

Sociology and Psychoanalysis: The Unfulfilled Promise

UCL, Institute of Education

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11th-12th November 2016

A conference co-sponsored by

BSA Sociology, Psychoanalysis and the Psychosocial Study Group

The Institute of Psychoanalysis

Department of Culture, Communication and Media, UCL Institute of Education

Independent Social Research Foundation

Institute of Advanced Study, and The Social Theory Centre, University of Warwick University

Despite the simplicity of Freud's provocation that sociology 'cannot be anything but applied psychology', the relation between the two disciplines remains an open question for many. Of course, there have been multiple points of contact between sociology and psychoanalysis – from, among others, Freud's own writings on civilisation, religion, and the psychology of groups; through the projects of the Freudo-Marxists and the Frankfurt School; to Lacanian accounts of subjectivity, feminist and queer re-evaluations of sexual difference, and postcolonial critique. Nevertheless, it is true to say that psychoanalysis has often found itself on the margins of sociological discourse, just as sociology has often found itself on the margins of psychoanalytic thought. To quote the title of a recent collection, psychoanalysis and sociology have suffered an 'unhappy divorce'; the promise of their relationship remains unfulfilled.

Over the course of this conference we will explore the presence of psychoanalysis within the history of sociology, reflect on earlier attempts to bring about the much delayed rapprochement between the disciplines, investigate the continued 'application' of psychoanalysis within the field of sociological enquiry, and consider what the two disciplines might learn from each other today. How does psychoanalysis, attending to the unconscious fantasy life of the individual, move beyond the realm of private interests? Conversely, how does sociology reflect on the operation of the unconscious? What forms of psychoanalysis are sustainable in different socio-political climates? And how can a psychoanalytic sociology enhance our understanding of contemporary society.

Bringing together international scholars and practitioners of sociology and psychoanalysis, our goal will be to explore the terms of a future psychoanalytic sociology and a sociologically informed psychoanalysis.

Programme

Friday, 11th November 2016

13.00 Registration

14.00-14.15 Introduction

14.15-15.45 Panel A: Close encounters, Part 1:

[Aim: To trace the history of some of the major encounters between sociology and psychoanalysis/group analysis and, to the extent that these encounters are historical, assess their legacy and relevance for today]

‘Knowledge and its Pretenders: Marx, Freud and Ideology’ - David Bell (*Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust; Institute of Psychoanalysis, London*)

‘The Unconscious and the Social: The Tavistock Link’ – Michael Rustin (*University of East London; Institute of Psychoanalysis, London*)

‘Broader and Deeper: The Psychosocial Promise of Group Analysis’ – Sasha Roseneil (*University of Essex; Institute of Group Analysis*)

15.45 Tea break

16.15-17.45 Panel B: Close encounters, Part 2

[Aim: As Panel A]

‘Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Agency’ – Amal Treacher Kabesh (*University of Nottingham*)

‘Psychoanalysis and Queer Theory: An Unrealised Promise?’ – Anne Worthington (*Middlesex University; Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research*)

17.45-18.15 Break

18.15-19.15 Keynote lecture: ‘Psychoanalysis and Social Critique: The Tragic, the Radical and the Redemptive’

Jessica Benjamin (*New York University; Stephen Mitchell Center for Relational Studies*)

19.15 Wine reception

Saturday, 12th November, 2016

9.30-11.00 Panel C: Psychoanalysis outside the clinic?

[Aim: To explore what happens when psychoanalytic ideas and techniques are applied to social questions and investigation. What do they illuminate? What are their limits?]

‘Inserting the “Imaginary” into Social Encounters: Lessons from the Analysis of Racial Prejudice and Black Non-Identity’ – Matt ffytche (*University of Essex*)

‘The Narcissism of Disciplinary Differences: From Freud’s Pseudopodia to Fanon’s Antennae’ – Julie Walsh (*University of Warwick; The Site for Contemporary Psychoanalysis*)

‘Melancholia: Loss and Politics’ – Claudia Lapping (*UCL, Institute of Education*)

11.00-11.30 Coffee break

11.30-13.00 Panel D: The social in the clinic

[Aim: To explore how the social world enters the clinical encounter and consider what happens clinically if this entrance is or is not addressed.]

‘Psychosocial Enactments in the Clinic: Tracing Normative Unconscious Processes’ – Lynne Layton (*Harvard Medical School; Massachusetts Institute for Psychoanalysis*)

‘Class and the Clinic: Everywhere and Nowhere’ – Joanna Ryan (*The Site for Contemporary Psychoanalysis*)

13.00-14.00 Lunch

14.00-15.30 Panel E: The unconscious in the social

[Aim: To interrogate the unconscious dimensions of social life through reflection on concrete social questions and problems. How does psychoanalysis help illuminate these questions and problems?

‘Conviction Narrative Theory: Using Psychoanalytic Thinking to Research Financial Market Instability’ – David Tuckett (*UCL; Institute of Psychoanalysis, London*)

‘Deprivation and Defiance: Waiting as a Sign of Hope’ – Steven Groarke (*University of Roehampton; Institute of Psychoanalysis, London*)

15.30-16.00 Tea break

**16.00-17.00 Towards a rapprochement between sociology and psychoanalysis?:
Challenges, impasses, and ways forward**

[Brief reflections from conference rapporteurs, Gail Lewis (*Birkbeck, University of London*) and Rachel Thomson (*Sussex University*) followed by open discussion.]

17.00 ENDS