

PSYCHOSOCIAL IMAGINARIES

PERSPECTIVES ON TEMPORALITY, SUBJECTIVITIES AND ACTIVISM



STUDIES IN THE PSYCHOSOCIAL

EDITED BY **STEPHEN FROSH**
WITH A FOREWORD BY JUDITH BUTLER



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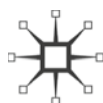
Perspectives on Temporality, Subjectivities and Activism

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Foreword: Tracking the Mechanisms of the Psychosocial

In a way this collection introduces a department, a course of study, a transdisciplinary undertaking, and so asks us to think critically about how disciplines are regularly separated from one another, often policed by hiring committees, the request for new positions, and the protocols of professional associations. In each case, a rationale must be formulated for why the kind of work envisioned by a given position makes sense, is valuable, conforms to reigning metrics, and contributes to the perceived value of the institution itself. Does a department have to establish itself as a discipline in order to make the case for resources? If a department is transdisciplinary, and cannot be conceived in another way, how does the value of all that intellectual crossing over become communicated and persuasive? What if the key intellectual problem that a group of people seeks to address can only be understood through several lenses? And what if the tension among those various ways of seeing is actually crucial for the elaboration of the object itself? Indeed, what if matters are actually slightly worse: the object looks differently depending on how it is regarded, and so several different ways of considering the object will invariably disagree on what the object is. As I write this, I think perhaps administrators should be kept from reading such sentences. And yet, if we insist on asserting the values of intellectual inquiry that do not immediately conform with accepted metrics of 'excellence' and impact, it will be important not to become frightened of the possible effects of our own thinking. For if we fail to keep our thinking alive, if we fail to think on the edge of what is already thought and thinkable, then we have sacrificed the critical dimension of thought for a place in the academy. That said, we have to make the strongest possible case for why there can be no academy, no university, without the kind of critical thought that brings us not only to the edge of the disciplines, but pushes us over the edge.

We may think at first that the disciplines in question are sociology and psychoanalysis, but in fact the range of perspectives in this volume exceeds any such polarity. In fact, none of the papers actually take a disciplinary point of departure. They ask about very specific kinds of phenomena: mourning, migration, waiting, becoming a subject, the

event, hope, hopelessness, subjective destitution, fantasy, spectre, time, stasis, gender, race, power, trauma, vulnerability, restitution, ageing and living on. In fact, the list I just offered is only one possible way of clustering the essays. It would be possible to pull on a different string and see how these essays form a tightly knit set of considerations on the inseparability of the social and psychic, but without fusing or reconciling the two terms. For many years after the liberationist expectations of the 1960s, a sober admonition circulated to the effect that none of us can hope that by changing social structures alone psychic transformation will immediately follow. Although some receded from psychic concerns (enacting a psychic withdrawal), yet others sought to accept and delineate the autonomy of psychic life itself. That latter project tended to take Lacanian form, and it tended to rely on the importance of the words, 'reducible' and 'irreducible'. The psychic is not reducible to the social; the symbolic is not reducible to the imaginary. The 'real' tends to reduce, even suck in, everything in its traumatic wake. The point was to examine social relations through one set of tools, even though disagreement surely reigned between those who understood 'the social bond' in terms of the symbolic order and those who either sought to further forms of materialist analysis that linked the social with the economic or, following Foucault, regimes of power. Although the efforts to ally Marx and Freud in the 1960s and 1970s sometimes sought a route through Lacan (Mitchell, 1974), yet others insisted that the link between them required no such mediation (Marcuse, 1955). Where these positions tended to converge, however, was in the focus on theory of the subject, the need to account for relations, whether social and/or phantasmatic, and the mechanisms and effects of production, understood not only as part of economic life more broadly, but the specific economy of the psyche. Indeed, terms such as 'economy', 'production' and even 'repression' tend to span the social and the psychological, prompting commentators to insist on separate semantic meanings. But if we allow for the semantic excess of each term, we stand a chance of tracking how the two fields are permeated by one another. Why should we be surprised to find that 'economy' proves so central for Freud, that the fetishism of commodities requires a symptomatic reading, or that 'the cultural unconscious' erupts in Foucault (e.g. 1971)? Is it that for all the line-drawing that emerged to ward off the possibility of another intoxicating synthesis, the distinctions could not fully hold? In fact, is it not more true to say that drawing lines to help us defend against exuberant and errant forms of union usually displace the fantasy that they seek to contain?

For the psychic and the social do not have to be synthesized to maintain an overlapping relation with one another. And they do not have to remain in a binary framework to prove useful for the kinds of complex analyses we see so clearly demonstrated in this volume. Some of us remember well the conjugal metaphors used to describe the possibility of Marxism and feminism: the marriage, the unhappy marriage, the necessity of divorce. Perhaps some version of that domestic drama frames as well our conventional ways of thinking about the social and the psychic, ones that continue to haunt our various methodologies. After all, some rather heady hopes about changing the self and society were at stake when we imagined the internal link between the two spheres. For instance, we may have thought, or think still, that psychic reality follows from social reality, and that all we need to do is to situate the psychic within the social conditions through which it gains its form and meaning. Or we may think that transformations at the level of subjectivity bear consequences for social life, and that we must 'start with the self' if we hope to effect broader transformations in the social and political world (a 1980s position, I believe, but one with distinct religious resonances across the world). In each of these formulations, we imagine the internal link as a causal or sequential connection. Analyse one in light of the other; track one transformation in order to track the other; effect one set of changes in order to effect another. Sequence requires enumeration. Sequential claims tend to assume that the terms that follow one another are, in fact, distinct from one another.

But what if the relationship between the two terms cannot rely on a causal or narrative sequence? Even if we for the moment treat them as distinct spheres, it may be that they are spheres that always impinge upon, and overlap with, one another, without exactly collapsing into one another. And the analysis of their relation is one that tracks forms and effects of permeability, impingement, resonance, phantasmatic excess, the covert or implicit operations of psychic investments in the organization of social life, the way that organization falters or fails by virtue of the psychic forces it cannot fully organize, the psychic registers in which social forms of power take hold? It is perhaps the specificity of these relations that stand to be tracked and analysed in any psychosocial analysis, which means, finding the right question to ask to find out how such terms ought to be thought together, resisting the romantic illusions of synthesis and the defensive postures of full divorce.

It matters that I continue to use metaphors of intoxication and withdrawal, union and separation, since the stance of the researcher is one that is already implicated in the problematic he or she seeks to pursue.

That stance invariably has a reflexive dimension, not only because we ask about institutions like work, migration, slavery, and apartheid from 'invested' positions, but because we articulate our own relation to the object as we work, and that often means responding to an ethical demand issued from the object field. One could, and should, ask about the formation of the subject under apartheid, but the questioner also is formed and implicated in the object field in the course of asking that question. There is the time of waiting for apartheid to end, but there is also the time it takes to think about that time. One temporality breaks through another at the ends of the scholar, and that puts the scholar in which time? Between times? One could, or should, ask about how the history of slavery and the early abolitionists serve as an animated memory for contemporary Black feminism, but that is also because feminists hope to draw upon the strength of resistance articulated in another time. To call upon that history is to animate a set of lost lives for the purposes of contemporary survival within racist social structures. One could, or should, analyse the temporality of work under neo-liberal conditions, especially the work of women that spans domestic space and other workplaces, or is torn between them. What is this 'torn up' time which becomes the subjective time of work? And what does it mean that just as neo-liberalism opens up a phantasmatic sphere of infinite self-invention, it also forecloses the very agency it figures, since it decimates those social and economic supports that enable agency at all. Indeed, neo-liberalism contracts the temporal horizon within which anyone can imagine the future of democratic social transformation. Especially under conditions in which debts become unpayable within a lifetime, the time of living becomes the time of an unexpiable guilt, a time punctuated by a vain effort to pay off the unpayable. The social bond becomes defined as one in which the debtor continuously fails an unwanted obligation. And for anyone who wishes to track the conflicting and ambivalent conditions in which migrant women come to 'belong' to different spaces and times, it would seem important to realize that the desire to belong implies an unacceptable loss, and that the desire not to belong engenders an unbearable estrangement. When we track migratory patterns, are we not also tracking the specific forms of ambivalence, the formation of longing and loss that is structured by economic and social forces, to be sure, but without which we cannot understand the phenomenon of migration itself?

It is not that the psychic accompanies the social, but that each sphere permeates the other in ways that are not fully predictable. The social object turns out to be constituted, in part, by its psychic dimensions,

and the psychological condition can hardly be separated from the social world in which it takes form. Indeed, the boundary between the spheres does not effectively contain each term or expel each term from the other. In its obduracy and permeability, the boundary sets a vexed agenda for anyone willing to navigate that terrain, for it cannot be said in advance how the terms will prove to be implicated in one another, and for what purpose.

In many of these essays, we can discern a fugitive operation of hope, found in the question of what can be expected, of what might happen, of how the past might re-emerge as an enabling condition, of how vulnerability might prove not to be the fatal foreclosure of all action, of how time might still open onto a future that is not the future of dispensable labour and unpayable debt, of how ageing might well be something other than inevitable degradation and decay, loss of sexuality and even one's gender. Perhaps the hopefulness of these essays is something other than the expectation of an intoxicated union that will not end in bitter disillusionment. This may bring us closer to an understanding of ways of knowing and modes of experience that are not controlled by teleological fantasies in advance, that deviate from established aims, that have a queer feel. Perhaps between impossible union and furious expulsion there is another region of feeling and knowing in which acknowledging what is most fearful conditions a modest breakthrough. Analysing the conditions of subjugation, destitution, loss, ambivalence, exploitation, racism, vulnerability and ageing, broken, foreclosed, or endless forms of temporal existence, can seem like a dim exercise, one bound to end up mired in conditions of hopelessness.

And yet a sometimes stubborn mode of persistence seems to confound even the most adamant reproduction of social suffering. It can take the form of a resistance to forms of power that destitute the subject, or an affirmation of modes of ambivalence that obstruct the totalizing tactics of social coercion. It can involve letting the time of the past or the time of the future break upon present time, disrupting the seemingly mechanical character of social power. Indeed, the psyche, Freud (1915) tells us, is also a mechanism, which means that some machine seems to inhabit the human as a constitutive feature. How did the machine enter the psyche? Is that a figure of industrial revolution seeping through into Freud's description of psychic life? Does this show how the social permeates the psychic (Zaretsky, 2005)?

The matter seems to be more complex. Freud tells us that the psychic 'mechanism' has as one of its tasks the *regulation* of stimuli that threatens to overwhelm the psyche itself. That stimuli, he tells us, can originate

internally or externally, which means that a 'shield' has to be established that can protect against traumatic overstimulation. A set of metaphors enter the description, borrowed from industry and the military, to be sure, but also redeployed in the service of explaining the effort to regulate a form of trauma clearly associated with 'war neurosis' in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). So shall we say that Freud is absorbing that vocabulary from the historical situation in which he lives? Or shall we say that Freud is explaining forms of trauma that are very specific to the new kind of war that people lived through? Surely, we can say both. The metaphorical transpositions seem to work both ways, so that we cannot exactly 'locate' the psychic mechanism in time and place, though we register its effects. That means that the 'internal' space of the psyche and the 'external' space of the social are confounded in and through this figure.

Note also that each of these explanations relies upon a trope of *absorption* or *borrowing*, marking permeability and transposition, the very issues that preoccupy the psychic mechanism itself. The psychic mechanism is regulating what can, and cannot, be absorbed, what should be allowed within those walls, or past that shield, and what needs to be kept away for a while or kept out for all time. The scene of trauma marks the limits of what can be assimilated, and the relaxation of trauma allows for a more tolerable porousness. Indeed, within dreamwork, what is 'taken in' from daily life, or from the experiential vicissitudes of history are condensed, displaced and transposed into the enigmatic syntax of the dream itself. Are there not dislocated and charged elements like these in the theoretical language that we use? The language we use to describe this mechanism seem already to be caught up in the machine itself (Martinez, 2013). 'The machine' and 'the shield' are both dislocated social figures that bespeak the reciprocal saturation of the psychic and the social – and its risks. There seems to be something inhuman looming, some fragment of war, circulating not only within the theory that describes the psyche, but circulating as a constitutive feature of psychic life. Even now, I seek to show how a relation of 'saturation' is at work, suggesting porous boundaries. It seems we are compelled, perhaps involuntarily or even mechanically, to seek recourse to that spate of terms that mark what can and cannot be 'allowed in', thus using the very language of the psychic mechanism to explain the relation between the psychic and the social. Our views on the relation can erect the defensive shield between the two zones or allow for greater porousness. But whatever stance we take within such a continuum, we seem invariably to attest to the problem of how that tenuous boundary is negotiated, and at what cost. What

presses upon us, and how do we seek to give form to what overwhelms us? What from the outside enters, how does it do so, and what language do we have for that site, that mechanism, of absorption and refusal? It would be so much easier if we could establish the sphere of the social and the sphere of psychic and debate their autonomy and inter-relationship forthrightly. But we are, from the start, caught up in the problem of their relation, and that fraught and promising negotiation marks our lives. The psychic mechanism (as a potent figure for the psychosocial itself) constitutes the object of inquiry and invariably marks the productive agony of the method. This double-bind demonstrates how the psychic mechanism of the scholarly writer is already enacting, and tracking, the problem with the power to centre and shatter the field of inquiry.

Judith Butler

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Notes on Contributors

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Stephen Frosh has worked at Birkbeck from 1979, first in the School of Psychology and since 2008 in the Department of Psychosocial Studies, of which he was a founding member and first Head of Department. From 1982 until 2000 he worked part time at Birkbeck and part time as a clinical psychologist in the NHS. Throughout the 1990s he was Consultant Clinical Psychologist and (from 1996) Vice Dean in the Child and Family Department of the Tavistock Clinic, London. His academic interests are in the applications of psychoanalysis to social issues; gender, culture and 'race'; and psychosocial studies. He is the author of many books and papers on psychosocial studies and on psychoanalysis, including *Psychoanalysis Outside the Clinic*; *Hate and the Jewish Science: Anti-Semitism, Nazism and Psychoanalysis*; *For and Against Psychoanalysis*; *After Words*; and *The Politics of Psychoanalysis*. His most recent books are *Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions* and *A Brief Introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory*, both published by Palgrave Macmillan.

Derek Hook was previously a reader in the Department of Psychosocial Studies at Birkbeck. In 2014 he moved to Duquesne University in the US, where he is an associate professor in the Department of Psychology. He is a scholar and a practitioner of psychoanalysis with expertise in the area of critical psychology and psychosocial studies. His research interests essentially converge on the theme of 'the psychic life of power', and his works tend to take up either psychoanalytic, postcolonial or discourse analytic perspectives on facets of contemporary post-apartheid South Africa. His recent books include *Steve Biko: Voices of Liberation*; *(Post)apartheid Conditions*; and *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial*.

Elizabeth Chapman Hoult is based in the Department of Psychosocial Studies at Birkbeck. She has spent her career working in education and her core research interest is in the development of educational resilience – how and why some individuals and communities are able to resist apparently overwhelming disadvantage and marginalization and instead succeed and thrive as learners. Her work is located in the interdisciplinary space between Sociology and English Literature. She draws on the epistemologies and methodologies of both in order to develop plural and deep understanding of resilience and transformational learning experiences. Her book *Adult Learning and La Recherche Féminine: Reading Resilience and Hélène Cixous*, published in 2012 by Palgrave Macmillan, explores the experiences of particularly resilient adult learners in higher education through a lens informed by the writing of Hélène Cixous.

Amber Jacobs was Lecturer in English and Critical Theory at the University of Sussex, before joining Birkbeck in 2008. Her background is in literature, feminism, psychoanalysis, Ancient Greek myth and tragedy. Her monograph, *On Matricide: Myth, Psychoanalysis and the Law of the Mother*, is an intervention into classical psychoanalysis via structural anthropology and feminist philosophy that posits a new post-patriarchal theory of the symbolic order. Her current work involves re-readings and expansions of psychoanalytic theories to accommodate new forms of subjectivities in the context of social, cultural and technological change. Her recent research is in visual culture, film theories, the relation between new media technologies and unconscious fantasy and theories of feminist and Queer spectatorship that challenge dominant psychoanalytic models of the gaze and sexual difference. She is also interested in the analysis of formal techniques in filmmaking that rework the relation between the image and power, and in making her own films.

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Lynne Segal joined Birkbeck as an anniversary professor to celebrate 175 years of Birkbeck College, in 1999. She was first involved in expanding the remit of gender studies at Birkbeck, straddling the departments of Psychology and English; later she helped to establish the new Department of Psychosocial Studies. Her teaching and research interests began with introducing feminist thought, psychoanalytic reflection, social and cultural location into a critique of mainstream psychology, adding critical theory when looking at the intersections between psychology and other branches of knowledge. Her major works have been in the area of feminist theory and politics, shifting understandings of femininity, masculinity and sexuality, alongside more recent work on

attachments, belongings, the work of memory, social conflict and, most recently, the psychic paradoxes of ageing. Her many books include *Out of Time: The Pleasures and Perils of Ageing*; *Making Trouble: Life and Politics*; and *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure*.

Bruna Seu joined Birkbeck in 2000. Her first degree was in Philosophy and Social Sciences, her Master's in Social Psychology with a dissertation on R.D. Laing and the anti-psychiatric movement, and her PhD was in Social Psychology. She qualified as a Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist in 1989 and has practiced as a psychotherapist since. During that time she has maintained her commitment to anti-psychiatric practices and therapeutic communities through her involvement with the work of the Arbours Association in London. Her interest in power dynamics and discrimination, the complexities of moral existence and social responsibility, and suffering was further developed through her research on women's shame, on which she has published widely and, more recently, through her work on public responses to human rights violations and humanitarian causes. Her book, *Passivity Generation: Human Rights and Everyday Morality* was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2013.

Introduction

Stephen Frosh

This book collects together essays by members of the Department of Psychosocial Studies at Birkbeck, University of London, one of the key sites for the development of psychosocial studies in the UK. The Department's work is transdisciplinary, bringing together issues that might appear in other disciplinary sites (for instance sociology, social psychology, psychoanalysis, political theory, postcolonial theory, queer theory, literary theory) and rethinking them from the perspective of a psychosocial approach that subverts the distinction between them. Our central argument is that there is no firm division between the 'psycho' and the 'social', despite the institutional power of academic disciplines that are built precisely on the reiteration of that division. Our approach therefore aims to be transformative of the subject of psychosocial enquiry itself and also both suspicious of (in the sense of offering a critical encounter with them) and generous towards (in that it is open to influences from them) the theories and methods that currently occupy the field. That is, we attempt in various intersecting and at times contrary ways to rethink the formation of the human subject as a 'psychosocial subject', irreducible to the traditional ways this subject is positioned, particularly by sociology and psychology. *Psychosocial Imaginaries* reflects the agenda in its very varied theoretical and empirical strands; what unites these is our dissatisfaction with the fragmentation of the disciplinary field into separate elements and our multifaceted attempt to articulate the intricate entwining of 'psychic' and 'social' processes to produce a new body of understanding.

Our view of psychosocial studies is that it does not constitute a discipline as yet, or as such; perhaps it is moving towards being an 'anti-discipline' in the sense of being opposed to disciplinarity, but certainly it is aspiring to be a 'transdisciplinary' enterprise. The distinctions here are

familiar but worth repeating. A discipline is a field of study that is organized according to accepted principles, so the community of scholars who work in it know what its interests are (the problems with which it concerns itself), and agree on the range of practices that can be drawn on to explore these problems or apply the knowledge that this exploration produces. These are, in turn, the methodological approaches of the discipline and its professional activities – its organization, rules of conduct, areas of claimed expertise, and in some cases (e.g. medicine or law) its institutional and bureaucratic arrangements. Psychosocial studies has some elements of this – the mere fact that the contributors to this volume share an institutional base in a Department of Psychosocial Studies indicates that there are some disciplinary practices at work. However, the institutional forms of psychosocial studies remain tentative, and the problems investigated and methodologies that are drawn upon are widely defined and consistently open and searching. They are, in the contemporary sense, ‘queer’ practices in being critically disruptive of many disciplinary traditions. What therefore makes psychosocial studies ‘trans-’ rather than multi- or interdisciplinary is that as a set of practices it is not just a meeting ground for other disciplines, but an attempt to call them into question, to provoke or undermine them through various kinds of sampling of different ideas and procedures (a kind of ‘nomadic’ practice), all in the name of searching for a systematically critical approach towards the psychosocial subject who belongs everywhere but also, in relation to existing disciplines, can be found nowhere at all.

The label ‘trans’ has a potent resonance in contemporary thinking, suggesting something that breaks across boundaries (especially those of gender) and queers the normative practices and assumptions of what is otherwise taken as unitary and stable. Lisa Baraitser, one of the contributors to this book, conveys this well in a recent discussion of transdisciplinarity in psychosocial studies, written from the direct experience of the Birkbeck Department (Baraitser, 2015). She asks the ‘question as to whether psychosocial studies might be better described as a set of trans-disciplinary practices, practices, that is, that allow movement across different traditions of thought without having to fully belong anywhere’. She goes on to elaborate this as follows:

The ‘trans’ [suggests] there are practices, objects, methods, concepts and knowledges that do not firmly belong within one disciplinary field or another, but move amongst them, somehow beyond the reach of disciplinarity. Unlike the prefix ‘inter-’, which retains

a certain claustrophobia, signalling the situation of betweenness or amongness, trans seems to gesture towards the great outdoors. We could say that a certain freedom accompanies whatever the prefix trans- attaches itself to, suggesting that a transdisciplinary concept, text, practice or method might be free to roam, inserting itself like a foreign entity within an otherwise homogenous field, much like the genetic meaning of the term 'transformation'.

Baraitser here captures the playfulness of the 'trans' element of psychosocial studies, its transformational component and its daring. Whilst attempting of course to be scholarly and to address serious issues, it is also impatient with what has come before, and rather keen to shrug it off, pillaging it for useful notions but not being bound to the assumptions or received practices of traditional disciplines. This is potentially a liberating strategy, playing on the version we are developing of psychosocial studies as something new and unconstrainedly 'critical' in the sense of using concepts and methods that can be drawn from anywhere appropriate in order to unsettle existing knowledge. We are interested in *challenging* received wisdom where we think it has settled down too firmly as a kind of 'common sense'; and doing that means creating a set of multiple voices – a 'polylogue' – that sets any disciplinary knowledge against other possibilities. In practice, this also means that work in psychosocial studies might be rooted in a particular discipline (for example, literature or sociology) but will strive to push away from it to draw in concepts and figures that are more regularly found elsewhere (e.g. postcolonialism, psychoanalysis). Indeed, what is often visible is a practice of offsetting one mode of thought with another, sometimes apparently alien one: psychoanalysis with postcolonialism, for example, or feminism with critical theory, or sociology with affect theory.

The writing that is included in this book demonstrates this transdisciplinary approach. The disciplinary origins of the authors are in psychology, sociology, literature, feminist theory and postcolonial studies, but in every case the work described reaches across a variety of perspectives that can be described as 'critical' in the sense of being disruptive of preconceived disciplinary assumptions. One way of framing this is to say that our work is fuelled by an understanding that what is taken to be the realm of the personal, including the 'inner world' of psychoanalysis, is produced and sustained by various manifestations of sociality, and vice versa. We recognize that a major dilemma is produced by this approach: that of giving value to personal experience, interconnectedness, intersubjectivity, affect, embodiment, agency and the impulse to articulate

a kind of ethical subject, for example in the manner of psychoanalysis; whilst at the same time acknowledging and drawing on the disruption of this agenda through the force of the revelation that this 'subject' is at best a precarious one. This dilemma is not easily resolvable, although it does resonate with Butler's (1997) response to a similar conundrum with respect to questions of power. There, the issue was to understand how a view of subjects as produced by and in power and hence as constituted by social forces which lie outside them, could combine with an awareness that subjects still have agency. Butler simply points out that agentic status is *what subjects are produced with*, and it enables them to take hold of power and use it. Similarly, we work with the assumption that the supposedly 'internal' states associated with subjectivity are produced in and by sociality, yet also have an important degree of autonomy that allows us to speak of them as material and in a significant if also slightly hazy sense, 'real'.

The chapters collected here reflect different ways of engaging with this dilemma, including theoretical and philosophical interrogations of formulations of social subjectivity and studies of particular 'objects' – art and performance, political memory, citizenship, film, human rights, ageing, resilience and psychotherapy. At stake is an attempt to find ways of examining these objects that give full weight to their actuality (so we are not pursuing a simple social constructionism) whilst also appreciating the way they are infiltrated from start to finish with what are usually taken to be 'subjective' elements. These have various sources. First, our ways of knowing are necessarily subjective in the sense of reflexive: as we seek out the objects of study, for instance an appreciation of ageing or of the end of a psychoanalysis or of apartheid-era fantasies, so we find ourselves invested in them, hearing their resonance for our own lives, seeing them from the perspective of our own social positioning. The personal motivations that fire our research work are by no means unique to scholars working in psychosocial studies, but our tendency is to foreground them in ways that are unfamiliar in many other disciplines. Our own *formation* as researchers is wholly infused with these investments and we have found we cannot differentiate straightforwardly between our 'professional' work and what it means to be 'psychosocial' ourselves. Secondly, each of these objects of study is saturated both with the supposedly 'psychic' (a useful term as it has the association of openness to whatever messages might come in from 'outside', rather like the traditions of the occult – telepathy and possession, for example) and the supposedly 'social'. For example, in relation to temporality, an issue which is central to this volume, practices that

disrupt neoliberal agendas or that mark up the 'time signature' of apartheid are not straightforwardly personal or social, subjective or objective; they are absolutely connected to both these registers. Time is experienced subjectively, it is warped and stretched, curved and straightened, yet it is not solely imagined; it has structures and consequences played out across the bodies and spaces of people's apparently 'real' and yet also 'imagined' lives.

This volume draws on a range of theoretical and transdisciplinary positions that influence the members of the Birkbeck Department and contribute to its particular orientation. One lineage comes via interrogations of power associated amongst other things with Judith Butler's (1997, 2005, 2009) influential work on precarity, loss, acknowledgement and nonviolence, which we see as a major intervention in thinking about relationality and also confrontations with state violence. (Butler's position as a Visiting Professor in the Birkbeck Department has promoted an engagement with her writing that is reflected in several of the contributions here.) This includes an understanding of the psychosocial as an arena for *ethics*. That is, in forming itself around questions of subjecthood and relationality, psychosocial studies is immersed in a set of considerations about what it means to engage in ethical theory and practice – in the development of a set of ideas about the 'ethical subject' and 'relational ethics' that draw together social values, ideological critique and political analysis. Secondly, psychosocial studies draws strongly on post-colonial thinking. This is because amongst its founding assumptions is the idea that knowledge is constructed in and through processes of social and historical location and power generation. For instance, the colonizing tendencies of psychoanalysis and their uses in colonialism have been well documented (e.g. Frosh, 2013a). Psychosocial theory allows scholars to consider how these acts of knowledge-imperialism become experienced as social and existential 'truths' yet also dramatize the contradictions and flaws in colonialism itself. Recent work on the construction of 'whiteness' and on postcolonial melancholia offers a psychosocial take on this, infused heavily with psychoanalytic thinking (Khanna, 2004; Seshadri-Crooks, 2000; Frosh, 2013b; Said, 2003) and showing how 'colonialist' theory can become a site for postcolonial contestation. Thirdly, psychosocial studies is strongly oriented towards critical reflections on political action, with an interest in identifying new modes of radical democracy that can be seen in work on societies in political transition as well as on marginalization in contemporary western culture (Hook, 2012). Fourthly, psychosocial studies is methodologically diverse, ranging from systematic empirical research deploying

qualitative methods to intense engagements with contemporary social theory (Emerson and Frosh, 2004; Palacios, 2013).

These strands of thought have produced considerable complexity and variability, including some contradictions between the approaches adopted by different members of the Department. These contradictions will become apparent in and between the chapters of the book, and include differentiation between distinct uses of psychoanalysis, between social research and literary or artistic criticism, and between theoretical and empirical foci. There is also, however, a set of clearly linked concerns that recur and that are to a greater or lesser extent derived from the Department's interest in the way contemporary subjectivities are embroiled in shifting cultural and social templates that have both local and global resonance. One issue that stands out is the recurrence in almost all of the work represented here of an interest in temporality – in new forms of time and of the experience and manipulation of time. Lisa Baraitser's first chapter establishes the significance of this line of work, showing how the ways in which time is lived are linked with, and reveal, the structuring of social formations. She proceeds to illustrate this with a rendition of alternative temporalities, explored through practices of 'maintenance' that can be found in various art works as well as resistive modes of living. In Chapter 2, Derek Hook supplies a more formal psychoanalytic understanding of temporality, drawing on the Lacanian orientation that has been characteristic of one strand of psychosocial theory. Suggesting that it is productive to differentiate different 'time signatures' (for instance, between measured time, imaginary time and disrupted, traumatic time), Hook goes on to apply this mode of temporal analysis to what he terms the 'unique temporality of South Africa's (post)apartheid period of political transition'. This also demonstrates an important element in the argument of this book: the 'application', or mutual implication, of theory and political analysis and practice.

The next three chapters continue this theme of time and the political 'event' with different emphases. In Chapter 3, Margarita Palacios engages with theories of the event, refracted through an examination of moments of interruption and disruption – of what she calls the 'out-of-jointness' of time. This leads into an articulation of the political dangers of theorizing an event as 'truth' (in particular in its contemporary versions of 'political theology') and of the ambiguities and potentials of thinking of the event as an always-already deferred spectral promise. For Lynne Segal, in Chapter 4, the pressing concern is to find ways to articulate the gendered practices of ageing as they navigate the exigencies of loss and affirmation; this chapter instances ways in which the

psychosocial perspective can make a direct statement about ethical and politicized modes of being as well as introducing a theme of belonging that also appears in some of the other contributions to the book.

In the next chapter, Elizabeth Hoult continues the literary theme introduced by Segal's exploration of recent writing, with a poignant examination of Shakespeare's play *A Winter's Tale*. In this, she attends to the ways in which resilience can be thought about both from a Butlerian performative perspective and through the deconstructive framework offered by the philosophy of Hélène Cixous. Hoult's claim is that the latter can provide a way to consider psychosocially the lived experience of vulnerability and resilience that attends to its positive potential as well as to its struggle. Chapter 6, in which Amber Jacobs examines the shift from 'analogue' to 'digital' culture, moves the argument towards an exploration of how radical changes in the cultural field impact both on the psychosocial subject and on the disciplines that engage with, and position, that subject. Jacobs traces the demise of analogue culture and the emergence of the new digital technologies that markedly challenge traditional theories of the subject, drawing links with psychoanalysis, but also showing how psychoanalysis itself might be rooted in a now anachronistic 'analogue nostalgia'. In a similar vein, though in a different field of application, Sasha Roseneil offers a carefully wrought examination of intimate citizenship in the context of postcolonial migratory flows. Her chapter is a detailed psychosocial analysis of what she calls 'the vicissitudes of citizenship and belonging' through the exploration of the affective dynamics and politics – the attachments, ambivalences and conflicts – of one woman's biographical narrative of transnational migrations, uprootings and settlings. This is an example of a piece that combines methodological innovation with the presentation of material that makes substantive claims, here about the nature of contemporary citizenship and belonging. Bruna Seu's investigation of denial and the mobilization of defence mechanisms in response to human rights abuses continues the theme of citizenship and political engagement, with an explicit psychoanalytic underpinning that also engages with the methodological practices of discourse analysis. Seu charts how public 'passivity' is warranted through various discursive moves that draw on, and are informed by, psychodynamic strategies of denial. Her chapter demonstrates both the power of these discursive strategies and the psychosocial richness generated by the combination of the different methodological traditions on which she draws.

My own final chapter of the book returns to the issue of temporality through an exploration of endings and their legacies – what we are left with