised scenic experience is said to press upon or make itself felt within spoken life in the form of somatised symptoms, enactments, projective identifications, repetition compulsions and so forth (Lorenzer 1974, p. 283, 1986a, p. 53). As previously indicated, for Lorenzer, the disruption that ensues is not always unwelcome since, in however inchoate a fashion, it expresses a resistance to 'things as they are' and a desire for a better world.

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

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

(Lorenzer, 1986a, p. 53)

As this suggests, once desymbolised, scenic experience is said to revert to its immanent, bodily state (i.e. it becomes an 'unconscious interaction-form') and is no longer available for creative thought or such things as self-reflection and reality testing. However, as with scenic experience that has not (yet) achieved symbolisation, this does not mean it disappears from social life. As Lorenzer argues, the now unconscious interaction-form retains its energetic, dynamic qualities if in a form that because divorced from symbolisation in language, promotes actions that tend to be repetitive and 'stuck' (what Lorenzer, 1970, pp. 72ff refers to as 'cliché').

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

The word, for its part, loses its relation to sensual practice, it becomes an emotionless, empty sign Desymbolised language signs ... remain in the conscious, where they can be easily manipulated ... In this state they are no longer

capable of embodying the specific quality they originally contained and which was originally experienced. As a result, they lend themselves to behaviour that is little more than calculating and coldly rational.

(Lorenzer, 1986a, p. 53)

In this passage, Lorenzer refers to at least two significant features of desymbolised language. The first is to be found in the fact that, once desymbolised, language loses its connection to sensual and affective experience. This suggests that, in such moments, we are less open and less creative in our capacity for thought (something perhaps close to what Christopher Bollas (1987) refers to as ‘normotic’ states of mind). However, as the extract indicates, Lorenzer also views desymbolised language as lending itself to ‘manipulation’. This is clearly an important aspect of Lorenzer’s relationship to critical theory and suggests that individuals and groups inhabiting states of mind characterised by desymbolisation will be less able to think for themselves and will, therefore, be prey to the appeal of ideology. However, it also suggests that ideology may, in part, work through language destruction – through systematic attacks on forms of thought in which the scenic is fully present (see, also, Hinshelwood, 1999).

Language games

Before moving on to summarise some of the implications of Lorenzer’s ideas, it is necessary to say something briefly about a final concept that is central to his thought: the ‘language game’. Needless to say, Lorenzer borrowed this term from Wittgenstein’s (1953) late work where it is used to refer to the idea that meaning resides in language use as this takes place within concrete activities that are themselves part of and express

wider 'forms of life'. It is not difficult to see why this concept appealed to Lorenzer. In emphasising the way in which meaning arises from a process that is simultaneously specific (language as it is used in concrete interactions) and general (expressive of wider 'forms of life' or 'world views'), the concept appears to occupy a position on the boundary between the individual and the social. As such, it can be thought of as paralleling Lorenzer's own preoccupation with the dialectical relations through which the individual and the social are constituted. Moreover, since the concept implies that meaning (via language use) is also closely bound up with the performance of concrete activities (ones that constitute a particular 'form of life'), it promises to tie individual experience to social practice. We can easily imagine that Lorenzer saw in this idea something akin to his own attempt to ground scenic experience in the individual's necessary participation in and negotiation of everyday social practices (proto-typically in the infant's experience of care).

However, as this last point suggests, before adopting the concept of the language game, Lorenzer had to import into it an understanding of the scenic and, with it, an understanding of the unconscious (see, for instance, Lorenzer, 1977, pp. 31-36). Thus equipped, the language game can be viewed as something in which meaning arises from language use as this takes place within concrete activities that are themselves part of wider 'forms of life', and as this incorporates, strips out or bars the scenically-structured interaction forms the interaction's participants bring to it. Indeed, Lorenzer (1970, p.161, 1977, p. 35) uses the term 'intact language-game' to refer to symbolic interaction-forms, i.e. language games in which scenic experience achieves symbolisation and is 'fully present'. Conversely, he uses the term 'split language-game'

to refer to desymbolised language or language games disrupted by scenic experience that has never been symbolised (Lorenzer, 1977, p. 51). As we will see in a later section, these arguments are fundamental to the way in which Lorenzer's ideas have been taken up in social, cultural and social psychological research. However, before discussing these points we need to draw out some of the major themes and implications arising from Lorenzer's attempt to reconceptualise the psychoanalytic project in a more materialist vein.

Some implications of Lorenzer's central ideas

Perhaps the first point to draw out from Lorenzer's arguments is his insistence on the centrality of embodiment – of sensual and affective experience – to human life. As we have suggested, for Lorenzer, sensual and affective experience constitutes an autonomous register of being – the scenic – which, although always implicated in conscious, spoken existence, is in some sense in excess of and radically opposed to it. Said to constitute the entirety of experience in early infancy, Lorenzer argues that this register continues to shadow and infuse being and meaning throughout life. As previously suggested, when 'fully present in language' via symbolic interaction forms, the scenic is said to animate our experience of the world, rendering it subjectively meaningful and more alive than it would otherwise be. Able to think and learn we are, in such circumstances, also most able to effect change: to act in accordance with emotional and objective realities and to wield the cultural resources available to us in ways that are most likely to realise new possibilities. In contrast, stripped from language or barred from symbolisation, scenic experience is said to press upon and interrupt spoken life, often in ways that are destructive or repetitive.

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

This emphasis on the mutually constitutive relations between the body, the scenic and the social also draws our attention to, what for Lorenzer, is the equally dialectical character of the relations that exist between the past and the present and the individual and the social. One reading of Lorenzer’s ideas about the relationship between past and present would suggest that interactions in the present are in some sense determined by

pre-existing interaction forms that, because they are unconscious (whether through language destruction or exclusion from symbolisation), therefore lie 'behind' or 'beneath' the interaction in question. It is certainly the case that, for Lorenzer, emotional configurations in the present can, in some sense, be said to be provoked by a pre-existing unconscious interaction-form. (For example, one of the individuals involved may have unconsciously set up the situation in order to elicit and thereby reconfirm the partial or 'deformed' experience associated with desymbolised or not-yet symbolised scenic experience.) However, Lorenzer is equally at pains to emphasise that a particular scenic configuration in the present is liable to *evoke* an existing unconscious interaction-form, which will then be acted out in and help constitute the interaction in the present. In this sense, we can say that the relational and affective shape of social interactions in the present set in motion interaction forms originally generated in the past, thereby drawing them into and making them active within a current interaction. In any given interaction it may be the case that one or other of these tendencies will be in the foreground but it would be a mistake to believe that, in consequence, only one is present. Instead, we should think that the pressure or 'pull' exerted on the unconscious by an interaction in the present is *always* met by scenic experience that already exists and, similarly, that the pressure exerted on interactions in the present by pre-existing de- or not-yet symbolised scenic experience is *always* accompanied by a pressure or stimulation coming from the other direction, that is from the interaction itself. In short, we can say that, for Lorenzer, social interactions evoke and are simultaneously provoked by unconscious interaction forms: they combine both at the same time.

This brings us to the question of how Lorenzer views the relationship between the

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

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

This is in part to do with the fact that interaction forms are never purely reflective of the wider social relations and conflicts in which they are located and upon which they draw. Instead, they necessarily register the specific, contingent and local ‘agreements’ we arrive at in negotiation with those with whom we interact. More importantly, however, they also contain within them something fluid but obdurate that resists and exceeds the demands of socialisation: the drives and scenic experiences that have been stripped or barred from language. The consequence of this is that, although interaction forms never escape the social and necessarily bear its mark, something of them cannot be assimilated to it – and this something can be said to provide the grounds for human resistance, creativity, change and, just as importantly, destructiveness (Busch, 2009, pp. 4, 6-8; Lorenzer, 1977, pp. 58-101).

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

However, we need to remember that the unconscious interaction forms that help constitute social interactions themselves bear the imprint of the social interactions from which they derive (i.e. they are themselves as much social as they are individual) and, moreover, that unconscious life unfolds within and in response to the ongoing social interactions in which the individual participates. Since these interactions take place on the terrain of wider social relations and are necessarily shaped by them, so we can say that the conflicts, prohibitions and taboos of the wider society necessarily impinge on and are present in the processes of language destruction by which scenic experience is stripped from spoken life, just as they impinge on and are present in the processes by which desymbolised and not-yet symbolised interaction forms are barred from the individual's conscious expression. Moreover, as we know from studies of the social life of organisations and institutions, such processes of 'making unconscious' can become routinised – sedimented into an institution's arrangements and practices – and thus relatively durable and widespread (albeit uneven and not wholly predictable in their effects). As Erdheim (1980, p. 269) has written, in these instances we are confronted by 'the societal production of unconsciousness' (see, also, Menzies Lyth, 1959). For all of these reasons, it is as equally true to say that individual experience – including what is unconscious – is, in part, made out of the social dimensions of everyday life as it is to say the reverse of this.

The processual – indeed dialectical – nature of scenic experience which is implied in this argument takes us to the heart of Lorenzer's thought. As Lorenzer wrote

... a scenic composition lies between the 'inside' and 'outside', between the organism and its environment ... It remains the basic model on which we base all further assumptions ...

(Lorenzer, 1986a, p. 43)

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

Language games, scenic understanding and social research

As the previous discussion has indicated, language and language-use are central to Lorenzer's materialist and embodied reinterpretation of our understanding of unconscious processes. It is precisely this dimension of his thought that has been taken up in the 'depth hermeneutic' tradition of social, cultural and social psychological research engendered by his work (see, for example, Bereswill, 2007, 2008; Bereswill and Ehlert, 1996; Braun, 2010; Günther, 2008, 2009; Haubl, 1999; König, 2009; Leithäuser and Volmerg, 1988; Mansfeld, 1998; Morgenroth, 1990, 2010; Prokop et al.,

2009). The reason Lorenzer's ideas might appeal to psychoanalytically-minded qualitative and biographical researchers is not difficult to discern. If research of this kind generates data on the language games that constitute people's life-worlds, Lorenzer's arguments hold out the prospect of being able to identify in these data traces of symbolisation and language destruction. In other words, his arguments suggest the possibility of following unconscious processes as these provoke and help constitute social interactions and life-worlds and as they are simultaneously evoked and constituted by them.

As this implies, the depth-hermeneutic method places considerable emphasis on the need to pay close attention to the scenic dimensions of a research text: the moments at which scenic content erupts into spoken life or is excluded from it. This could be mistaken for a largely technical exercise, perhaps involving detailed analysis of the language used in a particular interaction to identify moments of scenic rupture. As we will go on to argue, the depth-hermeneutic method does indeed involve reading of this kind (see, also, Liebsch in this special issue). However, as we argued earlier, depth-hermeneutic studies also frequently involve the use of the researcher's affective and embodied responses to a research text as a means to understand its latent meaning, what Lorenzer refers to as 'scenic understanding'.

As Morgenroth's contribution later in this issue illustrates, in the depth-hermeneutic tradition the task of tracing the scenic dimensions of a text is typically allocated to data-interpretation panels, small groups of researchers who meet to analyse the data generated by fieldwork. The main reference point for a group's interpretation is the

language used in the data in question, with particular attention being paid to moments in which panel members are excluded from a shared sense of meaning or where something unspoken, undigested or otherwise in excess of language seems to be present. Such moments are often signalled by gaps, inconsistencies, unusual or disjointed language, narrative leaps and abrupt changes of subject but they are also to be found in episodes or remarks whose emotional tone or resonance feels in some way distinctive. For example, they may be troubling, cause confusion, provoke irritation or seem oddly affectless.

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

At this stage, the text is read with evenly suspended attention, that is the interpreters’ reactions, moods, bodily sensations and moments of irritation are noted without coming to any immediate conclusions and without reaching for theoretically-informed

explanations. Using these resources as a starting point, passages that seem particularly resonant or otherwise provoking are then subjected to in-depth analysis. This analysis proceeds in the form of a dialogue, a constant movement back and forth between detailed investigation of segments of data, further reflection on the scenic experience they generate in the members of the interpretation panel, and more theoretically-informed speculation. By these means, the panel's emerging interpretations are tested and modified until they are either abandoned or accepted as plausible and productive.

In the course of this more detailed analysis the interpretation group will generally ask itself three sets of related questions. These move from a largely descriptive, 'surface' level to an 'underlying' level, the primary content of which can be said to be scenic in character (the depth metaphor being limited by the fact that, in reality, no one level precedes any other and even the 'deepest' can sometimes be in the foreground of what is happening). These questions are: (1) in straightforward terms, *what* exactly is going on or being said; (2) *how* is this happening or expressed (for example, what is the emotional tone of what is being said; what rhetorical strategies are being used); and (3) *why* is what is going on or being said happening in this way; what might explain it? (Lorenzer, 1971, p. 35; Leithäuser and Volmerg, 1988, pp. 256ff; see also, Bereswill and Ehlert, 1996, pp. 85ff;; Morgenroth, 1990, pp. 41ff). It is, of course, this third question that focuses attention on the unconscious scenic content of the text in question. In order to explore these points further, we need to return to the case vignette with which this article began: Lou's somewhat surprising response to the reality game show, *Big Brother*.

‘I just wanted her out’: A Lorenzerian language game?

In the context of the current article, we do not have space to make a full, depth-hermeneutic analysis of Lou’s story. However, in what follows we aim to give some flavour of this. As previously indicated, in the depth-hermeneutic tradition data analysis tends to be conducted by an interpretation panel which, in our case, consisted of the authors of the present article. In our initial reading of Lou’s story our attention was drawn to its rather extraordinary conclusion: the moment in which Lou pounded on the door of the phone box and her final comment on this behaviour (‘I just wanted her out’). Given this was the climax of the story and the actions involved were a little bizarre, the fact that it drew our attention is perhaps not surprising. However, it seemed possible that we were responding to something in the story in excess of its more spectacular dimensions. We were certainly amused and a little shocked by Lou’s actions but, reading her account, we also had feelings of bewilderment and exasperation. As was explained earlier, one of the assumptions of the depth-hermeneutic method is that a panel’s affective and embodied responses to data can, among other things, indicate moments of scenic disturbance in a text, for example moments in which desymbolised scenic experience presses upon spoken life or in which it is being stripped from it. With this in mind, our sense of being provoked by the climax of Lou’s story seemed to merit further consideration and, for this reason, we decided to subject it to a more thorough investigation.

Following the principles of the depth-hermeneutic method, we first asked ourselves what, in straightforward terms, was going on in this part of the narrative. Although the normal complexity of social life can sometimes make this question a difficult one, in

this instance the answer seemed clear enough. In the original events that formed the basis of Lou's story, she banged on the door of a phone box she herself wanted to use. In narrating these events in the present, she told a story to a researcher as part of a research project.

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

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

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

little evidence – more importantly, it located what was unspoken in the text inside Lou as an individual. In so doing, it failed to tell us anything of the relational dynamics that, from a Lorenzerian perspective, we would expect to find in the situation.

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

This argument has a pleasingly Lorenzerian ring to it. It implies that something about *Big Brother* (perhaps even something unconscious in the show's format) evoked in Lou an interaction form that was then enacted by her in her ongoing interaction with the programme, part of which involved her attempt to evict the phone box's unfortunate occupant. However, once again, we did not feel the argument constituted a satisfactory or complete interpretation. Whatever its merits, it felt too obvious, too close to

highbrow disdain towards a popular television format and its viewers. As such, it felt inadequately alive to our experience of the text's more troubling dimension and, possibly, to Lou's own experience in the moment. In short, it left something unsaid.

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

Armed with this possible insight we returned to the data and began to see in them a theme that had previously eluded us: a yearning for belonging and community and a sense of hopeless despair over the possibility of ever achieving this. For instance, as she narrated it, Lou's angry outburst followed in the wake of something that could be viewed as an act of betrayal and, more specifically, a betrayal of community. As will be remembered, Lou had been watching an episode of *Big Brother* in which a seemingly innocent and friendly act (Jonny's offer of a cup of coffee) was openly welcomed but covertly disparaged (having politely declined the offer, Adele mouthed the words 'Fuck off' to his retreating back). This can be read as a deliberate attack on a moment of harmonious communal life, of peaceful belonging.

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

This theme also seemed to suggest a different interpretation of the narrative's climax. As we know, since her own phone was broken, Lou rushed out to use a local pay phone and it was in response to the booth's being occupied that she exploded into anger. Read in the light of the preceding argument, we now began to wonder whether – in however counter-productive a fashion – Lou's outburst could be understood as a reaction to what might have felt like a failure in collective life: the experience, not uncommon in an era of neo-liberal reform, of being confronted in one's hour of need with the inadequacy of public provision. With this in mind, we asked ourselves whether Lou's aggression could perhaps be viewed as expressing an unspoken desire for a more generous, expansive and harmonious collective life, one less characterised by conflict, competition and constraint? If this were so, her response would, of course, contain a distinct irony

since, in banging on the phone-box's door, she would have undermined the sort of harmonious communal relations that she was seeking to defend. However, it seems at least possible that – counter-productive and contradictory as it undoubtedly was – Lou's desire to evict Adele and her subsequent anger faced with a phone-booth that was already occupied – articulated what, in Lorenzerian language, would be termed a hidden utopian wish: a desire for a better world (Lorenzer, 1986, p. 28).

In the absence of any opportunity to corroborate or confound this interpretation (such as might be afforded by re-interviewing Lou), it necessarily remains speculative.

However, it is important to emphasise that it has not been plucked from thin air. It emerges from the scenic experience of an interpretation panel – its members' response to something that felt particularly provoking or irritating in the data – and a careful reading of the latter in the light of this. As panel members, we certainly had a sense that the interpretation began to bring into view a dimension of the data whose presence could be felt but that was otherwise difficult to articulate or think about.

If, in Lorenzerian terms, we had responded to something in the data that was eluding symbolisation, how can this something be best understood? As argued earlier, the non-verbalised quality of the events that formed the basis of Lou's story and the sense of something unspoken in Lou's narration of these point to the presence within each of scenic content that had either been subject to desymbolisation or had never achieved this. The exact character of this scenic content remains a matter of conjecture but the analysis produced by our interpretation panel suggests that it may have had something to do with an intense yearning for community and a state of harmonious belonging. In

addition, as the sense of hopelessness in our interpretation panel suggests, it seems possible that this yearning was accompanied by a sense of despair: a belief that what was most desired could never be had, that it would be spoiled or taken away (just as Adele had spoiled the moment of peaceful belonging in the house, and the phone box's unknown occupant threatened to spoil Lou's ability to participate in a community of *Big Brother* voters). Indeed, from this vantage point, Lou's anger as she banged on the phone-box door can perhaps be seen as primarily defensive, an unconscious attempt on her own part to spoil that for which she truly yearned: a containing sense of community.

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

This ambivalence at the heart of the show is perhaps most starkly revealed at its climax. The show's ultimate winner ends up alone, the soul occupier of an otherwise empty house.

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

As we have suggested, our analysis of Lou's story and the events upon which it is based remains tentative and preliminary. To lend it greater authority – particularly the claim that it was a form of utopian desire that remained unsymbolised in her narrative – we would need to look for sources of information that might falsify it. For example, we could seek to re-interview Lou to gauge whether the interpretation proved at all

effective at generating associations for her (Hoggett et al., 2010). Alternatively, we could seek to compare our own responses to those of separate interpretation groups. Such processes have arguably achieved their most developed form in the work of Ulrike Prokop and her colleagues (2009). As Prokop explains in an interview published later in this special issue, the depth-hermeneutic method as she and her colleagues have developed it involves mapping the affective responses and associations of very different audiences as they consume popular media texts. This not only establishes the range of associations that texts generate but also the points of overlap between them. In so doing, it lays the basis for a better understanding of what is collective about both the ‘autonomous level of meaning’ in the text itself and in what this provokes in people’s responses to it.

Conclusion

In the course of this article we have sought to introduce a number of ideas central to Lorenzer’s thought and, in a preliminary fashion, to sketch how these have been taken up in the depth-hermeneutic tradition of social, cultural and social psychological research. To repeat a point made in the Introduction to this special issue, it is not our intention to make grandiose claims about either of these. As an established body of psychoanalytically-informed theory and research, there are certainly grounds for taking both Lorenzer’s work and the wider depth-hermeneutic method seriously. However, their utility lies less in any capacity to ‘solve’ unresolved issues in existing Anglophone debates than in their potential for shedding new light on existing ideas, opening up fresh dialogues and provoking previously unseen lines of inquiry. Some sense of this can be gained from Froggett and Hollway’s contribution later in this special issue, which

indicates the strength with which the notion of the scenic resonates with psychoanalytically-orientated psychosocial research methods as these are currently developing in the UK.

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

However, perhaps the fundamental challenge that Lorenzer poses us all, Anglophone or otherwise, is to be found in two related features of his thought: first, his requirement that we understand unconscious, bodily and social phenomena as being so deeply implicated in each other that we are obliged to address them as dimensions of a single process; and, second, his insistence that, being non-identical, these dimensions are in permanent tension or conflict. It is this second claim that underlines Lorenzer's belief

that, ultimately, psychoanalysis must be a critical enterprise. ‘The unconscious’, he reminds us, ‘is not a shadow of the conscious, it is not subject to the latter's formative influence. Instead it evolves “pre-verbally”, functioning according to rules of its own. It exists as a counter-system to the ruling consciousness of the language community and the prevailing conditions [...]’ (Lorenzer, 2002, p. 219).

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Notes

¹ ‘Socialisation’ is a slightly misleading term since, as is argued in the subsequent paragraphs of the main text, processes of socialisation always make and are made from bodies and embodied, affective experience. In Lorenzerian terms it would therefore be more appropriate to talk of the production of a ‘socialised nature’ or similar (see, also, the discussion in the section ‘Some implications of Lorenzer’s central ideas’ in this article).

² It should be noted that ‘interaction form’ is widely used in the literature to refer to the ‘internal’ as well as the ‘external’ dimension of these processes of negotiation. Although this renders the concept somewhat slippery, it has the advantage of unsettling the tendency to think in terms of an external, social practice that is then taken ‘inside’ in the form of subjective scenic experience. Instead, the interaction form should be viewed as *simultaneously* internal and external: both social practice (itself containing subjective dimensions) and subjective experience (though having dimensions that are social).

³ The version of Lorenzer (1981) quoted here is Schaffrik’s ‘working’ translation, given as an appendix to his own introduction to Lorenzer’s thought (Schaffrik, 2002). The German original was published in Schöpf (1981, pp. 213-224) under the title ‘Was ist eine “unbewußte Phantasie”?’.

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