

## **SO, WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?**

# **PERSONAL AND DEPTH PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES IN ELECTIONS**

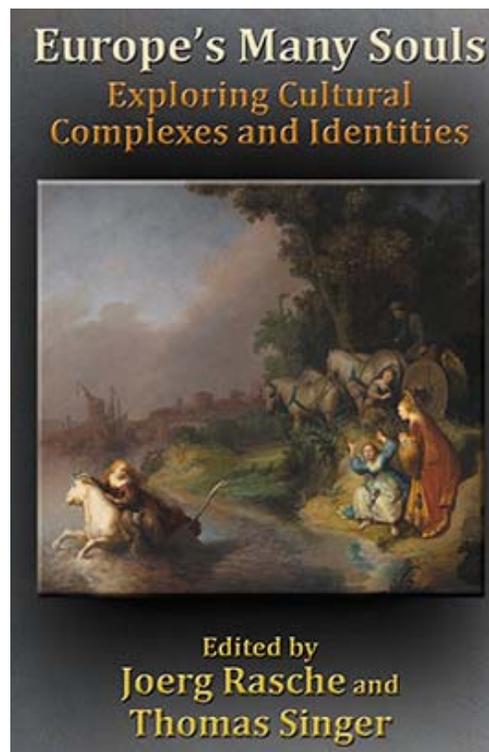
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### OUR CONTEXT

It's not a good idea to give a presentation on politics without some reference to its context. I don't only mean the context of what we can call 'the Trump election', whatever the result, which is on and in everyone's minds, but rather the context of the here-and-now, in this room tonight. Please allow me to do that before moving on to summarise the contents of this presentation.

This is the latest event in a long series. We seek to see how (and if) depth psychology and Jungian analysis can provide understandings of the political events of the day, coupling the spirit of the depths to the spirit of the times. The moving geniuses of this current enterprise have been Steve Zemmelman and Tom Singer and we owe them a huge debt of gratitude which I hope we will express in a moment.

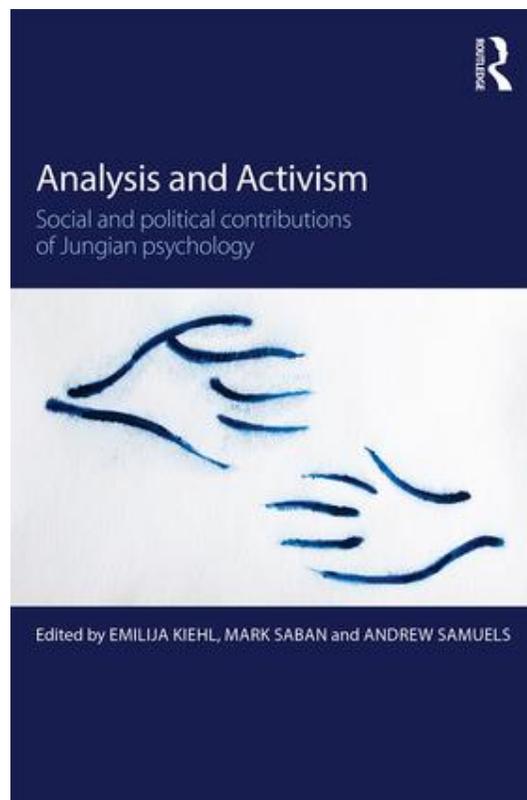
Steve is a new friend. But there's a bit more I want to say about my old friend Tom Singer's contribution to the 'Jung and politics' game over twenty years and more. This role has truly been scene-shifting, whether as a theorist or as an impresario and facilitator. Tom and I have become correspondents, or should that be co-respondents?, agreeing and sparring, as we work out the lines of what he has so felicitously called an 'inner sociology'. He is a credit to the San Francisco Jung Institute. This is just one recent example of his creative output:



There's a slightly wider Jungian context, too – and I want to say something about it, even though I realise that not everyone here is a Jungian analyst, therapist or psychologist.

In 2004, in a keynote at the Barcelona Congress of the International Association for Analytical Psychology, I said that we had witnessed a 'political turn' in Jungian analysis. I believed Jung would have silently approved of this development which has greatly intensified in recent years, given what he wrote in 1946 of 'the analyst's duties as a citizen'.

Here is an example of how today's Jungian analysts are taking up their duties as citizens:



Most of the chapters in this book were written by Jungian analysts who considered that they had additional roles as activists of one kind or another.

To fulfil the civic duties Jung mentioned requires contemporary Jungians to pay empathic attention to our relations with all of our fellow citizens and not just those who seem familiar. We may need to unlearn some (but not all) of the theories we have been taught. And, in an appropriate and relational way, we, in our moment, will find ourselves taking up a certain distance from what Jung, in his moment, wrote about Others.



This is a magnificent image of a bushman hunting. I offer it as a symbol of the desire to make an overdue act of reconciliation towards persons of African heritage and indigenous peoples.

## INTRODUCTION

OK – to the talk. Let me summarize it for you. The body of this short presentation divides into two halves.

The first half is a review of some of the many emotional and psychological issues that hover around the concept and the experience of an election, not only this one – the experience and perception of casting and not casting one’s vote, of choosing what to do with it.

The second half of the talk stems from me looking at myself in (and sometimes through) the looking glass and, as a result, trying to hold up a second mirror to you who are listening to me. In this second half, we will enter a difficult discussion about political violence. Political violence is the polar opposite of an electoral process, isn’t it? Hence, engaging with the fact and the image of political violence can’t be avoided.

Naturally, there are some concluding reflections.

Here’s the summary of the summary: you can say to people that ‘Andrew’s talk was on voting and violence!’

Now, let’s look at elections.

## **PART 1 ELECTIONS**

### VOTING AND THE SOUL

If orgasm marks the physiological end point of sexual intercourse, then voting in an election marks a similar climax to participation in a collective political process. As with orgasm, that isn’t the end of the story, there will be

more sex, just as there will be more politics. But, in general terms, when an election is done, it is, for a while, done – right?

No, wrong! Although a referendum is not an election, it is similar in that, for the moment, things are supposed to be settled. Yet, after the Brexit referendum, we saw a fascinating phenomenon in British politics: an appeal for a second referendum because the majority in the first was not deemed large enough to be decisive.

### **Petition EU Referendum Rules triggering a 2nd EU Referendum**

**We the undersigned call upon HM Government to implement a rule that if the remain or leave vote is less than 60% based a turnout less than 75% there should be another referendum.**

#### **Sign this petition**

***4,142,679 signatures***

Within a few days, more than four million people had signed the petition to Parliament you see referred to here. Amongst the many interpretations offered of this unprecedented happening, the one I preferred was that there are no lengths to which the privileged and the entitled – the elites – will not go to have things their own way.

I was struck by a passage in *The Economist* in mid-August that noted, in the usual sober and magisterial way that ‘Rather than wait four years for another election, [members] of Team Obama suspect many Americans would feel a patriotic duty to thwart what would in their eyes be the world-threatening

policies of President Trump’. I wonder if this is the liberal equivalent of ‘Lock her up, lock her up’.

Bertolt Brecht went to the heart of the matter in 1953 when the people of East Germany rose up against the Communist leadership who were not exactly pleased: ‘Would it not be easier for the government to dissolve the people?’, he wrote.

I have been following the ways in which many of my American friends and colleagues have responded to the unfolding electoral process. They have been using words like ‘disgusting’ to describe the distortions that the power of money and the penetration of the media bring. They use words like ‘terrifying’ and ‘frightening’ to describe the violence of the political *Zeitgeist*. (Their tone is indeed ‘apocalyptic’, to use Richard Stein’s word in his paper to the conference.)

At first, I was dismissive. I found myself wondering what was different this time, and, when I handed in my title, that was where I was at – ‘So, what did you expect?’ Don’t you already know that when money talks, you are condemned to listen? Surely, I thought, my friends and colleagues have known for years and years that there is a systemic problem to consider, and no reason to expect anything else. Actually, I wondered, when was it ever different? Hence: ‘So, what did you expect?’ Thus spoke the Englishman.

I was wrong. I apologise. I got it wrong – for two things are markedly different. The first is the *sheer level and quality of disgust*. And the second is the *sheer level and quality of fear in relation to political violence*.

I’d like to say a few words about disgust. In my book *The Political Psyche* back in 1993, I wrote that ‘political disgust is lurking alongside the shallowness and cruelty of much of modern life; our subjectivity is full of it’. I’ve continued to explore and write about political disgust. The body-rooted emotion and sensation

of disgust is politically diagnostic, for retching and the gag reflex are amongst the most basic of survival mechanisms. Our politics are killing us so we want to vomit them out. (Maybe this will come into Francisco's talk on the body tomorrow.) But what if disgust reaches such a pinnacle of intensity that, rather than aiding survival, it paralyses citizens? Is that where American politics are right now? Has disgust - the evolutionary solution to ingesting something toxic – now itself become the very source of societal poisoning?



This image was chosen to reflect what the same American friends and colleagues have been writing ever more passionately to me. Many of them (not all) are moving in favour of what the psephologists (meaning experts on elections) call 'tactical voting' – in plain language, 'voting with a clothespin on the

nose'. An image like this one of the boy and the knife is relevant whoever wins; it shows what political disgust and fear is like.



I want to ask what this kind of voting does to the psychological state of voter and nation alike? What does it do to people reading this, if it applies to them? (Actually, even if you have voted without the clothespin, you will know people who applied it.) What did it do to them psychologically?

It may help to drill down a bit deeper to see what is going on, from a psychopolitical point of view, in this kind of clothespin voting behaviour.

In a series of writings, culminating in 1919, the founding sociologist Max Weber drew a distinction between two major sets of political values: one he called the ethic of conviction (*Gesinnungsethik*) and the other he named the ethic of responsibility (*Verantwortungsethik*).

Succinctly, an ethics of responsibility – which we may take as inspiring tactical voting via clothespin – is a way to find what will work in practice to reach

one's political goals. Whereas an ethics of conviction is seen by Weber as an expression of the political and social freedom and autonomy of what he – rather unexpectedly - calls 'the soul'.

In Weber's time, a sociologist could freely write of 'the soul'! I don't think my colleagues in the Essex department of sociology, the leading one in the UK, would be so keen on the idea. By the way, I couldn't find any references to Max Weber in Jung's *Collected Works* which means that bringing the opposites of conviction and responsibility together is a job remaining to be done.

So - here's my question: how does clothespin voting bear down on the freedom and autonomy of the soul? We know it can work. You know that you – or many of you – will perform this in a month's time. But how are you and, I add, your clients and patients, your students, your workmates and colleagues, and your families – *how are you affected or damaged by such a course of action?* Can your inauthenticity in a good cause be sequestered and corralled so that there are no long term outcomes? Is the rider so firmly in control of the horse? Can the dykes hold back the rising waters? Can the square peg go in the round hole? Can the political soul survive the distortion of the clothespin and retain any kind of integrity?

Well, I don't know the precise answer and maybe there isn't one and it depends on who you are. It depends to a degree on psychological type, and even on 'political type' - who you are as a citizen, your political history, and what exactly is at stake for you as a political subject. This point is beautifully grasped in the title of Chapter 6 of John Beebe's new book on psychological types: 'The stretch of individual typologies in the formation of cultural attitudes'. Maybe it is individual typology that determines how clothespin voting works for an individual.

Anyway, this is what I am asking: How can you vote with a clothespin on your nose and retain connection to deeper considerations? Maybe one can promise ‘to do better next time’? This would mean, say, voting for Mrs Clinton in November, but promising in public, in what one hopes will seem like a less cataclysmic ‘next time’, an intent exists to vote *as the voter one really is*, and vote (just to give an example) for the Green Party? Even Senator Sanders didn’t go that far when he urged his supporters (in effect) to adhere solely to Weber’s ethic of responsibility and support Mrs Clinton.

That piece of imagining brings the first part, the first ‘V’ of my talk – voting – to a close. Now for the second ‘V’ – violence, political violence.

## ***Part 2: POLITICAL VIOLENCE***

The world is frighteningly coloured by the naked is-ness of political violence. It is hard to pick one’s way through its omnipresence. Just recently: Israel/Palestine, Egypt, Ukraine, Nigeria, Turkey, Tunisia, Syria, Paris, Brussels, and many American states. Your election is shot through with violence, isn’t it? Violence against women, minorities, opponents, and other nations.

My worry is that, by raising the problem of political violence, I might be perceived as making an inflated claim, either on my own behalf or on behalf of my profession, of offering to solve, or to salve, our terrifying situation. Yes, this possibility has worried me deeply. But I am not offering such a solution.

What I am trying to do, and I do know it is a tad ambitious, is to probe the psychological limits of political violence. Political violence may be seen as the ultimate expression of passion in politics and as a sign, whether we like it or not,

of an ethics of conviction. But, on the other hand, political violence has the immediate effect of halting whatever conversations might be going on and hence may be judged to be an abject failure of politics.

Yet it is hard completely to divorce politics and political violence. Therefore I feel that a discussion about politics at the time of this particular election that avoids the question of political violence lacks a crucial ingredient.

What can we say about political violence? To answer this has been a preoccupation of mine, a personal journey, for what seems like forever.

The following questions are not at all new ones, and particularly not when asked in overtly political settings. What definitions of political violence are of the most use to us? When, if ever, is violent political behaviour justified in politics? If such violence is sometimes justified, then in what circumstances and carried out by which agents? Is political violence an unexceptional response to oppression and frustration, to class-based economic injustice, to the 99%-1% split, to austerity and neo-liberal conceptions of the market, to billionaire democracy, to racism, and to capitalism? Is political violence justified as 'the last resort'? Or is it always a 'bad thing'? How does political violence compare to war, especially wars claimed to be defensive?

Analysts, therapists and other psychologically minded people are used to digging out subtle root causes and hidden meanings. How could they possibly be so crude as to take sides in a violent social or political dispute, let alone join in? How may they best support other individuals and groups that, for reasons considered sound and pressing, have adopted political violence in pursuit of their ends? Engaging with political violence raises serious problems for people, like

most of us here I should imagine, whose commitment is usually to keeping the peace, preferring voting to violence.

You see, in the world of analysts and therapists, including people who are interested in analysis and therapy, the majority of us seem to have assumed that non-violence is the only conceivable default position in politics.

Gradually – and this is the looking glass part of my talk - over around 40 years of being an analyst, I have come to see that things as apparently laudable as even-handedness and non-violence may also be rather elitist and Olympian perspectives to adopt. They may carry a narcissistic shadow. So I worry about the so-called ‘balanced view’ that some colleagues take towards political situations in which there is perhaps no such balance to be found. Isn’t this our very own ‘analytic violence’?

These problems for analysts and therapists have been addressed incisively by my friend and colleague Renos Papadopoulos (1998):

Whenever we address violence, as mental health professionals, we are bound to locate it in the context of the pathology-health polarity. Violence ... will invariably end up being pathologized; that is, violence will not be associated with health. (p. 457)

I can illustrate some aspects of our problem that Papadopoulos identified by recounting what happened when I asked the members of *five* separate on-line professional discussion lists – activist, scholarly and clinical (Jungian and psychoanalytic) - for assistance in finding literature from their fields that engaged the question of political violence in an open-minded way. To emphasise: these list members were not all clinicians though some were. What I got back was around

thirty references to *non-violence*, passive resistance, and Ghandi. No-one sent me anything on political violence. I was surprised and thoughtful.



However, over many years reading and re-reading, I have not found the literature in favour of absolute non-violence in politics to be particularly or always convincing, though I respect it and can partly identify with what is being expressed. But I think any kind of Jungian background undermines one's confidence in non-violence. Here I have been massively influenced by the psychological realism of John Beebe's anthology on terror, violence and destruction (2003), James Hillman's book on war (2004), and Luigi Zoja's book on violence (2009). Without resorting to biologism or evolutionary theory, Beebe, Hillman and Zoja's imaginative and scholarly treatments of the topic have made

the unwavering adoption of non-violence as the only possible psychological stance very difficult.

So - I haven't found theories of absolute non-violence helpful.

But neither do I find romantic, artistic and anarchist (or nihilist) glorifications of violence to be of assistance when bringing therapy thinking into an engagement with political violence. Yet I certainly understand what Bakunin meant when he said 'The urge to destroy is a creative urge'.



But, despite the iconic Vendetta mask and the ingenuity of the international Anonymous group of anarchists I don't think this nineteenth century retro romantic violentistic perspective, or its language, works well for us today.

Similarly, important ideas, such as those promoted by Slavoj Zizek and others, concerning the deep and universal presence of state violence, and the internalisations we all make of that, don't help us much when confronted as individuals with the problem of political violence.

To summarise: I have reviewed approaches that I can deeply respect but do not think will help us much in our current hour of need - such as a Ghandian stance of non-violence, or romanticization of political violence by anarchists, or notions of state violence.

What I want to do now is to discuss something that I call the 'Mandela-Ghandi fantasy'. I find this political fantasy to be a troubling sign of a massive psychopolitical problem. Going into it, puts flesh on the bones of our deliberations.

In a nutshell, I have often found that people with relatively little knowledge of the South African situation regard Nelson Mandela as having followed the path of non-violence. Yet, in 1964, at his trial for planning violent revolution and committing sabotage, he stated:

It [is] unrealistic and wrong for African leaders to continue preaching peace and non- violence at a time when the Government met our peaceful demands with force.



The picture shows the freedom salute being given as the convicted (including Mandela) are taken to Robben Island.

Many people who today celebrate South Africa's liberal constitution find it difficult to accept that the carefully and tightly controlled and targeted tactics of the African National Congress's military wing – *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (Spear of the Nation, known as MK) played a significant part in bringing down the Apartheid regime and Mandela to power.

At this point in my talk, I need to confess to my anxieties at the turn it is taking. I imagine you can empathise with what I fear: that I will be badly misunderstood as *advocating* violence, and of departing from the balanced, even-handed and reflective Hippocratic position that a Jungian analyst should take.

The main problem addressed by those who write about political violence in an open-minded way is how to turn the faucet off once it has been turned on. This

question certainly makes me rather agitated. For we certainly can't control the flow of things when violence enters the political picture.

Hannah Arendt put it like this, in a prescient article in the *New York Review of Books* in 1969:

If the goals of political violence are not achieved rapidly, the result will not merely be defeat but the introduction of the practice of violence into the whole body politic. Action is irreversible.

Yet even Hannah Arendt noted that:

Violence, contrary to what its prophets try to tell us, is a much more effective weapon of reformers than of revolutionists.

And she quotes Conor Cruise O'Brien with approval: 'Violence is sometimes needed for the voice of moderation to be heard'.

Indeed, despite her worries over the widespread political violence in the US and Europe in the 1960s, Arendt was ever careful to state and restate that political violence may be conceived of as 'rational'. Political violence is rational. I believe she would agree that sometimes, for anything to really matter, for example for American Black Lives to Matter in 2016, *it takes a riot*. This picture is from the 1960s of course.



But this picture of the New Black Panther Party is from earlier this year, taken in Baton Rouge.



Reflecting on this image, would you say ‘this is democracy’, or ‘is this democracy?’



This is a Jewish sniper in the Warsaw ghetto. If we look around, we see that such examples of ‘rational’ political violence abound and have always done so. Some of the images that move us the most include the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943, and many other examples of national liberation struggles in the past, such as the American War of Independence – and in the present, including that of Palestine today.

Anyhow, in response to the terror of terror which envelops this election, I have found myself writing about political violence. I have greatly appreciated the Jungian analyst Alan Vaughan’s wise response to a first draft of this presentation in which he correctly heard me as suggesting that politics and violence are unavoidably related and their linkage can usefully be considered beyond the existing binary of non-violence and violence.

There is, of course, much more which could be said. I could have talked about the sexualised aspects of political violence, its tendencies towards sado-masochism, its gendered and ethnic variations. There just wasn't time in 40 minutes.

Be that as it may, I hope you will agree that it matters a lot what our attitude to political violence is, it matters a lot how we relate to the idea of political violence, it matters a lot that analysts and therapists join in discussions about political violence. It matters because political violence in all its many forms is perhaps the key collective issue of our times. That is why I decided to take my talk into an election danger zone.

## **CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS**

To reprise: the two main V themes of the presentation have been a questioning of what clothespin voting in an election does to the soul of the citizen, and a call for a nuanced depth psychological exploration of the phenomenon of political violence.

Antonio Gramsci, the Italian activist, writing from prison in the 1920s, famously advocated 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will'. Yes, we could certainly pack up in pessimistic despair and stumble home tonight, depressed and broken.

It is sad that many people in many countries feel that they cannot 'make a difference' in today's politics. You hear this from the couch and you hear it from friends and colleagues all the time. They may vote or they may not vote but they

feel impotent whatever they actually do. That's the pessimism.

Here's the optimism: I think these citizens are being way too hard on themselves. True, they become guilty and self-critical when things don't work out as planned. Their idealism and energy goes underground, falling back into the unconscious, self-repressed. Then we pessimists say we are burned out. But isn't it our own wondrous optimistic fire that so consumes us? Are we not better than a pile of ashes? I believe we are.

Indeed, I think millions of citizens who seem to have rejected or become indifferent to politics are, secretly and valuably, as political as you could ever want. They *are* political 'Even if their very souls shrink from the political uproar, the lying propaganda, and the jarring speeches of the demagogues' – as Jung put it in 1946. They are faced with a hell of a challenge – and they can, I am 100% sure, mount a hell of a response. Great nations always can. Great peoples always can rise to the challenge of today's politics, to the challenge of the election and its aftermath: *to live without illusions - and without becoming disillusioned.*

Governments constantly try to improve things in the political world, usually by increasing and very occasionally by redistributing wealth. Or they alter the legislative and constitutional structures or defuse warlike situations. It is *not* that nothing whatsoever is being tried to make things better.

But a materialist approach deriving exclusively from economics, or one that depends solely on altering the structures of the state, will not refresh those parts of the individual citizen that a psychological perspective can reach. There is such disappointment in today's societies that are failing to deliver the spiritual

goods and provide a sense of meaning and purpose.

We can change the clothes, shift the pieces around, but the specter that haunts materialist and constitutional moves in the political world is that they only ruffle the surface. These attempts do not (because, alone, they cannot) bring about the transformations for which the collective political world and the individual political soul so desperately yearn.

### **Reference**

Papadopoulos, R. (1998) 'Destructiveness, atrocities and healing: epistemological and clinical reflections.' *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 43, pp. 455-477.

**Andrew Samuels** is a Jungian analyst and professor who has worked internationally as a political consultant. He is the founder of Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility (UK), Consultant Editor of *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, and co-editor of *Analysis and Activism: Social and Political Contributions of Jungian Psychology* (2016). Amongst other books, he is the author of *The Political Psyche* (1993), *Politics on the Couch* (2001), *Persons, Passions, Psychotherapy, Politics* (2014), and *A New Therapy for Politics?* (2015).