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# Researching In-Between Subjective Experience and Reality

Wendy Hollway & Lynn Froggett\*

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**Abstract:** »Forschung zwischen subjektiver Erfahrung und sozialer Wirklichkeit«. In this article, we draw on Lorenzer's method in our analysis of a single case data extract derived from a research project generating data through the Tavistock Infant Observation tradition. The partial case analysis demonstrates our methodological approach and explores conceptual territory at the meeting point of German and British psychoanalytically-informed traditions. Our scenic composition synthesised key elements of one observation visit to the home of a young black first-time mother in London. Lorenzer's advice to the cultural analyst to explore what irritates or provokes in the scene has something in common with the way that observers in the infant observation tradition use their emotional responses and process their experience. The aim is to provide access to what Winnicott described as an intermediate area of experience and Lorenzer considered "in-between". We explore this area through two provocations in our scenic composition. Using these data examples we ask: is it possible to conceptualise collective, societal-cultural unconscious processes (Lorenzer's *gesellschaftlich-kollektives Unbewußtes*, 1986) within this intermediate area? Specifically, how is racial and class difference present in the scene? How can it be located through scenic understanding of research data? And why does it matter?

**Keywords:** psychoanalysis, cultural analysis, psychosocietal, scene, scenic understanding, infant observation, symbolisation, societal-collective unconscious, transitional space.

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## 1. Introduction

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This article brings Lorenzerian concepts into relation with psychosocial analysis of a data extract taken from an empirical research project. The goal of psychosocial research is to explore ways of understanding that do not reduce to

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either psychological or social explanations and do not uncritically locate these in “the individual” or “society”,<sup>1</sup> or in “internal” and “external” worlds. We find Lorenzer’s concept of scenic understanding (1986) useful in unsettling such binary thinking and our data analysis is guided by a similar intent. The data thus provide an opportunity for a dialogue between two different forms of psychosocial understanding – Lorenzer’s approach which developed within the German post-Frankfurt School, and that of British object relations psychoanalysis. The idea of an “intermediate area” lying “in-between” reality and imagination is common to both these approaches. We take as a point of reference a paper by Lorenzer and Orban (1978) which discusses Donald Winnicott’s concept of an intermediate area of experience between “inner” and “outer” reality (Winnicott 1985 [1971]). Using observation data we put both Lorenzer’s and Winnicott’s concepts to work within our data analysis. In this way Lorenzer’s key concept of the “scene” travels into an emerging arena of British psychosocial research influenced by a different psychoanalytic and social scientific tradition. We explore the ways in which the two conceptual formulations can complement one another.

We demonstrate a further use of our method of scenic composition, a variant of the pen portrait or vignette, which aims to provide a vivid, visualised, rendering of a data extract that preserves its emotional resonance during data analysis and for the reader (see Froggett and Hollway 2010) for an analysis focusing on visual data). We situate the method of scenic understanding in relation to the key theme in this article – an intermediate or “in-between” area of experience. (For the present we leave open the question: in-between what? A possible answer will emerge in the course of this article.) Our final theme in this article is to consider how unconscious dimensions of collective experience implicated in Lorenzer’s conceptualisation of the scene can inform our understanding of the societal dimension within the intersubjective interactions that are the substance of our data analysis.

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## 2. Scenic Composition

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Imagine the following scene: In the living room of a cramped East London council flat, three people and a baby are gathered. 17 year-olds Calise and Anthony, both of African Caribbean heritage, sit sifting through the jobs pages of a London newspaper. Calise is holding a young baby, 11 weeks old, who

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<sup>1</sup> Within the UK arena “the psychosocial” usually is taken to include the macro-social and hence also draws on sociology, social policy and historical knowledge. Our own view is that the societal is always implicit in the micro-social and vice versa and that there is a risk of setting up a spurious dichotomy. In principle therefore we consider that the terms can be used interchangeably.

faces out, dribbling. Anthony is in high spirits, celebrating his exam success. A white woman in her forties sits alertly, looking at the baby and asking Calise how she and the baby are. She asks if the young man is an uncle. Calise laughs and replies “no man, huh some uncle. He’s a good friend, aren’t you Anthony?” Calise and Anthony engage in youthful repartee and the older woman continues to observe the baby, not being drawn in to laughing at Anthony’s good humour. The TV is tuned on low volume to an MTV station playing reggae and hip-hop. Loud music is playing in a bedroom from which another young man emerges, briefly looks in and moves off down the corridor. The woman observing the baby feels a ripple of unease, which she notices and registers through a feeling of “what is this person doing here?”

Calise puts the baby in his baby chair and she and Anthony discuss telephone techniques for making job enquiries. Anthony play-acts speaking to a potential employer: “Yes, em, good afternoon. My name is David Harding and I wonder if you have any vacancies. Oh you want people of a very high standard, more than one GCSE,<sup>2</sup> better than a D grade? Yes, well I think I can meet that, I’ve got eight. [Pause.] Yes, well there’s twenty of us and we’re all hoodies,<sup>3</sup> that okay?” Anthony then calls to Calise’s brother to “turn down that black music, yar. How can you have that stuff on so loud? Turn it down!”<sup>4</sup>

Both Lorenzerian and object relations traditions suggest that the research analyst use the emotional impact of reading as a way in to the text and we follow such an approach in the data analysis that we present. Before moving on, we would like each reader to consider this impact in the light of their own responses.

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### 3. Infant Observation as a Research Method

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The extract from which the scene is taken derives from an observation note, made by the woman observer in the scene, who was trained in the “infant observation” method developed at the Tavistock Clinic by Esther Bick for the purposes of training psychotherapists and related professions (Bick 1964; Miller, Rustin, Rustin and Shuttleworth 1989). In recent years, this method has

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<sup>2</sup> GCSE’s (General Certificate of Secondary Education examinations) are taken by school students in the UK at around 16 or 17 years.

<sup>3</sup> “Hoodies” refers to young men in groups who supposedly wear jackets with hoods in order to conceal their identities from surveillance cameras while they carry out antisocial or criminal activities. The observation took place at a time when hoodies were being widely and emotively publicised in the British media in terms of the way they were perceived as threats to law and order.

<sup>4</sup> The extract is used by the observer, Ferelyth Watt (2007), in a case study of this observed mother, which, along with five others derived from the project observations, is published in a special issue of *Infant Observation* (Urwin 2007a).

expanded its scope to research applications, extending beyond a training based on observing babies in their home situation (Urwin and Sternberg 2012). It provides psychosocial research with an observation method informed by a psychoanalytic epistemology, one that focuses not on discourse but on embodied expressions. The project from which this data extract is derived was about the identity changes involved when women become mothers for the first time. The field setting was the East London borough of Tower Hamlets, with its ethnic, religious and class diversity. Infant observation was used alongside the “free association narrative interview” method (Hollway and Jefferson 2012 [2000]).<sup>5</sup> This was the first time that the infant observation method had been used as part of a funded research project.<sup>6</sup> Six trained “infant observers” (attached to the research team) each observed one of a larger sample of mothers, once a week for the first year of her baby’s life. Detailed attention was paid to the baby and mother, notes being made only after the session ended.

The principle is that knowledge, theory etc.

are set aside during the acts of observing and recording in favour of allowing the experience to make its own impact ... A new concept of the observer is being employed ... here the truths which interest us are emotional truths. The observer cannot register them without being stirred ... Correctly grasped, the emotional factor is an indispensable tool to be used in the service of greater understanding (Miller 1989, 2-3).

The infant observation method is combined with a weekly seminar in which the group of trainee observers meets to process together the impact of the developing observation. The seminar is led by an experienced psychoanalytically-trained observer, normally over a two-year period (in this project, one year), and its task “is to explore, on the basis of the available evidence, the emotional events between infant and mother and the other members of the family present during observations” (Rustin 1989, 7). In the research project, modification of this task was slight, in that the observation focused on the mothers’ experiences. The group’s resources are used to help the observer think about an experience that is emotionally demanding, therefore supporting the reflexive use of subjectivity as an instrument of knowing and encouraging the group to “objectify intuition with evidence” (Urwin 2007b, 245). Judith Edwards (2008, 61)

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<sup>5</sup> Although we also have data from three free association narrative interviews with Calise, we have not used that information to supplement our analysis here (but see Hollway, 2007 for a discussion of the differences).

<sup>6</sup> Our three-year project “Identities in Process: Becoming African, Caribbean, Bangladeshi and white mothers in Tower Hamlets” was funded by The Economic and Social Research Council (grant number 148-25-0058), the government funder of social science research in the UK. The research team consisted of Wendy Hollway, Ann Phoenix, Heather Elliott, Cathy Urwin and Yasmin Gunaratnam. Dr. Cathy Urwin led the observation side of the project and conducted the weekly observation seminars attended by members of the research team. She edited a special journal issue on the observations cases (Urwin 2007a).

specifies the three opportunities that observers have to experience the observation and make meaning from it: in the actual observation setting, during note writing and via the seminar. Other group members can provide different perspectives from which to understand the observations.

Observers' notes are characterised by detailed description of aspects of the setting and activities: material and spatial, practical and relational. Using this method, observers become accomplished at noticing non-verbal, embodied aspects of communication and emotional states. It was chosen in order to go beyond consciously aware, talk-based methods, wishing to pick up a range of other registers, from the unsaid to the unsayable; that is those that reside in and are expressed through the body. For example, the observer, rather than assuming that her feeling of being an intruder was simply her feeling, or locating it in Calise's brother, let it reside *in-between*. Her observation note reads: "The feeling I get is 'what is this person doing here?'" a formulation that evokes her sense of the "in-between-ness" of the experience, cast in a grammar that confounds the issue of who owns the question of what she is doing there (casting herself as "this person" and not locating the feeling as originating in either herself or the brother).

There is some convergence between Lorenzer and Winnicott, a British psychoanalyst central to the object relations tradition, on the significance of the intermediate area of experience. Donald Winnicott (1985 [1971]) conceptualised this as a third area between that which is subjectively conceived and that which has the quality of externality. In Alfred Lorenzer's terms it is the area between "subjective fantasy" and "concrete social reality" and it is in this space that he located scenic understanding (see Salling Olesen's introduction to Lorenzer in this issue). We will later consider the importance of scenic understanding in relation to research texts but we note here that Lorenzer is not positing the (cultural or social) analyst's subjective ideas and fantasies as separate from or undisciplined by "concrete social reality"; he is attempting to think the psychological and the social together. Indeed Lorenzer and Orban (1978, 477) criticise Winnicott – correctly or not – for positing "an a priori co-existence of "subjectivity" and "objectivity" resulting in an intermediate area". Instead they describe the development of "interaction forms" from the earliest stimulus-response mechanisms of the foetus and through the undifferentiated process of primary (pre-symbolic) socialisation. The interaction forms are embodied, "stored" in the central nervous system where they provide the unconscious gestalt that organises life experiences: "all differentiation proceeds according to the blueprint of the sensorimotor complexes" (476).

Despite this caveat Lorenzer makes it clear that Winnicott's idea of transitional phenomena can be brought into agreement with the concept of interaction forms in that they occur within an intermediate area where the infant endows objects with significance so that they appear to come neither from within nor from without: in Winnicott's (1985 [1971]) formulation the infant "discov-

ers”, in the shape of a transitional object, what is there to be “found”. In “Playing and Reality” (1985 [1971]), Winnicott is also concerned with the ways in which feelings can be tested against reality and “tried out”. This behaviour, which he sees as a means of relating “inner” and “outer” reality, is a form of playfulness which depends on imagination and later finds expression in religion and cultural phenomena. One of Winnicott’s primary interests is in the conditions for this reality testing, which first occurs in infancy in the context of maternal holding. In holding the infant in her arms and in her mind the mother creates a secure environment in which the infant can occupy a potential space in-between subjective experience and the world as it presents itself. In this intermediate area of experience, the paradox of whether an object is conceived by the infant or exists in “external” reality does not need to be resolved.

Of the transitional object, it can be said that it is a matter of agreement between us and the baby that we will never ask the question: Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without? The important point is that no decision on this point is expected. The question is not to be formulated (12).

For Lorenzer the formation of transitional objects and phenomena, which emerge out of the non-differentiated unity of self and object, is a precursor to symbolisation and precedes the emergence of symbolic interaction forms in language. At this point they can be named, they take on a temporal and spatial dimension and they take effect within a cultural field. Even as pre-symbolic interaction forms, however, they have an unconscious social (and hence collectively produced) aspect, which informs socialisation processes.

With the development of symbolic interaction forms the infant’s experience is no longer an undifferentiated continuum between self and the world and hence there is a potential disjunction between subjective fantasy and concrete reality. This is experienced within the scene as a lack of “fit”, an irritation or a provocation,<sup>7</sup> where something that has not yet been symbolised “presses” into language. For the cultural or the research analyst, these provocations are a methodological starting point in opening up a text.

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#### 4. Provocations

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Because for Lorenzer subjective experience is *simultaneously* individual embodied, relational and social (Salling Olesen, this issue), empirical research must reflect this ontology. His concept of scenic understanding would imply “a process by which researchers reflect on their affective and embodied experience of their data” (Redman, Bereswill and Morgenroth 2010, 217). Likewise,

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<sup>7</sup> The root, in English, of the word provoke brings home its function: “to excite, stir up (feeling, action etc.); to give rise to, call forth” (Little 1973, 1697).

Cathy Urwin, leading infant observation seminars in the “becoming a mother” research context, demonstrates the use in data analysis of feelings of shock (Urwin 2007b), surprise (Urwin 2012) and confusion (Urwin, Hauge, Hollway and Haavind, in press). In this case, when the observer notes how the brother’s appearance provoked in her a feeling that she was intruding, she is following a central principle in psychoanalytic observation, noting her emotional responses in a register carefully separated from a detailed and descriptive observation of the setting and scene. Lorenzer’s method of following the provocation is very similar to that in psychoanalytic infant observation.

Once registered, this emotional response of the (data) analyst brings together the subjective fantasy and the concrete social reality: “texts are not ... empty formulae to be filled, their provocation lies in a quality present in the text itself” (Lorenzer 1986, 28).<sup>8</sup> Here, the implication is that, the provocation’s significance is not restricted to the individual; it can be understood as collective in the sense that subjective fantasies draw on the necessarily social quality of collective experience embedded in interaction forms.

In the following section, we take the observer’s “feeling like an intruder” as a key “provocation” via which we might be able to trace not only the individually specific but the collective aspects of experience that emerge in the intermediate area. The method requires that we, the analysts, note the provocation in our own experience and reflect upon it. We do this in chronological sequence, first Wendy and then Lynn.

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## 5. Feeling like an Intruder

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Wendy writes:

Like the observer,<sup>9</sup> I can readily imagine Calise’s brother wordlessly conveying a question about what this woman was doing sitting in the living room, because it seems to fit what I imagine to be the likely reality of the situation. Identifying with her, I wonder how she managed to transcend the experience of feeling like an intruder sufficiently to continue with her task. I also receive,

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<sup>8</sup> These page numbers refer to the German version of Lorenzer’s text. We are grateful to Mechthild Bereswill, Christine Morgenroth and Peter Redman for a partial translation into English.

<sup>9</sup> Wendy, whose authorship mediates the scenic composition, is one layer removed from the initial scene, access provided by the observer’s note. She shares most of the social identity characteristics of the observer, white, middle class, middle-aged educated professional, and has access to a similar reservoir of cultural knowledge, both explicit and tacit. At this point positioning theory would point out that this in itself would potentially position her as culturally other, even alien, to the young people in the room. However this does not account for the feeling of intrusion nor the fact that it is occasioned by Calise’s brother’s imagined wordless question. Starting with the provocation in the scene is not a substitute for use of sociological categories but defers it.

via her notes, a lively feeling of the good relationship between Calise and Anthony and of Anthony's quick-witted humour. I find myself liking these two teenagers, but feel unsure about the brother. The unease hangs around in my return to the original observation note, amplified by my feelings of responsibility (as project leader) for the ethical dimensions of the field work: Was it fair on Calise that the observer should go in and watch the baby for an hour while Calise tried to maintain what she would have been doing anyway?<sup>10</sup> Was the research role viable, ethical? What sense do research participants and others make of it and what effect does their understanding of it have on what the researcher observes? Returning to the observation note I wondered why the feeling of intrusion (the observer's and mine) applies in particular with Calise's brother, rather than appearing earlier. I find relevant evidence there about the observer's arrival, as follows.

In the first part of her note for this observation session, the observer records that she first encounters Anthony at the door "a young man whom I haven't seen before". When Calise arrives at the door a moment later, the note continues as follows:

I say 'You don't look as if you are expecting me' and Calise shakes her head. I think of asking if it's okay but don't. I pick up my bag and enter, following Calise and the young man down the corridor. Calise doesn't seem to mind. When I enter the room, the TV is on showing Wimbledon. I say 'oh Wimbledon'. The young man says 'yeah, do you want to watch it?' I thank him saying that I am here to see the baby. He turns over channels putting on an MTV station playing a mixture of reggae and hip hop.

There is already a suggestion in the observer's feeling on arrival that she is intruding, but it is mitigated by a different feeling; that Calise doesn't mind her going in. Calise presumably now remembers making the arrangement, part of a wider commitment that she has entered into that the observer visits weekly. This is the observer's fourth visit and Calise must be getting familiar with its conventions, namely that she continues to do what she would be doing anyway. It seems as if Anthony, a guest himself, takes the cue from Calise and tries to make the observer feel welcome. In this way the culture of observation research enters into the room. The brother's presence outside the living room feels less welcoming. The words the observer reached for as she tried to clarify her feeling in the note were "My feeling in relation to him (the younger brother) is that I am an intruder; an older woman and white; as though he is thinking 'what is she doing here?'" In this way she already makes sense of her experience as being about racial and generational difference. However, this imagined

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<sup>10</sup> The infant observer role is based on the "wish to watch the baby in his ordinary setting without any changes in the everyday pattern of family life in consequence of the observer's presence". Observers "are encouraged to interpret the role of observer as a receptive listening one, not blankly passive, rather following the leads of mother, baby and others" (Rustin, 1989, 9). In Margaret Rustin's experience "often a whole seminar group can be seized by immense worry about the intrusive potential of the observational setting" (ibid.).

question appears, in addition, to arise from the ambiguity of the observer role and the potential for it to be confused with surveillance – the kind of surveillance often associated with the figure of the social worker, bearer of societal anxieties and state regulation in relation to teenage mothers and their parenting skills. Whereas Calise might draw a clear line between negotiated observation and surveillance (we have background knowledge that she understood the role of the observer and that she had a good relationship with her social worker), this distinction may have been less obvious to Anthony and her brother.

Later in the visit the observer is left on her own in the sitting room as Calise, followed by Anthony, takes the baby to her bedroom for a nappy change and is soon joined by the baby's father, just arrived, after he has greeted the observer. The observer comments "I remain in the living room, feeling that to go into the bedroom would be too much": the feeling of intrusion is fairly pervasive.

This new provocation, amplifying the theme of intrusion, insists on the question: what is the nature of the inappropriateness of the observer's presence in this scene, as experienced in some way by all the participants (except perhaps the baby)? The observer's feeling that it would be too much to follow Calise into the bedroom (which she does without demur or difficulty on other occasions) also has the quality of a provocation. We both were relieved that, despite her experience in the role and its directives (observe wherever the baby is), she remained in the living room. If the scenes in the living room conveyed something of Calise's easy intimacy with Anthony, then presumably the privacy of the bedroom would do so even more. Bedrooms are well known for being where young people establish their spaces separate from the parental generation. Their retreat there together emphasises the generational difference between them and the observer.

The feeling of intrusion aroused by the data extract seems to be in excess of the actual reactions of the people in the room. In the research analysis we therefore need to explain not only the potential for an imaginative conflation of the roles of social worker and observer and resentment at social workers' "interference" in families but also the forcefulness of the feeling of intrusion and the potential for confusion between observing and spying. This is possible because the scene that occasions these fantasies lies somewhere between our imaginations and social reality, in the intermediate area of experience where reality as we find it is endowed with personal significance. At this point in the analysis another unwelcome intrusion occurred, for Lynn, via association with an uncomfortable memory that surfaced from Lynn's professional experience, many years previously when she worked as a social worker in a child protection team.

Lynn writes:

The bedroom scene bothered me and although I initially thought this was because I had taken on the observer's feeling that going into such an intimate space with a couple of teenagers would be 'too much', this didn't really ex-

plain why it made me so uncomfortable. A scene formed in my own mind of a social work visit I had reluctantly had to make to the flat of a sixteen year old with a one month-old baby. The flat was full of young (white) people who I experienced as hostile at the time and who retreated to the bedroom leaving me with the feeling that they were laughing at me, and planning some form of humiliation. I felt ridiculed and wary there in the grimy sitting room with the girl, the baby and a bull terrier, positioned as irretrievably alien and menaced by an intimation of violence that hovered somewhere between my imagination and the situation I was in.

This unwanted scenic memory did not emerge the first few times that Lynn read the text. Instead the observer's discomfort produced an inchoate sense of dread. The explanations she found for the sense of intrusion initially enabled her to dismiss the observer's reticence as a slightly inappropriate "sexualisation" of the event, probably born of cultural or generational misunderstanding. She only continued to wonder about the intrusion in conversation with Wendy and through this process of discussion the other scene configured in her mind.<sup>11</sup>

Lorenzer (1986, 51ff.) characterises unconscious dimensions of a scene as containing a "configuration of memory traces" – interaction forms that hold "life experiences" and form "praxis-figures" (configurations of action). These figures are embedded in a cultural (and therefore collectively held) unconscious,<sup>12</sup> experienced from infancy and built up through concrete patterns of relating with significant others and the wider environment (see Leithäuser, this issue). The praxis figures in question derive from societal expectations and anxieties regarding readiness for motherhood and the potential for conflict between the desires of young mothers, and collective investment in forms of socialisation. In Lynn's scene, these praxis figures take the form of a situationally specific antagonism acted out between the young people in the flat and the social worker. When not-yet-conscious material is activated – in this case because Lynn was reluctantly impelled to associate the feeling of intrusion with another scene of personal significance – it is because the figures have a "demanding or yearning quality that pushes them to enter consciousness" (Lorenzer 1986, 29).

It is worth asking what it is about the conditions of the research setting that *admits* them to consciousness, arousing a memory which had lain dormant for

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<sup>11</sup> At this point, the data analysis has moved a long way from the original situation, in time, in membership and purpose. The re-use of data (beyond "primary" and "secondary" analysis) is a matter of emerging interest in psychosocial research. Thomson, Moe, Thorne and Nielsen (2012) explore the ideas of travelling affect and travelling data also using data from the "becoming a mother" project and a group data analytic methodology that followed the infant observation principles outlined here. The term "travelling data" is used to convey the "overriding significance of recontextualising material in new times and places, and with different audiences" (311).

<sup>12</sup> "The unconscious in literature, as I would see it, is a collective unconscious, although admittedly not in Jung's sense" (Lorenzer 1986, 28).

some fifteen years; and why it should be of interest within the data analysis. At the time of the original events Lynn recalls a short-staffed team operating in a climate of public mistrust at social worker intrusiveness on the one hand and on the other of moral panics about inadequate teenage mothers, feckless working class youth and dangerous dogs. This atmosphere, combined with inadequate work-based supervision made it very difficult to do other than risk assess the situation and ensure that defensive and avoidant action was taken (by subsequently visiting in pairs). The data analytic setting, by contrast, provided an opportunity in which the events could be thought about. It also enabled the reflective orientation of the infant observation method. Material cognitively registered and acted on following the original event could now be emotionally processed.

In the post-Kleinian/object relations tradition, Wilfred Bion (1962), whose theory of thinking is part of our theoretical equipment (although not foregrounded in this article), put his conceptualization of symbolisation processes at the centre of his psychoanalysis (Ogden 2009). His memorable phrase “thoughts without a thinker” refers to raw, not-yet symbolised (emotional) experience and gestures toward the collective nature of this experience. His more technical term “alpha function” conceptualizes the conditions under which specific raw experiences (beta elements) may become thinkable (in Lynn’s example, not the conditions of the Social Services department but those of the later joint work on this article). These processes are intersubjective and affective, as Bion’s concept of containment in the early baby-mother relationship spells out. Mothers pick up their young babies’ unprocessed emotional experiences, through what Bion (1962, and see Ogden 2009) sees as normal (or “communicative”) projective identification and, hopefully, can think about this and return them in a digested form to the baby through their actions. Through such experiences, babies internalize their own containing function, which is crucial to thinking.

This aspect of British psychoanalysis enables us to analyse a given act of symbolisation, its conditions, processes and emergent meaning. It foregrounds ongoing processes of thinking and not thinking influenced by the quality of emotional experience (how frustrating or anxiety-provoking), rather than the unconscious as a location of repressed material. It is the quality of the setting in helping to contain this threat that enables experience to come to symbolisation. While superficially this might resemble Lorenzer’s account of the move from interaction forms to symbolic interaction forms, in the British tradition, it heralded something we cannot find in (our limited access to) Lorenzer’s work, namely an emphasis on the conditions (situational and developmental) under which thinking can occur. As Ogden summed it up in an account of Bion’s theory of thinking “it requires two minds to think a person’s most disturbing thoughts” (Ogden 2009, 91). The terrain that is denoted by the term “unconscious” has shifted here from the Freudian repressed unconscious to lifelong

and recurrent conflictual processes that operate, for Bion, in-between raw emotional experience and thinking. The potential significance of emotional experience is of course in its relation to reality, both material and socio-cultural, and it will therefore have a collective dimension. However, this was Bion's focus and only peripherally Winnicott's: while Bion, Winnicott and Lorenzer overcome the subject/object binary, they are not engaged in the same questions.

In our example, the further layer of anxiety in the scene Lynn associates to the data extract can best be ascribed to a societal collective projection – a fearfulness which, then as now, reflects a cultural anxiety about the dangerousness of the young unemployed “underclass”. This surfaces in political discourses where single motherhood and poor parenting are linked to violence and criminality. In the data extract itself all the evidence points to the inappropriateness of such fears in relation to these particular young people, and indeed they are not alluded to until Anthony brings them to symbolisation with his play-acting. Nevertheless, an undertow of socially-produced anxiety that cannot be disavowed generates a sense of unease. In this sense, collective unconscious content “presses” on the scene.

Our imaginations leave the bedroom part of the observation with the unresolved image of the observer sitting awkwardly on her own in the living room. Soon the three young people emerged; the baby's father went out to get take away food and Calise, Anthony and the baby rejoined the observer. The topic of summer job hunting continued. We pick up the theme of societal collective unconscious anxieties and fantasies pressing on the scene as we follow the provocations of Anthony's play-acting, attempting to use scenic understanding to help put into words what is unsettling about them.

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## 6. Anthony's Play-Acting

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We start by repeating the second part of our earlier scenic composition in order to bring it back to mind:

Calise puts the baby in his baby chair and she and Anthony discuss telephone techniques for making job enquiries. Anthony play-acts speaking to a potential employer: ‘Yes, em, good afternoon. My name is David Harding and I wonder if you have any vacancies. Oh you want people of a very high standard, more than one GCSE, better than a D grade? Yes, well I think I can meet that, I've got eight’. [Pause.] ‘Yes, well there's twenty of us and we're all hoodies, that okay?’ Anthony then calls to Calise's brother to ‘turn down that black music, yar. How can you have that stuff on so loud? Turn it down!’

For us, the provocations come fast on eachothers' heels: Anthony's conversation with the employer, using an assumed white-sounding name and middle class accent, followed shockingly by the transformation of the nicely spoken

David Harding into a gang of hoodies; then the demand to “turn down that black music”. Wendy writes:

My confusion at the voice in which Anthony spoke to the employer at the other end of the phone, imagined as white by me and – I feel sure – by Anthony, was rapidly succeeded by surprise and awe as the twenty hoodies were presented to the employer. I was impressed at this feisty challenge to the white status quo, in which it felt that potential aggression was offset by playfulness.

Anthony starts by proudly contrasting his eight GCSE’s with the “very high standard” of one GCSE, better than a D-grade, and it is puzzling whether he is directing sarcasm at the imagined employer (whose standards fall well below his own achievements) or implying that the employer is not being serious about academic qualifications, just interested perhaps in nicely spoken white boys.<sup>13</sup> Behind the interaction, but nonetheless pervading the scene, lies a social history in the UK of employment of black people in low paid unskilled jobs (of which telesales is a contemporary example) and also black male school students’ underachievement (Sewell 1997), against which Anthony is contrasting his own success. Taken as a whole, perhaps racialised and class-based job discrimination were colliding with Anthony’s pleasure at his success, an undercurrent pressing into language to threaten the idea that his exam results would be enough to earn him an interesting summer job.

Next, Anthony the job-seeker transforms into a gang of hoodies, bringing into the dramaturgical space a praxis figure laden with social anxiety. Nothing about Anthony’s demeanour fits the hoody image, yet in referring to it he evokes the spectre of young working-class delinquents, all the more alarming for their “blackness”, out to attack and rob, armed with knives if not guns, beyond the control of the forces of law and order.<sup>14</sup> This would not be a conscious part of a white liberal visitor’s experience; yet, for Lorenzer, a praxis figure such as this is contained in the collective unconscious. What impels him to raise and challenge this figure in his performance? Lorenzer points out that “because symbolic interaction-forms allow us to bring scenic experience to mind independently of the concrete social practices from which it derives” we can “try things out” and “test our feelings and perceptions against reality” (Lorenzer 1986, 53).

The collective unconscious in Lorenzer may assume transcultural *processes* (such as the propensity to “other” those who are different), but it also contains social *content*, which is historically and culturally specific. The dominant fig-

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<sup>13</sup> Subjective fantasy soon met concrete social reality (in Lorenzer’s phrase) because, according to the observation note, after the play acting Anthony “does go on to make a call and learns that a telesales company is looking for recruits next week” and “both he and Calise sound pleased and want to follow it up”.

<sup>14</sup> We write this soon after the English riots of August 2011 on a day when Kenneth Clarke, Secretary of State for Justice, referred to rioters as a “feral underclass”.

ure of the gang of hoodies is produced in an English context, referencing an underclass from the perspective of the well-to-do and more powerful. It is a culturally familiar figure, here brought in by Anthony. In contrast to the bedroom scene where an inchoate sense of unease lingers and (for Lynn) elides with other scenes of previously experienced dangerousness, the play-acting brings to full awareness something unacknowledged. Although Anthony invents a script, it is the performance as a symbolic whole that achieves this effect. Through the presentational symbolism of the drama Anthony seems to be indicating to the observer something that would have been difficult to communicate discursively. The distinction between presentational and discursive symbols, elaborated by Suzanne Langer (1990 [1942]), was a key influence on Lorenzer's thinking: presentational symbols bring together feeling and sense data and constitute a distinct realm of thought (which finds expression in music, performance and the visual arts) and are intermediate between abstract language-based concepts and the material world. They also underlie ordinary associative mental activity and are the basis of embodied, experiential thinking.

Anthony's mini-drama presents us with a potential threat in a cultural form in which a white audience can also try out or play with – and hence experience – the distinction between fantasies inflected with unconscious white cultural anxiety, and the reality encountered in the living room. The presentational symbolization detoxifies the threat, the accomplished use of satire further allays fears. Anthony identifies the issue, makes it explicit and binds it into a recognisable cultural genre. This “contains” the anxiety that references to race and violence might otherwise evoke. Anthony is not just reproducing the scenic hooded figure, but transforming the audience's experience of it into a new social reality. The contrast with the unresolved anxiety effected by the bedroom scene is palpable. There, rather than apprehending reality and creatively endowing it with meaning, a sense of threat was amplified with no clear justification.

Whereas not knowing might normally generate anxiety, the neutral quality of the observer's presence (she does not initiate or direct the unfolding interaction) enables the ambiguity to be sustained and the capacity for creative illusion developed. Without illusion – the ability to apprehend something “as if” it might be different – there can be no symbolisation. This led us to ask what it is that enables Anthony to mobilize his own capacity for illusion and that of his audience, first in the sitting room and then in the data analytic setting. It seems likely that this was enabled by the containing function of the observer herself. Although we do not have direct evidence of this from the observer's notes in this instance, other empirical studies (for example, Urwin et al., in press) have pointed to the fact that in infant observation research, an accomplished observer does over time mitigate her potential intrusiveness to become a reliable, non-judgemental and containing presence who holds the infant and family in mind.

If there were still any doubt that racial difference is part of the scene, Anthony's next move dispels it as he segues into the repeated demand to “turn

down that black music". This is not the black music playing low volume on the MTV channel, chosen by Anthony, but the music of Calise's brother, the other young black male present in the scene. Via this double displacement (not him, not his music), Anthony brings the idea of black into speech for the first time. An age difference is brought in simultaneously: it is the young who play music too loud for older people. Nonetheless, labelling the music black brings the white observer and whiteness into the scene, because the music would not attract this label if the three black young people were in the flat without her presence. In an intermediate area of experience – Lorenzer's "scene" – Anthony can play with this image of black youth, challenging it from a position of difference – his difference from loud black music and from a hoody gang member – and so, by virtue of his actions, can we.

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## 7. Conclusions

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Both of the methods that we bring into dialogue here use the concept of symbolisation and relate this in some way to the difference between conscious and unconscious experience. Lorenzer refers to this unsymbolised societal knowledge as a collective unconscious: "The unconscious in literature, as I would see it, is a collective unconscious, although admittedly not in Jung's sense" (1986, 28).<sup>15</sup> It seems to us that in psychosocial research (in contrast to clinical practice) individual and collective unconscious processes become apparent when the conditions enable unsymbolised material to become symbolised. If the *content* of the unthought known is to be symbolised at a given time, the anxiety that it provokes must be moderated. This depends on both the capacity for containment of the thinker and the social containers for both thinker and thought. The process of symbolising experience is impelled by what Lorenzer describes as the yearning quality of the unacknowledged and at least partly unconscious material that presses into consciousness. Bion's idea of containment helps us to understand the affective and intersubjective conditions under which the method of following the provocation is likely to access previously unsymbolised material.

The convergence of the idea of the intermediate area or in-between in the two traditions is partial. There is divergence in the language used (not surprisingly) and in the developmental account, but considerable overlap in recognising its importance within the symbolisation process. Lorenzer, Winnicott and Bion all help us to overcome the subject/object binary but they achieve this in

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<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, Jung's distinction between the individual and collective unconscious depended, at least partly, on its relation to symbolisation: in the former the contents have at one time been conscious (then repressed), which is a basic Freudian formulation, but in the collective unconscious, they have never been symbolised (Jung 1991 [1959]).

different ways. In both Winnicott and Lorenzer there is an explicit interest in its relationship to cultural experience. Lorenzer complements Winnicott by providing a more elaborate account of the relationship between socialisation and the internalisation and idiosyncratic elaboration of forms that derive from collective cultural experience.

The issue of unsymbolised material has featured centrally in our data analysis in this article. In the case of the bedroom scene, symbolisation at the time of the observed event was never successfully achieved, leaving the observer (and later ourselves, as research analysts) with an inchoate sense of intrusion that we have discussed in terms of fantasy and reality of observer and social worker roles, mixed up with societal concerns about teenage parenting. In the case of Anthony's play-acting, unspoken issues of difference, discrimination and misrecognition were performatively brought to presentational symbolisation, leaving us with a sense of relief and pleasure, that something had been identified and named, and anxiety consequently dispelled.

Lynn's emergent memory is of more than purely life historical interest for three reasons: firstly, it enables associative thinking to be creatively used within the transitional space set up by the research analysis (this idea was expanded in relation to Anthony's play-acting scene); secondly, it foregrounds the dynamic and dialectical relations between personal, life historical experience and the societal collective unconscious embedded within interaction forms and praxis figures. Thirdly, it illustrates an important methodological point about the validity or otherwise of using non-intellectual knowing to aid research understanding: these kinds of memory traces populate current experience with unsymbolised meaning and it is important to bring it into conscious awareness so that its significance can be apprehended with relative "objectivity".

We use the idea of unconscious processes to signify that which is not ordinarily accessible to symbolisation. This can be seen as a continuum of the unthought known ranging from the unsaid to the unsayable. The question for psychosocial research is how to open up an area of unthought known not usually available to qualitative social research methods. Although Lorenzer's idea of the scenic and Winnicott's notion of transitional phenomena transcend the binaries between subjectivity/objectivity and inner/outer experience in different ways, their conceptualization of an in-between is useful to us as researchers. It helps us bring to awareness aspects of experience that normally evade the attentions of social science research. Methodologically the provocation uses the emotion that arises from the scene to enable the research analyst to access this intermediate area.

In the current examples, important forms of difference – racial, generational and class-based – emerge through the data analysis, showing how societal issues of wide historical significance are manifest in small-scale interpersonal and group processes: in a domestic scene, where two friends interact and an observer sits watching the baby, issues of racial disadvantage on the job market

and regulation of teenage parenting in an African Caribbean London home invoke societal questions of inequality and power relations in contemporary English culture and beyond to colonial history. For psychosocial research, this means that the societal (macro-social) and the interpersonal (micro-social) should not be treated conceptually as two different objects of analysis.

In this article, we have opened up a debate about the meaning of a “societal collective unconscious”, what processes might be involved and its possible uses in psychosocial research. It is a small beginning, but we hope it will be followed up.

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