

Thinking about work, psychosocially.

This is the third 'Journal of Psychosocial Studies' that we have edited, which also coincides with the end of an academic year. When we sat down to have an editors' 'how is it going so far' conversation, it was noticeable how often we strayed into thinking about how the changing conditions of university life was impacting on a whole range of features of our capacity to work. Not just ours, because of our particular University locations, but the working situations of a range of colleagues in the psychosocial network had impinged heavily this year on their capacity to function as creative and effective teachers, researchers, writers and thinkers.

For some courses and individuals the last few months have been a struggle with their managements to survive new 'reorganisations' in university structuring. Functioning as a defensive strategy against anxiety, one might argue, the re-organisation of departments and schools, severing sound academic connections to, supposedly, offer more rational economic ones, seemed to have an under-lying anti-intellectualism.

At UWE senior academic and research staff – Professors, heads of research units, Readers and PL grades were 'reviewed'. For many this meant reapplying for their current posts – in the case of the Centre for Psychosocial Studies this meant insisting that the very people who had actually built the centre in the first place must be judged externally to be 'fit' to run it. For some Readers and Professors, having to prove they were still 'worthy' was the strategy. For PLs the whole grade was simply deleted, though some, a far small number, of middle management jobs could be (must be, if the salary was to continue) competitively applied for. The underlying contempt for workers' sense of security and self-worth, for histories of academic achievements which had secured such positions in the first place, shocked internal and external colleagues. Given how little money the whole process saved the organisation, the reasons for such humiliation and denigration of the symbolic bearers of intellectualism seem far from rational. With a landscape dominated by primitive anxiety, paranoid projections, splitting, envy and rage, Klein, rather than Keynes might provide a more useful conceptual framework in which to seek enlightenment in the current territory.

At UEL the sudden threat of dislocating the successfully embedded Psychosocial subject group from its social science and social work context also threatened the capacity of workers to use their creative energy on their academic pursuits and instead engage in a protracted wrangle with their management over location and connections, again with an over-riding sense that the excellent records of teaching and research were treated as of no account.

Even without the specific hacking and slashing in some institutions, the everyday situation for many academics this year seemed to be managing the imperative to teach more hours, produce more output, 'never mind the quality feel the width'. Running to keep up, no thinking time, no feeling time, no creative or innovative time, less sense of meaning, less esteem or respect, less self respect – a hard year, then, for many.

So then did we all have a terrible year – is psycho-social psycho-suffering? Was it all snakes and no ladders?

No, not necessarily. Brilliant things happened in 2010-11, some of which we felt very privileged to be part of. The Annual Conference – Psychosocial, q' est ce que sais? -

Ffffffffff antastic – was energising and exciting – these events go from strength to strength. UEL’s Candy Yates, along with Caroline Bainbridge, produced a great seminar series on ‘Media and the Inner World’. Innovative seminar series and one off workshops and seminars also continue to promote and stimulate psychosocial ideas. ‘The Station’ - a monthly ‘ideas in a group’ session, put in place by John Adlam, Jo-Anne Carlyle and Chris Scanlon is good example. Thank you the Tavi, Birkbeck, UEA, University of Central Lancashire, Institute of Education, Cardiff, and all the psycho-social scholars who operate in universities where there is not a critical psycho-social mass.

And now also thanks to some hard work on the part of Sasha Roseneil, Peter Redmond and Jem Thomas, British Sociological Association has a new group – Psychosocial Studies – great. So then we have quite a list of ‘reasons to be cheerful’.

This edition of The Journal of Psycho-Social Studies should also be in the cheerful list. The first paper, by Fred Alford, *Is the Holocaust Traumatic?* is, as one impressed reviewer commented, what she had thought academia was about - intelligence, creativity, curiosity and empathy used in the service of the greater good. We are very grateful for the contribution. Helen Lucey’s paper *Sibling Ghosts in the Machine* focuses on one of the institutional relationships that is at the core of academic life – that between a PhD student and their supervisor(s) – to think about issues of transference outside of the purely parental past, to explore the significance and reach of siblings in inner and outer worlds. Robert Chernomas contributed a paper with a title so erudite, witty and seductive - *What's a girl to do when her mode of production and the potency of the men who ran it are Gone With the Wind? - the historical materialist melodrama of Scarlet O'Hara* - that we would have wanted to include it regardless. However, the discussion in the paper, of the economic context of the character’s decisions and life trajectories in ‘Gone With the Wind’, well lives up to the title. Gill Buswell’s *A Bear in the Attic* is a delightful piece that draws on Gill’s day to day work of teaching and running a nursery class for three and four year olds. Her discussion centers on Winnicott’s notion of transitional objects and the ways in which the children choose, use, abuse, cling to, discard and forget to think about these special possessions that are an intrinsic part of nursery life. This article, together with Helen Lucey’s piece and the book review of Tamara Bibby’s *Education – ‘An Impossible Profession?’* make for significant signal in this issue towards the strong and growing current of psychosocial studies in education.

The Journal of Psychosocial Studies, pleased with this last effort – thanks so much everyone - is now off on its holidays, but back to work all too soon. Please send us your papers for review and publication, academics, practitioners, students and researchers alike.

Have a good summer, Helen and Liz.