

Psychoanalysis and Politics

Exclusion and the Politics of Representation

BY LENE AUESTAD



Lene Auestad is a Research Fellow at Philosophy IFIKK, University of Oslo. She has written for various publications including the *Nordic Journal of Human Rights*, *Dictum* and *The Public Sphere: Essays in Honour of Karl- Otto Apel*. Her specialisms include Prejudice in relation to group attachment, Ethics, Political theory, Phenomenology, Psychoanalysis, Object-relations, Emotions.

Thinking psychoanalytically about the nature of social exclusion involves a self-questioning on the part of the interpreter. While we may all have some experiences of having been subject to stereotyping, silencing, discrimination and exclusion, it is also the case that, as social beings, we all, to some extent, participate in upholding these practices, often unconsciously.

The book poses the question of how psychoanalysis can be used to think about the invisible and subtle processes of power over symbolic representation, in the context of stereotyping and dehumanization: What forces govern the state of affairs that determine who is an 'I' and who is an 'it' in the public sphere?

Thinking in terms of 'containment', a communication that is denied a social space for expression can be said to be actively stripped of meaning. Through its original contribution of attending to, and interpreting material that so far had seemed meaningless, psychoanalysis demonstrates a capacity to reinstall meaning where none was before - but how are such acts performed on a social level?

When common responsibility is displaced onto a suitable class or group and its representatives, the end point is reached when the individual is objectified and the social aspects of the process are no longer recognized. His or her position becomes an illegitimate one from which to speak - the person's subjectivity is excluded. The book poses the question of how we can conceive of the 'how' and the 'why' of this phenomenon and of possible counter-actions.

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