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### **Politics in practice.**

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**POLITICS IN PRACTICE**  
**Robert Withers 2001**

**Introduction**

Politics, like sex and religion can be relied on for more than its fair share of controversy. So considering how best to approach political material occurring in the course of analytic therapy seems fitting in a book about analytical controversies- especially since most therapists have probably wondered at one time or another how best to work with their client's political issues. Having said that, in this article, I will be arguing against the radical revisioning of therapy in response to such material. I will be making three main points.

Firstly in therapy, as in most walks of life, it is generally advisable to replace a particular practice, only when the old one is demonstrably damaging or counterproductive. It will be my contention, with certain provisos, that this has not been demonstrated with regard to conventional analytical psychotherapy's approach to political material.

Secondly if a practice is replaced, it is up to the innovator to show that the new one will not cause more harm than the one it is replacing. I will be raising various doubts and questions about this in relation to the sanctioning of 'political discussion' in the course of therapy. In particular I will be questioning whether the therapist can become involved in such discussions without the client's individuation process becoming obstructed through the imposition of the therapist's own unconscious material.

Underlying this doubt is the assumption that therapy is not an equal relationship, because one person pays another for expert help with their problems. That help, is dependant upon the therapist being able to *listen* to the client- and their own countertransference responses - in a therapeutic way.<sup>1</sup> It is hard to see how this therapeutic listening can be combined with active involvement in political discussion.

Thirdly I will be drawing on my own personal analyses to show what can happen in practice when therapists do get drawn into political discussions with their clients. This in my experience is often far from therapeutic.

### **Proviso**

There can be little doubt however that over the years analysts of all persuasions have tended to reinterpret their patient's concerns about the 'outside world' in terms of their own particular theoretical preoccupations. So during Melanie Klein's (1961) wartime analysis of Richard, she was interested the Oedipal aspect of his fear of Hitler invading Britain, not its realistic elements. And when Donald Meltzer (1978) re-examined the case, he did so in the light of his own theoretical preoccupation with the transference, if anything offering even less recognition of Richard's real concerns about the course of the war.

It also seems indisputable that the psyche regularly picks up on, and reacts to, events in the outside world- often without full conscious awareness of this. This seems to have happened for example when the participants in the legendary controversial discussions were locked in battle about the place of hatred and aggression in their

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<sup>1</sup> Freud (1912) Bion (1967) and others have characterised this therapeutic listening as an 'evenly suspended attention' or as an analytic 'reverie', while Fordham (1993) referring to Reik (1949) talks of listening with the 'third ear'.

psychological theories. On that occasion Donald Winnicott attempted to bring the protagonists to their senses by famously remarking 'I should like to point out that there is an air raid going on' (Grosskurth 1985 p.321), highlighting (perhaps unconsciously) the connection between the battle in the room and the one going on outside.

It is hard therefore to disagree with Samuels' contention that analytical psychotherapists have often failed to give due weight to both their client's conscious concerns about the outside world and their unconscious reactions to it. I will be arguing however that it *is* possible to adequately address those concerns and reactions without the radical revisioning of therapy he advocates. On this view it is the analyst's own preoccupations that have tended to exclude the client's concerns about the world from the consulting room- not something intrinsic to the analytic process. The deliberate politicisation of analysis along the lines suggested by Samuels is therefore at best unnecessary, and at worst counter-therapeutic.

I will be using a mixture of recent case material, and my own experience as an analytic patient to support these contentions. Initially however I wish touch on Samuels' paradoxical finding that despite not being involved in a war (at the time of writing) therapists seem if anything, more willing than ever to discuss politics with their clients. Could this be indicative of anything more than the quickening pace of political change in the world alluded to by Samuels in his article?

### **The intrusion of the political**

For James Hillman (1994) the answer is an emphatic 'Yes'. The intrusion of politics into practice is a symptom of psychotherapy's attempt to put an end to itself. The psychotherapy of individuals, he argues, has traditionally been concerned with the Self, with ego-strength and with individuation. In this way it has reinforced an alienated post-Cartesian world-view, which sees us as isolated individuals living in a dead material world. He welcomes the intrusion of politics into practice as a return of the world soul to undermine that world-view in its inner sanctum. And he regards the ordinary analytic reluctance to discuss politics as a pathological defence against the threat of that intrusion. He has gone on to give up practicing individual therapy, which he now believes, is inimical to his broader project of bringing soul back to the world.

Samuels is familiar with Hillman's arguments, and is clearly sympathetic to his overall project. But he falls short of advocating the end of individual psychotherapy. In fact Samuels' article can be read as an answer to Hillman- an attempt to defend therapy from his attacks by defining the conditions under which therapists and their clients may legitimately involve themselves in political discussions. On a practical level for example he argues that the containment of the analytic frame can render such discussions therapeutic. And he backs this up theoretically by proposing that each person could be regarded as possessing an innate political potential. The realisation of that potential would then become as much a part of a person's individuation process as the fulfilment of their work or love life, and discussing politics a part of routine

analytic work. The following personal experiences however, seem to highlight some of the dangers inherent in Samuels' proposals.<sup>2</sup>

## **Politics in practice**

### **The first analysis**

I began my first analytic training with an organisation that attempted to integrate psychoanalytic and Jungian ideas, in the early eighties. My analyst, who was suffering from age-related ill health, had been a communist in her youth and was still a Marxist sympathiser (as was I). She was on a direct line of analytic descent from Freud, and had set the training up. It soon became apparent however that the organisation was in the throws of a traumatic power struggle. This struggle directly affected me in various ways, and I was flattered and grateful but also a little uneasy, about my analyst's frank discussion of the related political issues in therapy with me. These issues were complex, but one important strand concerned the conflict between her Marxist inspired desire to provide therapy for the people, and the emerging organisation's more 'conservative' wish for the 'highest' possible training standards. Thus the frequency of analytic sessions for trainees became a subject of heated debate, for instance. In England these political strands are represented by the colours red and blue respectively.

One day I dreamed that I was attempting to enter a large department store through a revolving door. There were guards on the door. I managed to evade them and get into the building, but there was still an unpleasant paranoid atmosphere. I went into a lift and found myself naked as it began to descend. Ducking anxiously into a nearby storeroom in the basement I found some clothes. Some were blue and some were red.

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<sup>2</sup> As regards the apparent increase in political material in analysis, I suspect that this is largely due to the greater general openness to multiple discourses that characterises much of our post-modern world. In analytic terms this would translate into a lessening of the insistence that 'proper analysis' is *really* about one particular thing- whether that thing is the inner world, the transference, the archetypes or anything else (See Hauke, 2000 and McLeod 1997).

I was unable to make up my mind which to put on, but to my relief found some purple ones and left the storeroom in them.

Purple of course is a combination of red and blue, but I am less concerned with the meaning of this dream, than with my analyst's reaction to it. When I related it, she responded by asking if I was mad. I sat up on the couch in some alarm, and obviously terrified she declared that one of us had to be mad. That day someone else had had exactly the same dream and that wasn't possible. She then proceeded to lapse into a florid paranoid psychotic breakdown. Some months later when she had somewhat recovered she told me it was her who had had the same dream, and also that this had not been her first psychotic episode. Not surprisingly perhaps, this incident brought about the total collapse of the therapeutic relationship and also undermined my first training experience.

Nowadays all reputable therapeutic organisations insist that their members take part in continuing professional development programmes, which ensures analyst's work is regularly monitored and helps prevent the occurrence of such events. Certainly the actual psychotic breakdown of the analyst in a session is extremely rare, and therefore perhaps best dismissed as an unfortunate one-off experience. I have included this incident in the present account though because I believe it illustrates a general problem in an extreme form. If the therapist shares her political beliefs with the client, it may encourage him to identify with her position rather than evolve one of his own. The unconscious dynamics underlying that identification will then tend to get enacted, rather than analysed in the exchange of political views. Of course the same process could occur in relation to other emotive topics on which the analyst expresses an opinion. But the passions and judgement that are an intrinsic part of politics make it

especially prone to this danger. In this case the unconscious identification with my analyst seems to have somehow produced a shared dream. Perhaps she experienced this as intrusive and conceivably this contributed to pushing her into a psychotic state. (Searles 1959).

If my first analysis illustrates the potential for political discussion to promote an engulfing amalgam of analyst and client, my second illustrates the opposite danger.

### **The second analysis**

My new analyst, a Jungian, was like my first a Jewish refugee from the Nazis. I soon found out she had understandable but particularly strong feelings about the interminable Arab Israeli conflict, which then, like now was in a state of eruption.

Material related to this often entered the sessions. I dreamed at the start of the analysis for instance that: -

I was in a desolate wasteland/garden up an old tree picking plums, which I was passing down to Sigmund Freud who was collecting them in a basket. A disembodied voice ordered everyone to leave. The Israeli air force was about to bomb the garden, which would then be concreted over to make way for some sort of commercial development.

I will return to some interpretations of this dream towards the end of the paper. For the moment however, I will continue with the theme of the intrusion of politics into this analysis.

I sometimes brought my outrage about Israeli rocket attacks on Palestinian refugee camps into sessions. My highly respected analyst, excellent in many other ways, felt

compelled to get drawn into political discussions on such occasions. She would 'inform' me for instance of the 'fact' that the Palestinians had sold their lands to Israeli settlers and were deliberately maintaining refugee camps unnecessarily in order to court international sympathy. Perhaps she believed that she was helping me become conscious of things I was unconscious of in this way. But I experienced her as more concerned to force me to adopt her views than understand (the unconscious motivation underlying the expression of) mine. I would leave these sessions feeling angry and cheated.

When I voiced these feelings she responded by wondering about the transference and counter-transference. Was I perhaps re-enacting with her an adolescent rebellion I had been unable to have with my father? This felt a bit more like analysis, but in fact arguing about politics with my father had been one of the many pleasures of our relationship. What is more, I felt my differences of opinion with him had been respected in a way they were not with her. Our impasse continued, and I brought this material for a long time looking for some sort of resolution or understanding that never came. But I eventually desisted and resigned myself to potentially excluding important elements from my analysis in the process.

I can see now that I probably unconsciously contributed to this unresolved conflict myself, partly perhaps as a means of avoiding a repetition of the disastrous identification with my first analyst. My second analyst's willingness to get involved in political discussions with me however meant that this went completely unanalysed, along with my yearning for fusion, my fear of that yearning, and the work of mourning my first analyst. In addition her aggressive defence of Zionism meant that I

was able to split off and project my own aggression into her. The work of re-integrating it thus got blocked, as we became stuck in a paranoid schizoid way of relating (over this issue).

### **Generic dangers**

These personal experiences have no doubt contributed to my distrust of political discussions in analytic sessions. But I believe they also illustrate some generic problems and dangers.

The first concern is that Samuels' proposal to politicise analysis could encourage 'reactive' as opposed to 'reflective' analysis out of the counter-transference. Both my analysts seem to have enacted their counter-transference feelings in their political discussions with me, instead of reflecting on them and using them in the service of the analysis.

Samuels no doubt would argue that such 'reactive analysis' happens already when analysts let slip their views about morality, religion, relationships etc. But of course that does not mean such practices should be condoned. On the contrary they nearly always distort the analytic process, and interfere with the client's individuation. The effects of this can be very hard to acknowledge and work through. Since the judgements that are an inevitable part of political discussion make it especially likely to stir up powerful emotional reactions, underlying unconscious material can easily become obscured. How can therapy be protected from these effects?

The above experiences seem to show that the existence of the analytic frame per se, affords absolutely no protection whatsoever.

In addition, in practice the client is likely to feel pressured to adopt the analyst's political views, especially in a training analysis. But even if he reacts against this pressure, he is not really developing his own position.

On a related note, the spectre of the Nazis and of totalitarian communism is not so distant a memory as to rule out the nightmare scenario of analysis being used as a means of social and political control, with opposing political opinions being treated as pathological. To a certain extent this probably happens already when politics is discussed in analysis. And the ongoing computerisation of health and police records, together with the right of courts to access 'confidential' patient notes, adds another dimension to such fears. Perhaps the reluctance of many analysts to get further mixed up in politics could be understood in this light.

I expect Samuels would argue however that he is not supporting the sort of analytic practices I am describing above. In fact he would probably regard his proposals to self-consciously politicise analysis as aiming to counteract such malpractice. But if this is the case, he fails to show how those proposals might actually help that aim be achieved.

He advocates the introduction of 'political discussion' into ordinary analytic work for instance without identifying what he means by this. Is he talking about 'discussion' in its ordinary sense- an exchange of personal political views between client and

therapist? If he is, it is hard to see how this type of discussion could ever be therapeutic- for the reasons outlined above. Or does he have some specialised type of discussion in mind? He might for instance envisage the specific use of political discussion to facilitate dialogue between different parts of the client's psyche. This looks more therapeutically promising, and it does seem to tally with the one relevant piece of clinical material he presents.

That material it will be recalled involved an Italian man who dreamed of a beautiful, isolated, deep, clear lake. He associated the lake to himself and contrasted it with the Adriatic coast and its tourism and pollution. Samuels used this material to facilitate a dialogue between a part of the client that wished to withdraw from the emotional pollution of the world, and another that wished to engage with it in political activity. This material seems at first sight fairly innocuous. It also seems similar to the sort of work many of us are doing or trying to do already. But as we have seen, Samuels treats the client's political potential as possessing a special innate or constitutional factor. So at this point he would have to be very careful not to allow a theory driven privileging of political action to lead him to underestimate the importance of the call for withdrawal from the world in his client's dream material.

Of course there are practitioners of holistic medicine- Engel (1977), Pietroni (1996), Broom (1997) etc.- who rely on a 'bio-psycho-social' model of health. They do link mind, body and social concerns in their work, and their practices may be informed by analytic understanding. But they would not claim to be practicing analysis when they work in this way. Analysts who wish to continue practicing analysis tend to refer their clients to colleagues for medical treatment rather than risk falling prey to therapeutic

omnipotence by consulting with them themselves- even if they are medically qualified. I believe that analysts who engage politically with their client's material risk falling prey to a similar therapeutic omnipotence.

At this point a further question arises; 'Why stop at politics?' Why is political discussion any more therapeutically central, important or innately determined than discussion about physical health, the desire to retreat from the world, or any number of other subjects?

### **Hillman revisited**

But if political discussion in therapy is no longer sanctioned by appealing to the special status of 'political potential' in individuation, then how can analysis be protected from Hillman's attacks on it? Furthermore couldn't the above account of my two analyses be regarded as lending further ammunition to those attacks?

It is true that my first analysis was indirectly ended via the intrusion of politics. Hillman would presumably regard this as symptomatic of individual therapy's healthy wish to put an end to itself. It seems to me however to be more symptomatic of the difficulty my analyst and I had in working with the unconscious processes underlying our shared political material and was the result of a *departure* from standard analytic practice. If I am highlighting the failures in both my analyses, it is in the hope that

something useful can be learned from them- not in order to attack analysis. In fact I benefited in different ways from both analyses, despite their difficulties.<sup>3</sup>

Hillman it will be recalled objected to analysis on the grounds that it reinforces a Cartesian world-view of ourselves as isolated masters of a soulless world. And this may well be true of a kind of psychotherapy that emphasises ego strength at the expense of the unconscious. But analytic psychotherapy, it seems to me, asserts the precise opposite of this. It posits the otherness of the unconscious at the heart of the self and thereby subverts the sovereignty of the ego. This is profoundly undermining of the kind isolated individualism Hillman opposes, especially when that unconscious includes a collective (Jung) or linguistic (Lacan) element. In addition of course the relational aspect of much contemporary analytic practice further undermines individualism. For all these reasons I would argue that Hillman is mistaken when he regards the apparent analytic exclusion of politics as a symptom of its resistance to the overthrow of the Cartesian world-view. That view has been subverted already. Hillman however is presumably quite aware of these arguments. It seems likely therefore that his opposition to analysis springs from personal frustration with its rigours rather than from high-minded philosophical principles. But whatever Hillman's motivation, Samuels' 'defence of analysis' on the grounds of an appeal to innate political potential now begins to look unnecessary.

I will move on next to consider how political material is treated in the course of an ordinary contemporary analysis. Is it possible to adequately address the client's

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<sup>3</sup>At this point I would like to thank both my analysts' heirs for kindly granting permission to publish this sensitive material- and also Andrew Samuels whose 'response' to this paper alerted me to wisdom of seeking that permission.

legitimate political concerns without revisioning analytic theory and practice along the lines suggested by Samuels?

### **An ordinary analytic case**

Peter was a young man in his late twenties with a socialist feminist political orientation in five times a week analysis. He lived in shared, co-operatively managed accommodation with a number of other like-minded men and women. He reported that a previous male resident had been expelled from the house after some 'girlie magazines' had been found in his room. Peter was terrified that if he betrayed feelings of sexual attraction towards any of the women they would experience this too as oppressive, and he himself would be expelled. Consequently he spent a lot of time alone in his room and avoided emotionally meaningful interactions with his housemates wherever possible. When these did occur he felt painfully oversensitive to their nuances and became terrified by the violence and intensity of the feelings and fantasies they aroused in him. This led him to withdraw further, worsening his problems.

One day Peter shamefully reported that in a general election in his teens he had nearly voted for an extreme right wing political party. He desperately wanted to understand this action that was so contrary to his current political beliefs. The thing that disturbed him most was the party's racist agenda, which led it to advocate the forced expulsion of immigrants.

When he thought back to his life at the time, he recalled the following incident. His father (an alcoholic) had hit him, his mother and his numerous siblings throughout his

life. One day after dinner when his father went to attack his mother in a drunken state, Peter intervened physically and forced him off. His father reacted by attacking a different brother and furiously declaring that if Peter ever interfered in such a way again he would kick him out of the house. From then on he lived in constant fear of his father's threat.

With very little help from me, he was able to see that by nearly voting for the far right political party he was unconsciously identifying with his father. In other words he was hoping 'his party' would expel foreigners in the way he himself had feared being expelled. He went on to make some links with his present living situation- his fear of being thrown out again, his guilt about his relief that it was his housemate not him who had been expelled and so on.

He then remarked that he had attempted to cope with his mother's depression and lack of availability by becoming extremely self-sufficient from a very early age. This could be regarded, as a forced expulsion of his own dependency needs from his conscious psyche. The denial (expulsion) of his own needs in both his current living situation and his previous political belief system clearly reflected his continued use of this defensive strategy. He was greatly relieved to begin to understand the significance of his previously incomprehensible political flirtation in this light, and went on to address other therapeutic issues.

I suspect this clinical vignette illustrates how many analysts might currently work with similar political material presented in a session, and I trust that Samuels too would probably find little to disagree with in the handling of this case so far. As we

have seen he does not specify what type of 'political discussion' he wishes to encourage in therapy so it is hard to be sure of this. But it seems unlikely he intends the analyst to get drawn into a discussion of the relative merits of hard right as opposed to hard left politics in a situation such as this. Since his teens Peter has simply replaced one harsh set of political beliefs with another, leaving the underlying splits in his psyche unaltered. Discussing politics in this way would therefore not be therapeutic and could easily reinforce those splits.

There are those who believe all meaningful analytic work must take place within the here and now of the transference relationship (see e.g. Proner, Hinshelwood current volume). Such analysts would no doubt attempt to relate Peter's political dilemmas to that relationship, hoping to resolve the underlying splits in his psyche there. And in fact Peter and I did go on to address the way his conflicts manifested themselves in the therapeutic relationship. But many therapists besides Samuels would reject the reductive formulaic use of transference interpretations (Kast present volume, Peters 1991) without espousing any 'radical revisioning' of analysis. How might Samuels' views differ from theirs?

At times I became identified in the counter-transference with Peter's split off libidinal desires. This happened for instance when he first mentioned his housemate's expulsion. I found myself then wanting to argue the case in favour of pornography and against the version of feminism prevalent in the group of people with whom he lived. Perhaps Samuels would advocate actually getting involved in a political discussion at this point. He might justify this as an exploration of Peter's feelings

about the oppressive nature of the politically correct regime within which he lived, and/or an attempt to improve the relationship between different parts of himself.

If I had got involved like that at this point however I believe there would have been a danger of simply returning Peter's projected feelings to him undigested. In fact he was strongly identified with the socialist/feminist regime within which he lived initially. So if I had argued in favour of pornography at this point I could well have entrenched his identification with a harsh super-ego. He might have believed then, with some justification, that I was filled with dangerous sexual desires not him; and the reintegration of those desires would have got blocked.

But Samuels might agree that under these circumstances it is better to wait until the client shows more awareness of the needy/sexual part of his psyche. Only then might he feel able to embark on a fruitful discussion of the conflict between that side *of the client* and the other more moralistic one. Such a 'political discussion' might conceivably have taken the form of a consideration of Peter's conflicting attitudes to pornography. But if this is all Samuels is suggesting then it is hard to see how his position differs from that of many other ordinary therapists. In fact slightly later, when Peter had talked about his (fear of betraying) feelings of sexual attraction to his housemates we were able to address this split together. But the groundwork for this had already been laid by then through his recognition that the immigrants he had wished to expel in his teens also represented needy parts of himself.

This piece of clinical material appears to illustrate that it is possible to work with a client's political material without either denying its importance or radically revisioning therapeutic practice.

### **Citizen as therapist to the world**

Although most of the above considerations seem to militate against Samuel's project to politicise analysis, there is another factor that appears to operate in its favour. Quite often in an analysis, material arises which has clear political connections. My dream of Freud, the garden, the tree and the Israeli air force quoted above is a case in point.

It will be recalled that in that dream the Israeli air force was about to bomb the desolate garden, and my feeling was that this was in order to make way for a commercial building development. The garden was effectively going to be concreted over. Firstly then the dream could be regarded as referring to the end of nature at the hands of the military industrial complex (see e.g. Giddens 1991).

But it could also be interpreted as a reaction to the Arab Israeli conflict. From this perspective the garden could represent a ruined Eden, with the plum tree corresponding to the tree of knowledge: I am then identified with the Palestinians who are about to be driven from the devastated Holy Land by the Israeli air force.

A third political interpretation concerns the Freud Jung split. It will be recalled that at the time of the dream I had just moved from a Freudian to a Jungian analyst. The Israeli air force from this perspective is in the position of Jung in his conflict with

Freud. I am then in danger of being caught in a conflict of loyalties between my new Jungian analysis and my original psychoanalytically dominated training, which I feel I will have to leave.

A fourth political interpretation concerns the demise of communism, which was in the process of succumbing to the cost of the arms race at the time of the dream. Freud would then stand for my Marxist Freudian analyst, who was being threatened by the capitalist-backed Israeli air force.

The dream could thus be regarded as a counter-transference in Samuels' sense to all these political situations. This observation seems to support Samuels' conception of 'citizen as therapist to the world'. I cannot see though that acceptance of the notion of 'citizen as therapist to the world' would actually require any change in analytic practice. What could my analyst have done about these political interpretations of the dream apart from acknowledge my feelings about them, and help me address any unconscious elements in them? After that surely it would be up to me to decide what if anything to do in terms of political action *outside analysis*. In addition feminism has long acquainted us with the notion that the personal is political (see Orbach 1998). So even here there is little new in what Samuels is suggesting.

### **Other interpretations**

Partly for completeness sake, it seems important to acknowledge that other interpretations of this dream are also possible and could prove therapeutically more fruitful than those above. The tree could stand for mother with the air force in the

place of the Oedipal father. Both could stand for parts of the self. A transference interpretation involving my two analysts (represented by Freud and the Israeli air force) is also clearly possible. And the plum (bum) tree could even allude to the first stage of the alchemical work. An archetypal interpretation is also possible with the disembodied voice representing God expelling Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. And the purple skin of the ripe plums could refer back to the purple clothes in the dream I shared with my first analyst.....

It is small wonder perhaps given such a plethora of possible interpretations that many therapists turn to the security of a formulaic method of working with dreams, systematically prioritising one type of interpretation over another. If the therapist resists this defensive manoeuvre however then the interesting question of how the analytic couple (see Carvalho present volume) decide which interpretation to actually pursue does arise- given that only one at a time can actually be worked with.

Preferably of course this is the one most likely be therapeutic and open up unconscious material. Ideally that interpretation probably comes out of a mixture of the client's feelings and associations and the analyst's ability to sense the presence of the unconscious. All too often however the couple's defences or preconceptions seem to be the determining factors.

My own analyst actually emphasised the purposive nature of the dream. The old was being cleared to make way for the new. In effect she was telling me to put the past with my mad analyst behind me. Although kindly meant, this interpretation tended to block the work both of mourning and of understanding what had happened in my first analysis. This contributed to leaving us partially stuck in a paranoid schizoid way of

relating. From my analyst's side it is conceivable that her difficulties coming to terms with the emotional effects of the holocaust played a part. I can only speculate that perhaps she had had to concrete over important aspects of her own past and that she was advising me to do likewise. In this sense perhaps her own unresolved traumas interfered with her ability to listen to my comments on the Arab Israeli conflict in a way that would help me to resolve my related ones.

## **Conclusion**

If there is one conclusion to be drawn from the above experiences and reflections, it is that it is extremely difficult to be there for another person without imposing our own conscious or unconscious agenda upon them. And yet as analysts this is precisely what we aspire to do. Of course at times we all fall short of that ideal. But it is hard to see how we could either directly discuss politics with our clients, or systematically ignore their political concerns, without straying further from it.

## **Summary**

In the course of this paper I have argued that it is analysts' specific theoretical preoccupations, not something intrinsic to the analytic process itself that has led them to sometimes neglect their client's legitimate concerns about the outside world. On this view the radical revisioning of analysis proposed by Samuels is unnecessary. In fact it could be harmful if it simply replaces one privileged piece of theory with another. I have gone on to use case material (both my own and that of a client) to illustrate what I consider to be some of the dangers of political discussion in analysis.

In particular I have suggested that political discussion is by its nature likely to encourage the intrusion of the analyst's own views and judgements into the analytic process. This could tend to reinforce splitting processes in the client and distract from the analyst's task of listening therapeutically to the client's material. I have gone on to question Samuels' simplistic suggestion that the existence of the analytic frame automatically confers protection from those dangers.

I have also pointed out that Samuels is very unclear about exactly what he means by 'political discussion' in therapy. I have tried to identify a type of discussion that uses political issues to encourage dialogue between different parts of the client's self and suggested that this could in fact be therapeutic. I have argued though that this is possible in normal analytic practice, and in this sense we already have the tools to deal with political material, and therefore do not need to radically revision therapy.

I have also suggested that it is possible to treat certain aspects of Samuels' proposal to politicise analysis as a defence against James Hillman's damning criticisms of contemporary analysis. I have gone on to show why I believe those criticisms are themselves ill founded, and Samuels' defence against them therefore unnecessary.

Finally I have addressed Samuels' notion of citizen as therapist to the world. I have tried to show that there are strong grounds for believing that material on both the client's and the therapist's side may reflect the impact of political events. I have also implied that it is as therapeutically important to try to understand unconscious elements in that as in any other analytic material. In addition it may well be therapeutic for the analyst to acknowledge the client's emerging feelings about such

events. But the notion of citizen as therapist is already implied in the well-known feminist equation of the personal and the political.

It should go without saying that some of the psychological concepts discussed in this paper could be usefully applied in the world of politics. I am thinking in particular of the mechanism of identification with the aggressor, and of the use of endless conflict as a defence against mourning and fears of engulfment. Despite years of analytic endeavour however- Gross (1913), Freud (1931), Reich (1933), Orbach (1978, 1998) etc.- the world has yet to show up for its first therapy session, as Samuels would put it. So I shall have to leave it to those with greater therapeutic ambitions than myself to devise a way of getting it there. Meanwhile I hope I may be forgiven if I stick to the more modest task of listening to my clients' concerns and attempting to attend to the unconscious processes at work in both them and myself: that task is arduous enough.

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