Original Article

Article: Gratitude and Leave-taking: Editorial Reflections, 2003-2017

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Abstract

In this article we reflect on our time as editors of *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*. The article reviews some of the journal's major contributions to psychoanalytic understanding of social and political problems; considers whether or not we are entering a post-neoliberal world; and discusses some of the challenges faced by *PCS* given the marginal status of psychoanalysis in the wider culture, the journal's emphasis on interdisciplinarity, and its commitment to providing a space for multiple psychoanalytic voices. The article's later sections consider some of the areas that remain underdeveloped in the journal's coverage. In particular, they explore the challenging task of specifying whether or not social entities, as opposed to individuals, can be said to have properties that are unconscious in the psychoanalytic sense.

Keywords: *Psychoanalysis Culture & Society*; neoliberalism; status of psychoanalysis; interdisciplinarity; unconscious dimensions of the social world

This issue of *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* is the last to appear under our editorship. From January 2018, the journal will be in the capable hands of Michael

O'Loughlin and Angie Voela. As we turn over the editorship to them, we would like to reflect a bit on our experience as editors, both as a team and as individuals.

Lynne began editing the journal in 2003, when she and Simon Clarke succeeded founding editor Mark Bracher. At that time, *PCS* moved from publishing twice yearly to four times a year. With enthusiastic support from our new publisher, Palgrave, and with a diverse and amazing editorial board, the journal continued to grow, marking its 20th anniversary in 2015. In 2009, Peter took over the co-editorship of the journal from Simon. We have thus edited *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* together for over 8 years.

PCS and the Political Moment

If we had to nominate the single most significant political and economic force dominating the years of our editorship (and those preceding it), neoliberalism would be the obvious candidate. In our view, *PCS*'s exploration of what psychoanalysis might have to tell us about the fantasies, the character structures, and the defenses nurtured by neoliberal policies has been among its most important contributions. Over the years, the journal's pages have hosted an array of Lacanian, Kleinian, and relational theorists whose analyses of neoliberal versions of collective and individual subjectivity have charted the costs of neoliberalism for public life and private well-being, as well as clearly suggesting some of the psychic barriers to progressive social change (see, for example, our two special sections on the psychosocial effects of neoliberalism, Layton, 2014a, 2014b).

Although it seems unlikely that neoliberalism has yet run its course, it is possible its end is finally in sight (see, for instance, Beckett, 2017; Chakraborrty, 2016). Widespread dissatisfaction with sluggish economic recovery in the wake of

the 2008 financial crisis, together with the longer-term economic and social consequences of globalization and neoliberal reform – stagnating wages, job insecurity, rampant inequality, an eroded welfare state – were clearly factors in both the UK Brexit vote and Donald Trump's 2016 presidential election victory. This upsurge in right-wing populism in so-called 'mature' liberal democracies seems to have been something of a wake up call for global elites; even the IMF has raised questions about the efficacy of neoliberal policies (see Ostry *et al.*, 2016).

At the same time, the conditions fueling right wing populism also led to Labour's unexpected electoral advance in the 2017 UK general election. In an echo of Bernie Sanders' campaign for the Democratic nomination, Labour ran on an avowedly social democratic ticket – pro-welfare, pro-government intervention and spending – the first time it had done so in twenty years. Although Labour lost the election, its social democratic policies proved vastly more popular than predicted, unexpectedly denying the Conservative Party a majority. The Conservatives retain power thanks only to a humiliating deal cut with the DUP, a small, sectarian and somewhat scary party from Northern Ireland.

The fact that social democratic ideas are starting to resonate with a UK electorate weary of neoliberal reform finds some reflection in the US. Hillary Clinton's lack of appeal with sections of the electorate, although driven in part by misogyny, owed at least something to her identification with Democratic Party versions of neoliberal policies. Meanwhile, Republican attempts to "repeal and replace" the Affordable Health Care Act have failed dramatically, and Republican legislators were met with large local protests at town hall meetings in red states. All over the US, progressives are newly entering local and state politics, running on anti-neoliberal social democratic platforms.

Although grounds for optimism, those developments are embryonic and, in themselves, do not mark a decisive break with the neoliberal era. We cannot escape the fact that neither Labour nor the Democrats assembled election-winning majorities, or that, in both the US and the UK, the immediate future is likely to be dominated not by social democracy but right wing populism – or an attempted and probably ill-fated compromise between it and neoliberalism. Even were social democracy to become electorally ascendant again in the short to medium term, there are questions to be asked about its ability to deal with the internal dynamics of contemporary global capitalism (see, for instance, Streek, 2016).

Nonetheless, we are evidently at a moment of some potential, a moment to think anew about what psychoanalysis might contribute to creating a more just social world. Needless to say, psychoanalysis is not uniform, either as a body of theory or a clinical practice, nor is it the first discipline to which one would turn for insights into a post-neoliberal future – political economy is a better candidate for that task. However, this does not mean psychoanalysis has nothing to offer the debate. Part of its contribution undoubtedly lies in the explanations it gives for how and why we resist what is in our interests and of the powerful appeal of the irrational and destructive. Perhaps more important as we look to the future, the different versions of psychoanalysis also provide a rich resource for thinking about what it means to be human and what most allows us to thrive psychologically and emotionally as individuals and societies. If we are entering a post-neoliberal world, or if such a world is becoming at least thinkable, we should seek to ensure that psychoanalytic insights, in all their diversity, are central to the conversation about the form that world should take.

Given psychoanalysis' current marginalization in the wider culture, achieving that ambition is likely to prove challenging, of course. Equally, we should be under no illusions about the limited influence academic journals possess, particularly in the world at large and particularly when they are relatively small, as is *PCS*. The message psychoanalysis brings is often unwelcome, none more so than the news that reality must be faced. Nevertheless, it is not illusory to assert that, from our different psychoanalytic perspectives, we have important things to say about what constitutes a good society and how we might build one. With readers all over the world, and contributors among the leading figures in their fields, it is also not illusory to say that *PCS* is and will continue to be an important place to say these things.

Neoliberalism is not the only issue we face, of course, and it is far from being the only matter *PCS* has addressed over the years. The journal has an ongoing commitment to social justice in many areas, including race, class, sexuality and gender, publishing articles, special issues and special sections on, among many others, immigration and 'otherness' (Ainslie and Tummala-Narra, 2009), cross-generational perspectives on feminism (Layton, 2016), psychoanalysis and African-Americans (Stopford and George, 2014), and queer and trans politics and experience (albeit limitedly in the case of the latter) (see, for instance, Lesser, 2015). It has also addressed the social and political dimensions of trauma (Alford, 2013; Alpert and Goren, 2013), psychosis (Charles, 2012), as well as many social and political issues from around the world. These have included articles, special issues and special sections on South Africa (Hook and Long, 2011), the Balkans (Bjelić, 2011), Greece (Stavrakakis, 2013), Iran (Kabgani and Clarke, 2017), Argentina (Hollander, 2013), and problems affecting indigenous people in Australia (Tracey, 2012). The important special issue on the Palestine/Israel conflict (Frosh, 2016) featured activists,

therapists, theorists, and individual and group analysts working on the ground in various collective projects. Finally, some years ago we inaugurated a new thread in the journal on environment and sustainability, appointing an editor specifically to gather articles, field notes, and reviews on the subject. We have great expectations of our new Environment and Sustainability editor, Joseph Dodds, an activist and scholar who plans to develop the section beyond what it has already been.

The Academic and Clinical Environment

As the above suggests, we have not only published articles from multiple psychoanalytic perspectives; we also publish articles from a multitude of disciplines: political science, literature and film, economics, sociology, critical psychology, cultural studies and clinical psychoanalysis, to name but a few. We are a proudly interdisciplinary journal, believing that the psychoanalysis of culture and society requires interdisciplinarity if it is has to have any purchase. Interdisciplinarity is not without its challenges, however, particularly in a climate in which academia has increasingly embraced a neoliberal audit and market culture. In such a climate, our commitment to interdisciplinarity tends to place *PCS* at the boundaries of the fields from which its contributors are drawn. Leading political scientists write for the journal, for instance, but it is not a core political science publication. The same can be said for almost all the disciplinary currents that feed into the journal. The exception is psychosocial studies, a relatively new and still developing interdisciplinary field of inquiry in the UK which has the psychoanalysis of culture and society as one of its central strands (see, for instance, Redman, 2016).

Psychosocial studies notwithstanding, *PCS*'s structural position on the boundaries of a number of intersecting disciplines means the journal struggles to be a

major presence in any of those fields. In the marketized culture of the contemporary university, one consequence of this fact is that younger academic voices are sometimes discouraged by their institutions from publishing with us. Similarly, rather than publish in *PCS*, clinicians have at times chosen to publish in those mainstream psychoanalytic journals willing to accept the occasional social justice-orientated critique, since to do so brings recognition from the clinical field and guarantees a clinical readership.

Should *PCS* adapt to the demands of that environment? It is difficult to see how the journal can do so without sacrificing the interdisciplinarity central to its mission and, we would argue, its intellectual vibrancy. Opportunities doubtless exist to increase the journal's reach and standing, not all of which we have successfully embraced as editors. *PCS* currently has no social media presence, for example. Nevertheless, in the absence of a seismic reconfiguration of disciplinary boundaries, it seems likely that *PCS* will continue to be relatively small. In those circumstances, what it can aim for is to punch above its weight – to publish high quality submissions, maintain a profile in excess of its circulation, and seek to make a difference in the world.

Another reason why the journal is not generally part of disciplinary mainstreams is to be found in a matter to which we have already alluded: the declining influence of psychoanalysis in the wider culture. It is no revelation to say that psychoanalysis is no longer the cultural force it once was and this waning influence is as apparent in academia as elsewhere. We are a long way from a time in which a survey of the state of contemporary sociology could conclude that

the theories of Sigmund Freud have become pervasive in American thought-ways in the mid-twentieth century and in American sociology. Many sociologists are using adaptations of psychoanalytic methods, segments of its theories, and … selected and varied concepts. (Hinckle, 1957, quoted in Cavalletto and Silver, 2014, p. 17)

As Cavalleto and Silver (2014) document, psychoanalysis was a taken for granted point of reference for US sociology in the immediate post-war years but faced a precipitous decline in influence thereafter, never recovering its former prominence despite occasional upsurges of interest. Parallel points could be made about the rest of the social and human sciences. Even cultural studies, a rare bastion of interest in psychoanalysis during the 1970s and 1980s, fell so far out of love with psychoanalytic ideas that a recent special issue of *PCS* argued the case for their rediscovery (Kramer and Viol, 2017).

Although psychoanalysis' declining influence in the academy is undeniable, a strange paradox is also observable. As the pages of this journal testify, the psychoanalysis that is present in the academy today is far more diverse than it was in the 1950s when much psychoanalytic social and cultural analysis tended to be Freudian or neo-Freudian (Kleinian work at the Tavistock Institute was a notable exception, see Trist and Murray, 1990), or the 1980s when almost the only psychoanalytic cultural and social analysis being done was by Lacanians. Indeed, Mark Bracher invited Lynne to join the editorial board of *PCS* as part of his attempt to diversify the journal's psychoanalytic perspectives on social justice. This increased diversity reflects something of a renaissance in psychoanalytic thinking over recent decades. Ongoing innovations in Lacanian, relational, post-Kleinian, Winnicottian and many other traditions have fed into and enriched the psychoanalysis of culture

and society. If earlier studies remain essential and have much to teach, it is nevertheless arguable that psychoanalytic cultural and social analyses have entered a noticeably open and creative phase.

That renaissance in psychoanalytic thought has, of course, had an even greater impact on clinical practice. The paradox here is that, as psychoanalytic thinking has flourished, psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapies – in many ways (though not all) decidedly non-neoliberal practices – have been increasingly marginalized, to be replaced on both sides of the Atlantic by market-based mental health care and the dominance of short-term, cognitive behavioral therapies (for the consequences of this process in the UK, see Vaspe, 2017, to be reviewed in a forthcoming issue). How have psychosocial perspectives on clinical work fared in this context? As in the polarized political world, we find, at one extreme, analytic practitioners advocating radically decontextualized pedagogical practices in which clinicians are encouraged to give case presentations that omit all historical or social markers. At the other end of this continuum, we find more practitioners who, cognizant of left academic work on race, gender, class, and sexuality, embrace intersectionality theory and advocate bringing into the treatment the way that social positionings and power differentials of both therapist and patient operate consciously and unconsciously. If such differences partly reflect divergent approaches to clinical technique, they also have to do with the ongoing difficulty that some psychoanalytic traditions have acknowledging the impact of the social world on unconscious life, a fact that suggests the interdisciplinary encounter between psychoanalysis and the social and human sciences still has a way to go.

One further point about the current standing of psychoanalysis is also worth making. Despite what we have called the recent renaissance in psychoanalytic

thought, the specialist educational model that shapes both psychoanalytic and academic training continues to foster an environment in which people from different psychoanalytic schools rarely speak with one another and make only limited use of each other's ideas. Consequently, although psychoanalytic thinking is flourishing, cross-fertilization between its various schools is not happening as much as it might. To recommend such cross-fertilization is not to wish away real differences that exist between the schools, merely to advocate greater curiosity and openness. We have tried, in the journal, to create conversation by publishing views on given topics from the perspectives of different schools, and we hope that, even when these views remained firmly within the boundaries of their specialism, readers will have been stimulated to make something new of the multiple perspectives offered.

Gaps and Absences

If the foregoing comments give a flavor of at least some of the work published in the journal over recent years, what of things unsaid? A noticeable feature of *PCS* during our tenure has been the relatively small number of articles reporting on large-scale empirical research projects. There are many people doing high quality empirical work, of course. Indeed, our field notes section has featured much empirical works-in-progress. However, results from large-scale projects are few and far between. It seems likely that the paucity of articles arising from larger-scale studies reflects funding bodies' priorities and decision-making, themselves a reflection of the current marginalization of psychoanalysis in mainstream social and political science. However, it is worth asking if this absence also reflects a lack of co-ordination and ambition among psychoanalytically orientated researchers. Are we failing to foster and sustain the national and international networks capable of generating large-scale funded projects?

Another perhaps surprising feature of our tenure has been the relatively small number of submissions received that reflect on activism and applied projects. Most of those we do receive also fall into the field note category. This partly reflects the academic nature of the journal and the retreat in many areas of the academy from direct contact with activist and community organizations – something that had been a feature of much academic work in the 1970s and into the 1980s. It is probably too easy to romanticize work from this era and the arguments are not uniformly in favor of those who want academics, psychoanalytically informed or otherwise, to "take sides" (to paraphrase Howard Becker's (1967) famous essay). Nevertheless, for a journal committed to social justice, we might expect to see more work of an activist bent. The rampant injustices of our times – from "austerity" in the UK and attacks on welfare on both sides of the Atlantic, to police shootings of young black men and the failures of "Great Power" foreign policy adventures – certainly give plenty of scope. It had long been the wish of our parent organization, the Association for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society (APCS), to foster activist projects that our members would work on together during the year, report back on at our conferences, and publish in the journal. Some members have indeed produced outstanding documentary film work, participatory action research, and clinical/artistic projects carried out with various traumatized populations (to name only a few, see contributions to Alpert and Goren, 2013; Altman, 2017; Haaken and Palmer, 2012). However, the journal would certainly welcome more of this work.

Equally, the costs involved in translation – borne by authors – mean that *PCS* has published only a handful of articles by non-Anglophone authors. Because of this, we are cut off from vibrant currents of psychoanalytic social and political thought in continental Europe, the middle east, central and South America and elsewhere.

Furthermore, despite the presence in the journal of, for example, work from South Africa and from contributors working with indigenous peoples in Australia, the global south – not least the Indian sub-continent – remains noticeably under-represented in its pages.

In addition to those gaps and absences, there is one final matter that seems to us to be a major and ongoing limitation in our collective attempts to psychoanalyze culture and society: the difficulty of translating psychoanalytic concepts to the social world. It could be argued, of course, that most of the journal's pages engage, in one way or another, with precisely this task. In what sense, then, does it represent a gap or absence? Looking back over the past years, our feeling is that, despite evident strengths in describing what is social in the unconscious lives of individuals, interpersonal relations and groups, the field continues to have difficulty specifying what is unconscious in the social itself. It is this question to which we turn next.

Translating psychoanalytic concepts to the social world

Earl Hopper (2014), among others, has pointed to the widespread tendency in the literature to apply psychoanalytic concepts developed in one context, usually that of clinical practice with individuals, to phenomena that are collective or social in character (p. xiii). This tendency is unproblematic when the concept applied is intended as an analogy but more troubling when assumed to be translatable from its original context to the social world without mediating work. To take the obvious example, when we speak of a culture of narcissism do we mean that narcissism is a property of the culture itself or of people in that culture? To be clear, Hopper's point is not that psychoanalytic concepts should never be applied to social and collective entities but that, when they are, we should take care to specify how they work and,

when necessary, modify them to account for the differences between individuals and collectivities and social formations. Hopper himself has been engaged in a long term project (with Haim Weinberg) to identify how unconscious processes (superficially a feature of individual minds and minds in interaction) can be said to work at the level of the group and in other social systems, including society at large (see, for instance, Hopper and Weinberg, 2011, 2016, 2017).

Such arguments are hardly new, of course. Freud (1930/1961) himself warned about the risks of transposing ideas derived from individual psychology to the social sphere, and others have sought to provide accounts of how unconscious processes known to operate intrapsychically and intersubjectively can also be said to circulate through society at large; be reproduced over time; and, in some sense, become sedimented into or "housed" by social institutions, practices and structures (see, for instance, Alford, 1989; Armstrong and Rustin, 2015; Long, 2013; Lorenzer, 1986; Oliver, 2004; Volkan, 2004; Žižek, 1997). As those arguments indicate, analyses of unconscious processes as they operate at a collective and societal level are not without resources, many of which are highly sophisticated. Nevertheless, theorizing those processes is complicated and, arguably, remains at a relatively early stage of development. We can probably best illustrate this point through a concrete example.

Potentially one of the more productive avenues of inquiry into the unconscious dimensions of the social world is to be found in the psychoanalytic organizational consultancy literature, specifically the notion of social systems as defenses against anxiety, first put forward in the work of Elliott Jaques (1951/1990, 1953/1990) and then developed by Isabel Menzies Lyth (1960/1990). As Susan Long (2006) has written (in a definition that applies most to Menzies Lyth's work), the idea of the social system of defense

… proposes that anxieties originating in people's responses to their work tasks, stimulating primitive anxieties and experienced by many within the organization … lead to a collective defense. This collective defense becomes part of the culture and structure of the organization. That is, it becomes part of the way things get done. The anxieties may be part of the primary task, say, of nursing, or teaching, or accountancy, but they may also be part of associated tasks such as management or taking up 'authority for role' in face of disagreements. (p. 284)

For instance, in her much cited study of the nursing service at King's College Hospital in London, Menzies Lyth (1960/1990) concluded that the nature of the primary work task (intimate contact with sick and dying patients) aroused so-called primitive anxieties in trainee nurses. Over time, the hospital had developed an unconscious defensive system – including excessively routinized and instrumental relations with patients, systematic evasion of decision-making and a highly punitive culture of blame – that sought to "handle" these anxieties. Although the defensive system was partially successful in keeping nurses at an emotional distance from unconscious anxieties generated by the primary task, it increased anxiety in other ways – through nurses' fear of making mistakes, for instance – and drop out rates from nurse training were high. The system also meant that anxieties associated with the primary task were never addressed and worked through, in the process stifling individual and organizational growth.

Jaques's (1953/1990) version of this model, which saw people as "plac[ing] part of the contents of their deep inner lives" and "pool[ing]" these in the social system of defense, was not a fully social account (p. 420). As Long (2006) writes, the model suggests that social systems of defense are collections of "intrapsychic

structures shared by covalent individuals" (p. 286). Menzies Lyth (1960/1990) did not disagree with Jaques. Indeed, she was at pains to clarify that she did not seek "to imply that the nursing service *as an institution* operates the defenses" since "[d]efenses are, and can be, operated only by individuals" (p. 458). Nevertheless, her argument plainly indicated the system persisted over time, actively recruiting new student nurses and inducing in them a defensive structure. Although the nurses were said to have valence for this structure, Menzies Lyth was clear they would not of necessity have come to inhabit it had they not gone to work at King's. (Not all student nurses were able to accommodate themselves to the system, another reason for the high drop out rate.) At the very least, Menzies Lyth's argument involved an understanding of the social system of defense as something that, although not independent of the individuals who participated in it, nevertheless exceeded them. Consequently, it also pointed towards the possibility of understanding unconscious defenses as a property of the system itself, not of those individuals: a social account of unconscious processes.[1]

Most significant for our current purposes is the possibility that the notion of social systems of defense can be transposed from its roots in organizational studies and applied to social formations more widely. In other words, although developed to work at the level of the organization, the concept feels as if it should be able to explain how unconscious processes might become structured into wider social relations and networks of cultural meanings, generating further unconscious processes among those who participate in those relations and networks. Among others, Susan Long (1999, 2006) has argued for just this possibility (see, also, Hoggett, 2010).

Long's (1999) article, "The tyranny of the customer and the cost of consumerism" interprets such things as the deregulation of markets and the labor supply, the marketization of public services, and the promotion of consumer values in the wider culture as evidence for the existence of a social system of defense operating across wide sections of society (Her empirical examples are Australian but the article implies the ideas can be generalized to equivalent national contexts.) To simplify somewhat, Long suggests that "economic rationalism" – the belief that free market relations, if left to their own devices, produce the best possible outcomes in most if not all spheres of life (p. 731) – combined with a "discourse of consumerism" – the valorization of the buyer/seller relationship and "instrumental individualism" more generally, together with a concomitant retreat from other forms of relating and value (pp. 727, 733) – have come to dominate business, public policy and everyday life in the advanced industrialized economies.

Although, for Long, economic rationalism and the cult of the consumer should be understood as part of an ideological project, they are also a defensive response, at least partially unconscious in character, to long-term social and economic change, including the uncertainty aroused by increasingly "global markets where the customer is 'sovereign'" (p. 723) and the decline of older forms of stability, solidarity and authority (religion, class, nation, the paternal state and so on). "[A]longside implicit ideological manipulation by organizational elites," Long writes, economic rationalism embodies "deeply unconscious dynamics of social defenses against anxiety" (p. 725). Indeed, Long argues that the grip economic rationalism and consumer choice now have on many people's lives is such that the "purchaser/provider" couple can be viewed as a basic assumption (Bion, 1961/1998) operating across quite large swathes of the advanced industrialized economies. The purchaser/provider couple, she

writes, "stands … [unconsciously] for a sexual or creative pair" that will undertake "emotional work, as well as thinking and action, … on behalf of the group" (p. 737). The purchaser/provider couple is, in short, a collective illusion protecting us from experiencing the pain of what has been lost (the security of a more stable economic and social world in which, however problematically, dependency was acknowledged and addressed) and the hard work of finding new ways of relating in the world in which we now find ourselves.

Long's argument is insightful and thought-provoking but – a necessarily brief sketch of the phenomena she describes – it raises numerous questions. One question, largely empirical in nature, concerns the extent to which the argument is over-generalized, failing to differentiate adequately among what may be somewhat different economic and social developments (the new public management, just-in-time production methods in manufacturing, market deregulation and so on). A parallel question concerns the extent to which it potentially homogenizes dramatically fragmented populations likely operating with very different defenses – something that may be particularly true of the UK and US, where the Brexit vote and Trump's election to president have revealed deep social and political divisions.

However, another set of questions concern the social systems of defense model itself or, at least, our ability to apply it beyond the level of the organization. In particular, how possible is it to say that a single, relatively homogeneous social system of defense can operate across different domains of social and economic life: business, government, public services, everyday life and so on? The social systems of defense model was developed in studies of single organizations where it is relatively easy to discern systems of defense in operation and persisting over time. It is not too difficult to imagine how such systems can also operate across linked organizations

within a sector. For example, the defensive system in operation at King's, the hospital in Menzies Lyth's study although particular in certain respects, seems likely to have at least something in common with those in operation in other hospitals. Its highly punitive culture of blame seems to have been specific, for instance (for a response to criticism of the hospital's management by the General Nursing Council, see Halton, 2015, p. 34) but other aspects – the rigid hierarchies, routinized practices of care and so on – were presumably common across NHS hospitals of the time. Since these hospitals were also departments of a single organization, we may be justified in describing the defensive system at King's as a local variant of a wider system in operation throughout NHS hospital care or parts of it (see, also, Chernomas, 2007).

The task becomes more difficult, however, when we move from single organizations and sectors to multiple sites. To return to Long's argument, we can imagine economic rationalism and consumer choice being first taken up in the 1970s within a relatively self-contained world of academics, politicians and think tank policy analysts. (In the UK this would have included members of parliament on the right of the Conservative Party, individuals working for independent research and policy institutes such as the Centre for Policy Studies, and academics influenced by Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman,) Close institutional and personal ties between these various players may allow us to think in terms of an unconscious defensive system coming into existence within their milieu, in which economic rationalism and consumer choice, as well as having cogent intellectual and ideological functions, also served purposes that were not fully conscious – perhaps having the quality of a basic assumption in the manner Long suggests.

As Long argues, not too long after economic rationalism was beginning to take hold of sections of the political class, a cult of the consumer started to emerge in business and management theory, leading to widespread restructuring of retail and other business sectors around such things as just-in-time technologies and total quality management programs (du Gay and Salaman, 1992). Once again, we can imagine that the cult of the consumer had unconscious dimensions and that the restructuring of particular organizations – and even linked organizations – along consumer-oriented lines could be shown to serve defensive functions. However, although there are clearly points of contact and communication between the business and political worlds, they are different spheres with different purposes and modes of activity. As such, even if we could identify a common system of defense in operation in commercial enterprises restructured along consumer-oriented lines, it is not obvious that we would also be able to identify a single system of defense operating across those commercial enterprises and the political milieu and defending against the same unconscious anxieties in each. To do so we would need a mediating mechanism of some kind. In the absence of such a mechanism we can, at best, speak of separate systems operating in tandem and to some degree open to each other.

The picture becomes even more complicated if we start to add further domains to our analysis: public services; the media; everyday life; and so on. It is not that, in the advanced industrialized economies, any of these spheres have remained immune from economic rationalism and the discourse of the consumer – far from it. Nevertheless, given their diversity, it is unclear the extent to which the prevalence of economic rationalist and consumer-orientated ideas, practices and modes of organization can, in themselves, be said to constitute a single social system defending against unconscious anxieties that are the same across those different sites.

One possible retort to that argument would be to say that a common system of defense operates "above" the various social domains we have outlined and is an emergent property of the ways in which the diverse defensive systems operating within them interact. An emergent system of that kind would certainly provide the missing linking mechanism we mentioned a moment ago. However, it is not readily apparent what such a supraordinate system would look like or how it would come about.

Our point is, we hope, becoming obvious. Long's suggestion that economic rationalism and the valorization of the consumer operate as a social system of defense in existence across large swathes of social life is intriguing, but does not itself explain how that system came into existence, functions and is maintained. Such an explanation – if one is in fact possible – would require a far more differentiated account, involving considerable elaboration and perhaps adaptation of the social systems of defense model. In particular, it seems unlikely the model can, in any simple sense, be scaled-up from the level of the organization to the wider social formation. Moreover, as some readers will have noticed, Long's development of the social system of defense model does not itself address what is unconscious in the long-term social and economic changes against which economic rationalism and the cult of the consumer are said to defend. Consequently, it seems likely that, even if a more differentiated account of the model could be generated, we would still need a further explanation of this unconscious content and the mechanisms by which it circulates.

Given the reservations we have outlined, it is equally possible an attempt to develop a more differentiated account of the social systems of defense model would prove futile, leaving us needing a different account of how unconscious defenses (and

other psychic processes) operate in the social world at large. Whether or not that is the case, our immediate interest in exploring the model has less to do with its intrinsic merits than with what it highlights: the sheer difficulty involved in trying to specify those properties of the social world that might be unconscious and how these can be said to operate at scale and over time. Despite the difficulty, this seems to us an important, perhaps urgent task. At the risk of departing on an exhortatory note, this task is one we urge readers of *PCS* to address in the years ahead.

Conclusion

Although it is hard to gauge the impact a journal actually has in the world of ideas and the world of action, we know that *PCS*'s editorial board and authors are among the finest thinkers in the area of social justice and psychoanalysis. We also know that a lot of people want to publish in the pages of *PCS*, so many that we generally have more than a year's worth of copy waiting to make its way into the journal. It has been a privilege to know our editors and authors and to work with them these many years; we have learned so much from them. We have also known and worked with Angie and Michael for many years and feel certain that they will carry forward the best parts of *PCS* and, given their creativity, take the journal to new and exciting places.

Again, we thank all the members of our editorial team past and present – our field notes editors, book review editors, environment and sustainability editors, contributing editors, editorial board members, our international advisory group and the editorial and production team at Palgrave. We also thank APCS, in particular its chairs, Marilyn Charles and Lita Crociani-Windland, for the association's continuing support of the journal and we extend special thanks to our excellent managing editor, Simon Thomas, and to those who occupied this role in the past. And we look forward

to being a part of *PCS* as it continues to evolve, analyze, and intervene in our precarious sociopolitical world.

Notes

[1] Long (2006) appears to endorse this possibility (pp. 285-286). However, the claim that unconscious processes and contents can be the properties of social entities rather than individuals remains contested. See, for instance, Alford, 1989, pp. 57-58

About the Authors

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