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Psychosocial Reflections on Fifty Years of Cultural and Political Revolution: Editors' Introduction

Candida Yates, Barry Richards and Alexander Sergeant

Fifty years after the hippie counterculture of 1967 ('the summer of love') and the political turbulence of 1968 ('May 68'), the Association for Psychosocial Studies Second Biennial Conference staged a psychosocial examination of the ways in which today's world is shaped by the forces symbolised by those two moments. Held at Bournemouth University in April 2018, it explored the continuing influence of the deep social, cultural and political changes in the West, which crystallised in the events of these two years. The cultural forces and the political movements of that time aimed to change the world, and did so, though not in the ways that many of their participants expected. Their complex, multivalent legacy of 'liberation' is still developing and profoundly shapes the globalising world today, in the contests between what is called neo-liberalism, resurgent fundamentalisms, environmentalism, individualisms, nationalisms, and the proliferation of identity politics.

A counter-cultural and identity-based ethos now dominates much of consumer culture, and is reflected in the recent development of some populist and protest politics. A libertarian critique of politics, once at the far margins, now informs popular attitudes towards many aspects of democratic governance; revolutionary critiques have become mainstream clichés. Hedonic themes suffuse everyday life, while self-reflection and emotional literacy have also become prominent values, linked to more positive orientations towards human diversity and the international community.

In this context the conference sought to bring together psychosocial analyses of the development and legacy today of the 'revolutions' of the 'Sixties'. While this included fully historical studies, other papers did not have an explicit focus on that decade as such, but approached the conference theme through explorations of contemporary issues in politics and culture. The collection of papers presented here, from the very wide range of contributions to the conference, cluster around some of the themes which were predominant there: feminism, gender, individualism, anxiety, and artistic expression.

The collection begins with Barry Richards' analysis of the sociocultural shifts inaugurated by the 1960s as changes in the predominant mode of societal containment. Entitled *The Causes of Sanity*, his article suggests that there are historically specific ways in which societies offer management of anxiety, and so help to underpin the sanity of individuals. The 'Sixties' signalled the emergence of popular culture as a major source of this containment, linked to the rise of expressive individualism. While seeing these as fundamentally positive developments, Richards argues that the potential of the political

sphere as a resource for the containment of anxiety, through the state's provision of a shared geographical place of safety, also needs to be developed.

Like Richards, Carla Penna's article *From 'Cultural Revolution' to the Weariness of the Self: New Struggles for Recognition* provides a critical analysis of individualism and the psychosocial costs of its ideology within the contemporary world. Penna takes a group analytic perspective to examine the shifts that have taken place from the moment of 'Cultural Revolution' in the 1960s, in which progressive ideas of freedom and equality held out the promise of transformation at conscious and unconscious levels of experience. Penna argues that despite the socio-political and cultural achievements of that time, the 'social suffering' and 'exhaustion' that have since emerged, and which are widely manifest today, highlight the need to foreground concepts such as 'freedom with' and 'social freedom' in order to understand the new struggles for recognition faced by postmodern subjects.

Marilyn Charles' article *Borderline: A Diagnostic Straitjacket?* focuses on the links between social injustice and readings of borderline conditions as pathology that can be traced back to the 1960s, and which have since been challenged by the forces of progressive politics which also emerged at that time. Charles provides a compelling discussion of the value of psychoanalysis in helping us to understand the power dynamics bound up in such readings, as she unpacks the meanings and experience of borderline conditions in relation to the case study of 'Val'. Charles weaves in aspects of her own experience as a clinician to suggest how the psychoanalytic lens can aid our efforts towards alleviating human suffering, and uses clinical vignettes for illustration.

Mica Nava's article *Looking Back: '1968', Women's Liberation and the Family*, also draws on her own experience to analyse the emergence of the women's liberation movement in Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and what it meant for her as a radical young woman with three small children. Nava reminds us that for those with young children in the late 1960s, the theoretical and political reframing of 'the family' was 'the most distinctive and liberating aspect of the early women's liberation movement'. Using material from her own past publications and other historical sources, Nava draws on her own memories of that period, and reflects on the debates which took place at that time about childcare, communal living and the idea of 'the personal as political'. Nava also provides a personal and highly nuanced discussion of the family and its meanings from the perspective of current sexual and parenting politics.

In parallel to the article by Nava, Joanna Kellond examines one of the autobiographical works of the American artist and illustrator Alison Bechdel, an exploration of her relationship with her mother, and an important element in the intersections between second-wave feminism and the work of Donald Winnicott. In her article *The Reproduction of Mothering: Second Wave Legacies in Alison Bechdel's 'Are You My Mother?'*, Kellond focuses on the place of psychotherapy in Bechdel's account, including her description of a possibly transformative experience in psychotherapy, in which an unorthodox response by her therapist appears to enable her to achieve a shift in her experience of her mother. Kellond's analysis of that shift suggests how this personal narrative of an emerging forgiveness can be seen to express developments since the 1960s in psychoanalytically-influenced feminist theory.

The focus on images from the 1960s is taken up in a very different way in Alexander Sergeant's article which focuses on a very specific phenomenon, one emblematic of the hippy moment of the Sixties: the persistent appearance in visual media around the world of the slogan 'Frodo Lives!'. Its origin was in graffiti in the USA, probably emanating from an argument amongst American devotees of *The Lord of the Rings* about how to interpret the ending of Tolkien's best-selling fantasy epic. However, as Sergeant describes, it became a more general expression of counter-cultural sentiments, such that those reproducing or consuming it could find in it a wide range of meanings, or could take pleasure in its lack of meaning (which for others was the reason for dismissing it). Sergeant sees this phenomenon in the context of the emergence of fantasy fiction as a form of mass popular culture, and he uses a comparison of Kleinian and Lacanian understandings of symbolism to argue for the benefits of emotionally polyvalent symbols as offering a foothold for emotional connection between different social groups.

The final article in this collection, *Masculinity, Affect and the Search for Certainty in an Age of Precarity*, is by Lita Crociani-Windland and Candida Yates. They explore the affective dynamics of masculinity within the mediatised realm of the Manosphere, where what Jessica Benjamin refers to as the psychosocial dynamics of 'victimisation' and of being 'done to' are recurring themes. They develop their analysis through a case study of the online media coverage of the Canadian Professor of Psychology, Jordan Peterson, and discuss the conscious and unconscious dynamics of his appeal for his followers on Reddit and YouTube. As a celebrity public intellectual, Peterson's pronouncements on a range of issues from gender to free speech appear to resonate powerfully for those men who feel anxious and persecuted by the cultures of identity politics and of feminism in particular. The article argues that Peterson's appeal is underpinned more widely by a defensive wish for certainty in an age of precarity.

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