

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Infant Observation

International Journal of Infant Observation and Its Applications

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/riob20

# Psychoanalysis and other matters: where are we now?

by Judith Edwards, London and New York, Routledge, 2020, 205 pp., RPR £34.99 (paperback), ISBN: 978-1-138-49464-0

Chau-Yee Lo

**To cite this article:** Chau-Yee Lo (2020) Psychoanalysis and other matters: where are we now?, Infant Observation, 23:1-2, 103-107, DOI: 10.1080/13698036.2020.1794709

**To link to this article:** https://doi.org/10.1080/13698036.2020.1794709

Published online: 15 Jul 2020.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 24

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=riob20

## References

Dickson, M. D. L. (1938). *Child guidance*. Sands.
Klein, M. (1961). *Narrative of a child analysis*. Hogarth Press.
Klein, M. (1963). On the sense of loneliness. In *Envy and gratitude and other works 1946–1963*. Reprinted London: Hogarth Press, 1980.
Rustin, M., & Rustin, M. (2017). *Reading Klein*. Routledge.
Sherwin-White, S. (2017). *Melanie Klein revisited: Pioneer and revolutionary in the psychoanalysis of young children*. Karnac.
Steiner, J. (2017). *Lectures on technique by Melanie Klein*. Routledge.

Debbie Hindle
*Clinical Training in Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy, Human Development Scotland*
debbie.hindle@gmail.com

© 2020 Debbie Hindle
https://doi.org/10.1080/13698036.2020.1789406
Check for updates

**Psychoanalysis and other matters: where are we now?** by Judith Edwards, London and New York, Routledge, 2020, 205 pp., RPR £34.99 (paperback), ISBN: 978-1-138-49464-0

One of the hallmarks of the naturalistic infant observation model developed by Esther Bick is the observer's non-participatory stance, which is designed to facilitate and maximise the observer's ability to tune into their own body- and mind- state in the process of observation. From this data, the observer learns how to sharpen their intuition for non-verbal and proto-verbal communication from the mind of the infant. Learning from experience involves allowing both the bodily and the emotional to be fully lived, processed and thought about. It forms the basis of Klein's epistemophilic instinct, and later Bion's K link: the drive to get to know and be curious about ourselves and our internal objects is also a prerequisite for all creative and artistic endeavours.

Judith Edwards' latest book *Psychoanalysis and other matters: where are we now?* is a celebration of this creativity. It is also an especially timely reminder of the indomitable, universal, creative human spirit, as well as the perennial struggles and disappointments along the path to emotional growth. Edwards' other publications include *Pieces of Molly: an ordinary life* (Karnac, 2012) and *Love the wild swan: the selected works of Judith Edwards* (Routledge, 2017), as well as numerous journal articles. She is a former child and adolescent psychotherapist based in the UK and worked at the Tavistock Clinic as a clinician and lecturer, including leading infant observation seminars.

Already in the Introduction (xix–xxiii), the author issues a friendly warning to the reader, 'tolerance of doubt and a sense of infinity are both essential as we travel onwards: and we may never arrive' (xxii). The sense of adventure and wonder is indeed evident and pervasive as the reader 'travels on', as the author encourages open-mindedness in her question:

> But is there a way of loosening our grip on our convictions in order to find an authentic voice – at least for the moment? Culture and the individuals within it are intricately

> intertwined; but what we hope to achieve here is a collection that is reflective and associational rather than offering proof. (xix)

Finding an authentic voice is of course no easy task, and Edwards makes a strong case that in order to do that, each one of us needs to be in dialogue internally with different, sometimes conflicting aspects of ourselves, and externally too, with others. She suggests that through these exchanges, the breadth and depth of thinking are increased; when boundaries dissolve, there is potential that 'bridges rather than walls between disciplines are built, as the knowledge chain is carried forward a little further in a complementary rather than contradictory spirit' (xxi). Part of being in dialogue, the author reminds us, involves ways of seeing, perceiving, learning to listen to ourselves and others in conversation. Edwards casts a wide net: with her characteristic quiet insight and modesty, as editor, she brings together an impressive array of papers from practitioners and thinkers across diverse disciplines: from her own field of child psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, and applying psychoanalytic thinking to arts and culture, venturing beyond to anthropology, philosophy and mathematics.

*Psychoanalysis and other matters* is framed by a foreword by child psychotherapist and psychoanalyst Margot Waddell, who primes the reader through the words of psychoanalyst Roger Money-Kyrle, 'as in physics, so in psychology, ultimate truth is perhaps of infinite complexity, to be approached only by a series of approximations' (xvi), and has a comprehensive and expertly put together Index (pp. 188–205).

The book is also a treasure trove of ideas for anyone interested in the potential of human creativity which transcends cultural, linguistic and time boundaries. A firm believer and practitioner in psychoanalysis in search of the hidden meaning in the ordinary and artistic, she invites the reader to 'form a dynamic duo, a living system as it were … to play with these ideas, even have fun with them' (xxii). As author, Edwards' own voice is most directly heard in the Introduction (xix-xxiii), 'Inside: sculpture, anthropology and psychoanalysis; a conversation', co-authored with anthropologist and film-maker Hugh Brody and sculptor Antony Gormley (Chapter 8, pp. 92–106), and in the conclusion of this book, 'Where are we now? How do we look and what do we see?' (Chapter 14, pp. 174–187). Chapter 8 is an account of a conversation about the making and filming of Gormley's sculpture project *Inside Australia* (2002–2003). Fifty one highly evocative figures, 'insiders', are installed 750 m apart across Lake Ballard in Western Australia. The horizon is flat all around. Gormley's idea is that wherever they are viewed, they are seen as 'tiny, hair-like verticals hanging from the horizon' (antonygormley.com retrieved 6 July 2020). He emphasises the importance of the way the body communicates across time and culture, and through these body sculptures Gormley's determination is to lead the viewer inside, to what is beneath the surface. This conversation between Gormley, Brody and Edwards could be seen to be a focal point in the book: it seems to be a place where the reader can pause and wander and somehow or other, some of the other ideas of the book also surface and coalesce here in a fluid way.

Although Edwards tells us that 'this is not a book for reading straight through: it is for dipping into and then following one's own thread of playful thinking' (xx), there are nevertheless compelling themes that thread through the different chapters. The incontrovertible but perhaps at times mysterious link between body and mind is never far away, and seems to find its way back to Freud's idea that our body is the foundation of our sense of self, 'the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego' (1923, SE XIX, p. 26). For example, the chapters exploring meaning in psychoanalytic work with children and adults are replete with references to the importance of sensing the possible meaning in body language, be it as observer of the clinician's own embodied

countertransference which enabled the patient to slowly learn to become in touch with their own body anxiety and tension (Graham Music, 'Body positive: bodies, minds, trauma and becoming easeful', Chapter 6, pp. 64–76), or, the clinician's intuition about a child's clumsiness and her flat-footed, clingy walk that led to the child herself later being able to talk about being afraid to lift her heel and to push off, which led to the clinician's further understanding of the child clinging to their internal objects (Anne Alvarez, 'Future perfect: some reflections on the sense of anticipation in ordinary infants and in psychoanalytic work', Chapter 4, pp. 43–52). The use of metaphor in other cases, for example, Josie Oppenheim's 'From primitive fears to the safety of metaphor' (Chapter 1, pp. 1–12) and Rachel Henry's 'Borderland territory in developmental creativity' (Chapter 3, pp. 29–42), explores further developmental theory of creativity and powerfully integrates the Kleinian concept of object reparation, Chassequet-Smirgel's distinction between self-enrichment and object enrichment, and Winnicott's idea of the transitional space. When internal object relations are secure, and infant and mother are more able to begin the task of separation, the life-long journey of developing and maintaining transitional space beckons. Winnicott is quoted by Edwards here: the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated (p. 105). Also relevant is Winnicott's formulation in *Playing and reality* where 'cultural experience provides the continuity in the human race that transcends personal experience' (1971, p. 100), again quoted by Edwards (p. 105).

Widening the field of inquiry further still, in 'Linking mathematics to psychoanalysis' (Chapter 2, pp. 13–28), Alfredo Moscardini invites the reader to make an imaginative leap to consider the connection between the two disciplines through non-linearity. The author points out the difference between Scientific Thinking, which is reductionist, mainly linear, and tending towards equilibrium and Systems Thinking which is intuitive, chaotic, unstable and non-repeatable, and which is holistic in its approach (p. 20). He argues eloquently that looking at it from a non-Euclidian perspective, mathematics has much in common with psychoanalysis. Another aspect of non-linearity is recursive structure: this is also explored in Shulman's 'Literature, psychoanalysis, chaos theory: iteration, re-iteration, recursion' (Chapter 12, pp. 148–161), by way of reference to William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!,* and making a return journey to psychoanalysis and the concept of transference, a clinical tool that traverses present and past relationships across space and time. Eric Rayner's chapter 'Matching, attunement and the psychoanalytic dialogue' (Chapter 7, pp. 77–91) focuses again on the importance of early non- and proto- communication between infant and mother and draws parallels between that and the dialogue between patient and analyst.

The deceptively simple but nuanced task of observing, as it were, without memory or desire, takes us far beyond the consulting room. Sarah Sutton's 'What you see is what you get: observation, as opposed to inspection, as a means of organizational change' (Chapter 9, pp. 107–119) takes the reader to the somewhat fraught atmosphere of a hospital trust board, where she had the experience of observing the board undergoing significant, organisational change. A sanguine reminder of the danger that lurks behind 'seeing is believing', she borrows from the idea behind the Impossible Elephant to illustrate that the real value of an observational approach lies in sensing emotional undercurrents in order to have clues about what may be going on beneath the surface (p. 109). This quality of attention is also shared in Mick Megee and Lucy Alexander's 'The right start in life: the politics of learning and mental health in schools' (Chapter 10, pp. 120–132), where the two authors are in lively conversation with each other about using psychoanalytic thinking in their different work in the school setting. Even in the hurly-burly

of school life, they give moving accounts of the value of slowing down and observing to the benefit of the children and staff they each encountered.

Intuiting what is below the surface is also much in evidence in Jadran Mimica's 'Womba: the Yagwoia (cannibal) complex' (Chapter 5, pp. 53–63), an evocative and disturbing account of witchcraft phenomena which captures an aspect of the myth and history of Papua New Guinea. A womba is a human-being who has been inflicted with demonic qualities by exhibiting the need to be blood-thirsty and later cannibalistic, reminiscent of Freud's *Totem and taboo* (1913, SEXIII, pp. 1–162), and also of Klein's idea that devouring and taking possession is one significant feature in early unconscious phantasy. Significantly Mimica tells us that local communities come to terms with these malignant transformations: they engage in the task of mourning, which is explored in depth in Ying Xue and Wing-kwong Ng's 'The mourning process of ancient Chinese Women since the 11th century Song dynasty' (Chapter 11, pp. 133–147). The two authors explore mourning as a universal task, and at the same time draw out specificities to women's social status in a period in Chinese history. The pain and vulnerability involved is vividly illustrated by their interpretation of the poem *The adagio of resonance*, written by Qingzhao Li, regarded as one of the greatest poets in China. And, in 'Looking, after, the future: conversations with Central Australian Indigenous thinkers' (Chapter 13, pp. 162–173) anthropologist Ute Eickelkamp writes movingly about her long relationship with the people of Anangu, exploring the social, cross-generational nurturing that is necessary in order for the communities to face the many insecurities of life there. The message of survival and existential dread is close to home, perhaps too close, in respect of climate crisis, and also the current Covid-19 pandemic.

True to the spirit of inquiry, Edwards offers her concluding thoughts by way of questions, 'Where are we now? How do we look and what do we see?' (Chapter 14, pp. 174–187). She uses observation vignettes from infant observation as well as an observation from a nursing home of a much older person with dementia to remind us to be curious and questioning about what we think we know, and to be modest and accepting of our limitations: 'the natural history of ideas evolves through links both between disciplines and between theoreticians … as the threads of knowledge lengthen over the generations' (p. 185). She seems to remind us once more of the need to play, to touch those most hidden places in ourselves in order to be more fully alive and creative, to benefit from 'a breath of fresh air … so that we may see the motes dancing in the sunbeam' (p. 175).

*Psychoanalysis and other matters* is an authoritative study and a source of inspiration to psychoanalytic practitioners and anyone enthusiastic to explore the origins of creativity. It is also an impressive and scholarly contribution to psychosocial and cultural studies, and an indispensable collection for all those interested in psychoanalysis and the arts.

## Notes on contributor

***Chau-Yee Lo*** PhD, M.Prof.Ch.Psych.Psych., F.R.S.A. is a child and adolescent psychoanalytic psychotherapist trained at the Tavistock Clinic where she is a visiting lecturer. She has a background in law and in music and has a keen interest in exploring the connections between early development, psychoanalysis and creativity. She has recently been awarded the Elizabeth Spillius Research Fellowship by the Melanie Klein Trust, and is Reviews Editor of Infant Observation.

## References

Freud, S. (1913). *Totem and taboo*. SE XIII.
Freud, S. (1923). *The ego and the id*. SE XIX.
Winnicott, D. (1971). *Playing and reality*. Tavistock Publications.

Chau-Yee Lo
*Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK*
chauyeelo@gmail.com

© 2020 Chau-Yee Lo
https://doi.org/10.1080/13698036.2020.1794709

Check for updates

This article has been republished with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.