Between Memory and Desire: From History to Psychoanalysis and Back

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The recesses of feeling, the darker, blinder strata of character, are the only places in the world in which we catch real fact in the making.

William James

Somnambulists, Lovers, Hysterics and Historians

On 27 March 1907, the Psychological Wednesday Society devoted one of its regular evening meetings to the problem of somnambulism (sleep-walking). Isidor Sadger's paper on the subject was followed by a lively discussion, and the concluding remarks were made by Freud who took the opportunity to tackle the mechanism by which fantasy is used to fill gaps in the memory. Among the individuals who seek to escape the anxieties of the present by resorting to the supposed certainties of the past, Freud mentioned three groups that evening: lovers (who cannot stand the idea that the present state is a new one and soon believe they somehow knew each other long, long ago), hysterics (who may replace the auto-erotic fantasies of their childhood with fantasies of seduction), and historians—those professionals who project the observations of their time and transfer them to the past (Nunberg & Federn 1962).

It is not merely for the sake of paradox that I am opening this brief juxtaposition of history and psychoanalysis with a scene from the early history of psychoanalysis (in spite of the admittedly unappealing allusion to historians as somnambulists). Reading Freud's remarks at that meeting, one wonders how someone who had written more about historical and literary figures than about living patients could voice such a disparaging statement on the historian's craft. And yet, the same Freud who expressed this view on history writing has done more than most modern historians to change our conceptions of history and memory and their interrelatedness. Was he not the first to explain why, despite all efforts at objectification, and regardless of the most meticulous source criticism and methodological competence, human

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memory—with its unconscious psychic determinants—counteracts and reduces history's objectifying pretensions? Surely it was Freud, the writer of the much-criticized case histories, who redefined the relationships between history and memory, fact and fantasy—thereby delivering a devastating blow to the age-old notion that perceived them as antithetical. It is common knowledge that today one is expected not to use Freud and psychoanalysis synonymously (if only for the sake of evading the resistance that is likely to be elicited, more by his name than by the name of his theory). Nonetheless, it is doubtful if psychoanalysis, as we know it today in its diversity, would be possible unless it was so intimately linked with the biography of a single person. ‘My fantasy still lives in Russian history’, wrote the future founder of psychoanalysis in 1885 to his fiancée. Soon he would delve into his private fantasy world and create from it a public language—as public as the language of history. It can hardly be doubted that the founder of psychoanalysis loved, dreamed and developed his ideas with a strong notion of history, and the resulting impact on his theory remains with us today. In 1898 he would compare the human memory to an archive into which any knowledge-seeking person would like to enter, while two years earlier, in the Studies on Hysteria, he had already referred to the archive while redirecting his interest for the psychic archive towards archaeology (Freud 1896, 1898).

Whereas in the early days of psychoanalysis Freud's preference for using the historian's vocabulary and metaphors still lacked the precision and aspirations of his later years, the epistemological foundations of psychoanalysis were nevertheless laid in close proximity to the ideas voiced by the leading historians of his day. Nineteenth-century historical discourse shared many things with the evolving discipline of psychoanalysis. With its claims for both empathy (Einfühlung) and objectivity, by striving towards universalistic explanations and simultaneously praising the uniqueness of its objects of study, by demonstrating its potential to specify what can be legitimately desired and what can be realistically hoped for, nineteenth-century historicism created some of the major ideals addressed by psychoanalytic theory. Traditional historical discourse sought to achieve a higher degree of objectivity by emphasizing that a distinction must always be made between facts and their interpretation. Facts, which were sometimes referred to as evidence, were to be given precedence over their interpretation. By the same token, a true story (that is, not only told but is known to have happened) was considered more valuable, or worthy of interpretation, than a false story or one that is imagined. Modern historians, it was argued, can disagree about the facts and their interpretation. However, it was always assumed that they would agree on what is ‘fact’ and what is ‘interpretation’. In order to avoid misunderstandings, let us be clear about what is meant by ‘interpretation’ for, underlying the familiarity of this concept, two different epistemologies can be distinguished. Early modern historiography, much like ego-psychology, tended to perceive interpretation as a methodical objectifying activity. It
presupposed a division between the observer and the observed, which implied that the act of interpreting, and the understanding generated by it, do not enter into the event but are rather designed to explicate the author's (or the observed phenomenon's) true meaning. There is, of course, a second way to understand the act of interpretation, or interpreting, to which we will have to return when we focus on intersubjective theory and its relation to the theory of history. Let me just state briefly that, for the historians I am invoking now, interpretations meant something like a translation. Postmodern historiography, on the other hand, would view the act of interpretation as a *reflexive* act that goes behind the subjectivity of the act of meaning, and hence as an act of creating something anew. (For a discussion of the interpretative position in the social sciences and the Freudian position on interpretation, see **Gadamer 1976; Kristeva 1983; Apel 1984**.)

The binary world that modern historiography imposed on its objects of investigation did not stop at the distinction between observer and observed, facts and interpretations. It indicated an additional pair, and raised it to iconic stature—the text and the context. The luxury of using a solid and assuring text was something of which historians were very proud. The assumption that, once found, a true document would speak for itself helped historians bridge many of their bitterest disputes, which were closed ‘*non liquet*’ for lack of sufficient evidence. Defending the authority of the text in question, searching for an appropriate substitute should its credibility become questionable, indeed, the search for the ideal text, have consumed much of the historian's time. The question of where the text ends and the context begins has thus turned into the backbone of modern historiography.

Before we move on to examine how psychoanalysis defined itself *vis-à-vis* the historical discipline, it is worth looking at the ideas developed by two leading historians of the nineteenth century. It seems that Leopold von Ranke's famous dictum to the historian—'*to extinguish the self ... to let only the data speak and powerful forces appear ... to portray the past as it actually was*' (cited by Sheehan 1989)—presented an ideal to which early psychoanalysts, no less than historians, had to ascribe, if only in order to free themselves from the idealistic and romantic tradition of philosophy, and to join the contemporary, victorious scientific-positivist current. Hence the ideal analyst not only believed in the existence of a powerful drive originating from within the organism, but he also preferred the ego to the self, a thoroughly analysed ego that could serve as a *blank screen* for the projections of the patient.¹

¹ Whereas Freud's wording was rather ambiguous in his early writing, what came to be known in the English literature as the ‘ego’ did not represent the ‘*selbst*’ but rather the ‘*Ich*’, i.e. the executive, objective and functional aspect of the personality in its handling with reality, in contrast to the self which, although subordinated to the ego, is endowed with the more subjective experiential aspects.
Johan Gustav Droysen, the historian whom Gadamer (1976 [1962b], p. 48) considered the founder of modern hermeneutics, wrote his historiosophic essays in the first half of the nineteenth century. However he could equally be read today as precursory to Freud's later notion of history as the study of materials given in the 'return of the repressed' of society. Droysen noted that the past could be known only insofar as it continues to exist in the present. Since the events that make up the past are gone, we are left with remains which make any investigation of the past a meditation on that part of the present that is really either a trace or a sublimation of some part of the past. The main objective of the historical investigation, according to Droysen, is to conceptualize and understand the past with the same categories, which are expressed in the thing that is to be understood. Yet Droysen was not only concerned with the content and the form of historical representation: he pointed to the fact that historical events will have different meanings, depending on the kind of discourse chosen to represent them. The historian should pay as much attention to, and be conscious of, his interpretative framework as he does to collecting data, since the same set of events can present itself in an infinite number of ways. As Hayden White (1987) pointed out, this idea bears a close resemblance to the one proposed by Gadamer (1975) and his notion of the interpretative community which guarantees the objectivity of interpretation by the common practice of interpreters and not by means of formalized methodology, i.e. objectivity as intersubjectivity.

Nineteenth-century historical discourse not only celebrated the uniqueness and 'otherness' of its objects of study. Its claims for objectivity were linked with claims for an empathic attitude towards the past. The reconstruction of a historical context was considered possible only on condition that it could be subjectively meaningful for the observer. Its representation required an empathic re-experiencing and consequent concrete comprehension. Thus, by resorting to a term such as Einfühlung (empathy) to describe the attitude by which the analyst could gain his insight into his patients’ mind, Freud drew on a concept with a long history in aesthetics and, most importantly, in the study of the past. The use of empathy in the service of objectivity should not be seen in this context as a mere methodological guideline, but as a discourse qualifier, a discourse that would gradually position psychoanalysis next to historical discourse, midway between science, hermeneutics and art.

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2 The first time that the word Einfühlung is encountered in Freud's writings is in Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious (Freud 1905). See Pigman (1995).

3 While there is absolutely no need to dichotomize the natural scientific and the humanistic or hermeneuticist facets of psychoanalysis, I consider it useful to retain these traditional poles of psychoanalytic discourse.
The Rise of the Clinical Historian

What kind of historian, then, was the psychoanalyst in the early days of psychoanalysis? Was he to follow the memories of his patients as traces of the past in the same way that the positivist historian strives to discover the meta-historical laws governing the course of human history? Doubtless there were instances in which Freud believed that the results of a successful analysis were no less self-evident than those of an accomplished archaeological dig.4 The emphasis, however, was laid not so much on the reconstruction itself, but on identifying the laws that govern human history. In 1909, in response to Alfred Adler's reflections on The Psychology of Marxism, Freud claimed he could accommodate the entire history of humanity within a single psychological formula in which two elements should be distinguished: the widening of the human consciousness, and secular progress in the mechanism of repression (Nunberg & Federn 1962, protocol 72). The essential determinant of our culture is the degree to which we can subject our drives to repression. Notwithstanding the apparent contradiction between the two lines of development, Freud maintained that, in view of the growth in humans' propensity to repress their instinctual drives, it is the expansion of consciousness that maintains human capability for existence. In later years, as Freud carefully removed the Utopian dimension from his theory, he became more receptive to the aggressive drive, and summed up the history of the world as 'essentially a series of murders of people'.

It was left entirely to historians to choose which of the two facets of the budding psychoanalytic theory they should turn to. Later on we will have to ask ourselves why is it that most historians judged both the optimistic sublimative judgement proposed by the early Freud and the pessimistic apocalyptic notion of history of his later days to be equally reductionist. Freud, however, was not content with pronouncing judgement on the course of human history. In his attempts to extend the tools of psychoanalytic inquiry into the realm of historical research, and to reconcile archaeology and mythology, he stepped even deeper into the gulf between historical and material truth. The most notable of these attempts was his study on Moses and Monotheism (Freud 1939), to which he later added the subtitle ‘A historical novel’. By challenging Jewish historiography and proposing a psychoanalytically informed version of the history of the Jews, Freud not only brought psychoanalysis as close as it had ever been since The Interpretation of Dreams to the most private and subjective sources of his theory. He also opened up new horizons for psychoanalysis to free itself from the

4 Freud retained the image of the analyst-archaeologist until the end of his career. We find him returning to this image in one of his last essays: ‘Constructions in analysis’ (Freud 1937).
kind of dogmatic objectivism that resulted from his own early positivistic convictions, and to redirect itself toward hermeneutics, criticism and subjectivity. Yet Freud's attempts (here as much as in the case histories he wrote) were taken rather literally, and were judged according to the old objectivist, perhaps even Lamarckian aspirations he once held. The more subtle, and indeed deconstructive current in his theoretical achievement which opened a new discursive path in history and narratology, was by and large ignored or downplayed by the adherents of ego psychology, who wanted to secure psychoanalysis's position in the medical paradigm. This facet of psychoanalysis also escaped the historians of Freud's time, remaining dormant for several years until, in the aftermath of World War II, it was rediscovered and addressed by the scholars of the Frankfurt school, by literary critics and, finally, by clinicians. One of the earliest systematic attempts to relocate Freud's achievement by divesting it of its scientific rhetoric is to be found in Jürgen Habermas's (1968) contention that Freud misconceived the implications of his own self-reflective enterprise, a scientific self-misunderstanding, which made him use the mechanistic language of nineteenth-century positivistic science.

If we turn now to consider how historians for their part registered the appearance of the psychoanalytic discipline on the stage of the humanities, we note the relative indifference with which the historical establishment greeted the new discipline. Although the reception of psychoanalysis in Central Europe and in America was determined by the crisis in the somatic model in medicine and did not echo any specific need arising from the humanities, the question of why historians were tardy in utilizing psychoanalysis is warranted. After all, historians had a long tradition of erudition and were notorious for drawing on theories from other fields in the humanities and social sciences, when they did not rely exclusively on their ‘busy common sense’ or traditional wisdom for their explanatory objectives. A historian of the stature of Mark Bloch (1953) could only wonder, shortly before his death, how it happens that, although historical facts are, in essence, psychological facts, historians follow every possible lead to ascertain whether or not some human act has really taken place, whereas, once they proceed to the reasons behind that act, they are usually content with the slightest appearance of human consciousness and will. ‘Some history books’.

5 Whereas Freud himself did not take his Moses essay half as seriously as his critics did (the most passionate of these being the Jews of Mandatory Palestine (Rolnik 1998)), a distinguished member of the psychoanalytic community (Eissler 1965) could actually spell out his conviction that the establishment of the State of Israel was no less than a direct consequence of the psychological effect of Freud's successful analysis in Moses and Monotheism.

6 Heinz Hartmann's Ego Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation (1939) may be considered emblematic of this quest.
complained Bloch, ‘are thus read as if mankind is made up of logical wills whose reasons for acting hold no mystery’.7

The publication of Erik Erikson's (1958) *Young Man Luther* is usually considered a landmark in the use of psychoanalysis in historical research. Yet, with all its scholarly merits and valuable insights, this book has become emblematic of the kind of psychohistorical discourse, which kept psychoanalysis a welcome tenant within the confines of a new interdisciplinary genre. One textbook in the field of psychohistory (Lawton 1990), which opens with the declaration ‘Psychohistory is alive, well, and here to stay’, reveals the somewhat defensive strategy with which psychohistorians since Erikson have had to fend off criticism from both psychoanalysts and historians. Although there is little doubt that this discipline is alive, several questions may be raised about its being a real solution to the limitations that are inherent in the fusion of psychoanalysis as a body of knowledge and historical research. For it seems that, sooner or later, any attempt to qualify the imaginary interdisciplinary space between history and psychoanalysis will converge with one of the two familiar paths taken by the power struggle between the disciplines. The first path, usually taken by psychoanalysts, defines the relationship between history and psychoanalysis by the primacy of the psychoanalytic method as a foundation from which the materials of other disciplines (in this case, history) can be comprehended. This is the familiar path of ‘applied analysis’ in which psychoanalytic concepts are applied to historical objects of investigation.8 Historians, for their part, are likely to dispute psychoanalysis's hegemonic pretensions by labelling the psychoanalytic language a historical product, a cultural artifact that is yet another phenomenon to be studied by historians and consigned to the twentieth century. As long as the two disciplines meet on some neutral field of investigation, the front lines may remain blurred enough to allow trust and dialogue. Yet it takes only one brief look into the historiography of psychoanalysis, the place where psychoanalysis is no longer the object but the subject of investigation, to convince one that psychoanalysis's natural tendency to resist any kind of

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7 It is interesting to note that, by using the word ‘reasons’ instead of the traditional ‘causes’, Bloch seems to have anticipated the hermeneuticist current in contemporary psychoanalytic discourse. This idea corresponds to what Roy Schafer (1976) has termed the ‘action language’ of psychoanalysis in which a distinction is made between reasons and causes, the latter being necessary and sufficient conditions for their effects, whereas the former are far from being objective, and only concern the way in which a person represents the world. For a critique on the distinction between causes and reasons, see Strenger (1991). For an attempt to reconcile those seemingly contradictory dialectics by means of political theory, see Brunner (1995).

8 For a pioneering theorizing along these lines see Friedländer (1980). For a critique of some of the most dilettante psychohistorical ventures to ‘put Clio on the couch’, alongside a *plaidoyer* for reconciliation between the two disciplines, see Gay (1985).
historicism is as counterproductive as the historians’ reluctance to transgress their traditional distinction between text and context in their evaluation of psychoanalysis.9

It follows that, unless we are inclined to grant psychoanalysis the status of a pure discipline which is constructed by categories that transcend every historical, cultural or contextual reality, the question of the application of psychoanalytic concepts to the phenomenon of history cannot be separated from the question of the historical and cultural contexts of the formation of the very concepts which are being applied by psychohistory. Such an interdisciplinary task implies the paradoxical use of psychoanalytic theory both as the object and the subject of investigation. What is usually at stake here is that, with its insistence on a universal, unconscious oedipal striving, psychoanalytic theory cannot connect psychic processes to the specifics of history and of culture, and therefore fails to offer anything more than reductionistic and anachronistic generalities to complex and particular instances in human history (Wallerstein 1999; Toews 1999).

Can the question of psychoanalysis and history be resolved by declaring an interdisciplinary zone that will supposedly neutralize the tensions and uncertainties that each discipline brings with it, and has been struggling with for over a century? My answer would be a reluctant nay. Much can be lost from psychoanalysis once it is hybridized and made palatable to the explanatory taste of psychohistorians. There is even more to lose from history as an open-ended discourse, once common sense falls prey to psychoanalytic ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, to borrow a less sympathetic phrase of Paul Ricoeur’s (1970).

Having restrained our expectations from the fusion of history and psychoanalysis, we can now turn to examine several epistemological points of convergence that may nonetheless benefit from a juxtaposition of the two disciplines.

**The Transitional Space and the Search for Lost Objects**

At this point it is worth noting that those historians who let themselves be informed by psychoanalysis do so with a clear preference for the structural model and the metapsychology upon which it rests. The tripartite structural model may well be considered a refinement of its predecessor, better suited for the conceptualization of intrapsychic conflicts and ambivalence from a medical-therapeutic perspective. However, it lacks the openness that is needed when we wish to view different manifestations of human behaviour across different cultures and different times. From the point of view of

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9 On the issue of the historicization of scientific disciplines such as psychoanalysis, see Gelfand & Kerr 1992; Kurzweil 1996; Wyatt 1988; Skues 1998.
contemporary historical scholarship the natural-scientific paradigm, with its emphasis on phylogenetic causality, is likely to flatten and oversimplify reality, since it deals mainly with universal patterns of psychic conflict that arise in the course of the individual’s development, with very little consideration for the social context in which they occur. I would suggest that our historical self-understanding could benefit most from the ontological-hermeneuticist approach to psychoanalysis. Such a reading of Freud, which would necessitate a reappraisal of the old topographical model with its emphasis on tropology, meaning and signification, is far more relevant to the study of history than its structural counterpart. Freud’s earlier concept of overdetermination (Überdeterminierung) can also be deemed valuable for the historian, provided it is divested of its positivistic connotations. The once highly popular term among psychohistorians was introduced by Breuer and Freud (1893-95) in the Studies on Hysteria and became one of the fundamental tenets of the psychoanalytic theory of dreams. It is in this second context that over-determination (a characteristic of dreams in which several related wish-fulfilling motivations come together in the manifest dream and are represented by the same element) could account for the various chains of meanings, each with its own specific coherence at a particular level of interpretation, which may unfold on different levels but not independently of each other. Although over-determination does not mean that a dream, a symptom or any other mental manifestation may be interpreted in an infinite number of ways, it does constitute a departure from scientific positivism, as it implies a system of subjective signification rather than a search for objective laws of nature.

The question of what kind of psychoanalysis is best used in historical research cannot be discussed separately from the question of how we perceive historiography in general. This point may be illustrated by a short quotation from Peter Gay, surely one of the most psychoanalytically informed historians of our time. Lamenting the decline of the objectivist ideal of historiography, Gay wrote:

The tree in the woods of the past fell in only one way, no matter how fragmentary or contradictory the reports of its fall, no matter whether there were no historians, one historian, or several contentious historians in its future to record and debate it. (Gay 1974, p. 210)

But can the question of external reality and its historical representation be resolved by resorting to such realistic, down to earth metaphors? What Gay seems to neglect in his sober verdict on the objects of ‘the real and single past’ is that the term ‘history’ will always unite the objective with the subjective, no matter how realistic our perception of others and ourselves would be. Those who engage in history writing are therefore bound to accept a certain paradox, somewhat akin to Donald Winnicott’s (1989 [1968a]) famous developmental paradox, namely that the objects they are
investigating reside in some ‘transitional space’ where they must be created and at the same time discovered, over and over again.\textsuperscript{10}

The concept of the \textit{transitional object} and space, together with the entire transitional phenomenon it entails, allowed Winnicott to formulate his theory of \textit{playing} and to emphasize its significance for the development of the individual. Winnicott considered playing ‘the knife-edge between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived’ (Winnicott \textbf{1989} [1968b], pp. 203-206), for it is through playing that we learn how to use materials of external or shared reality for the expression of personal and fantasized material. Winnicott's observations are pertinent to our understanding of the nature of historical writing, to the extent that they present a unique attempt to de-emphasize the role of displacement and sublimation of aggressive and sexual drives as the core of cultural experience.\textsuperscript{11} If acculturation means more than sublimation, then writing the history of our self-understanding should at least echo the process by which a person's subjective experience comes into being out of an interplay with the objects of his past. It should not, therefore, surprise us when we find Gadamer's use of \textit{playing}, in his discussion of the problem of self-understanding, so reminiscent of Winnicott's theorizing on this concept. Gadamer (\textbf{1975, 1976} [1962b]) reminds us that the entire language of understanding is replete with references for \textit{playing} (words \textit{come into play} within the definite context in which they are spoken or understood, etc.). The real experience of playing a game goes beyond the subjectivity of the player, since it consists of the fact that something, which obeys its own set of laws, gains ascendancy in the game.

It is in this vein that I would suggest that historical writing, with all its seriousness, is likewise based on such interplay, and is in itself an attempt to mediate between temporized subjective experiences. It is a game, which challenges our capacity to draw an infinite set of lines between our present self-understanding and the objects of our past, and to check their validity through a set of agreed upon rules. At least this is how I propose to read Gadamer's concluding remarks in his discussion on how self-understanding is generated in the paradoxical way of the game. ‘It is not really we ourselves

\textsuperscript{10} ‘… the essential feature in the concept of transitional objects and phenomena … \textit{is the paradox, and the acceptance of the paradox}: The baby creates the object, but the object was there waiting to be created and to become a cathected object … we will never challenge the baby to elicit an answer to the question: did you create that or did you find it?’ (Winnicott \textbf{1989} [1968a], p. 221 [italics in original]).

\textsuperscript{11} For an acute analysis of the role of playing in the development of culture, perhaps even more penetrating than the one proposed by the early Freud on the one hand and remarkably reminiscent of Winnicott on the other hand, see the Dutch historian Johan \textbf{Huizinga (1955)}. According to Huizinga, the consciousness of the one who is playing finds itself in an inseparable balance between belief and disbelief, whereas the savage knows no conceptual difference between \textit{being} and \textit{playing}.
who understand: it is always a past that allows us to say, “I have understood”’ (Gadamer 1976 [1962b] p. 58).

There is, however, one major achievement that may be attributed to psychohistory. It is to be found, as I hinted earlier, not so much in its methodological and metapsychological reliance on psychoanalysis, as in the introducing of tropes and metaphors from the clinical setting into the language of contemporary historiography. Tropes, as we have come to appreciate, are the main vehicle for historical representation (White 1978).12 The language of the ‘talking cure’ has gradually permeated historical discourse, rendering it more self-reflective and dialogical than beforehand. Reenactment, trauma and transference are all terms that can be used in a meaningful way, even by historians who do not share the metapsychological assumptions of psychoanalysis.13 Freud, we recall, insisted that transference phenomena dominate each person's relations to his human environment. Without such concepts, postmodern historical discourse would have had to continue viewing the ‘discourse of the real’ and the discourse of the imaginary, or the ‘discourse of desire’, as antithetical. And, as Hayden White (1987, pp. 20-21) has persuasively argued, it would further have had to sustain the illusion that the logic we apply for the re-presentation (or, better, presentification) of the past and the logic of history making are one and the same thing. With the help of psychoanalytic tropes we can change our perspective on the logic of history. We no longer need ready-made aphorisms such as ‘history repeats itself, for we appreciate the wish-fulfilling element they disclose, as well as the actual role played by the historian—a participant observer in an intertemporal dialogue between present and past—in making the past look as if it repeats itself. In short, historians are the ones who repeat themselves and make history look like a repetition with change.

The search for the lost objects of history, which is always carried out in the present, is governed by two basic assumptions: that the historical event no longer exists in the form it existed when it occurred, i.e. it involves temporality, and that the past event signifies something for the present. So viewed, history writing involves linking past temporality with a present one, and the objects created by the act of history writing are ‘linking objects’, in the sense that they exist both within and outside the realm of present reality and experience.14 These objects can never be recorded in their totality.

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12 See also Lionel Trilling’s (1951) definition of psychoanalysis as a ‘science of tropes’, and Antal F. Borbely (1998) on the psychoanalytic process as a search for lost metaphors.

13 The term reenactment was introduced by Wilhelm Dilthey in the last decade of the nineteenth century and was later elaborated upon by R.G. Collingwood (1994 [1946], pp. 282-302).

14 Vamik Volkan (1981), who coined this term, is using it slightly differently. His ‘linking objects’ are actual objects that function in the mourning process of the individual.
Moreover, their integration into a context of significance follows a period of latency, which should be analysed carefully by the historian. This is the time in which the present, to use Walter Benjamin's (1980) formulation, was claimed by the past as its continuation without knowing it. Benjamin's theory of history makes use of the concept of deferred, or retroactive meaning (Nachträglichkeit) upon which Freud's earlier formulations rely. Every event or scene may be considered a lost object unless it is reactivated and given meaning in the course of time. What is important here is the biphasic nature of the human memory, in which a temporal distance separates the event and its meaning (Rauch 1989). It is here that the concept of trauma, to which we will soon turn our attention, lends itself for further investigation of the relationship between knowing and not knowing about past objects of desire. First, however, we must say a few words about transference and how it comes into play in the writing of history.

What Freud (Breuer & Freud 1893-1895; Freud 1905a [1901]) originally formulated as ‘transference’ was not—as was later appreciated—an interpersonal dynamic. In its original sense, transference implies first of all a shift in time and space of libidinal energy, a shift of desire. Transference is therefore bound up with a notion of time, not as simple continuity or discontinuity, but as repetitions with variation or change. Identifying configurations of transference—or, better, re-identifying past objects of desire and decathecting those objects from the memory traces and experiences that form the perception of the present—is perhaps the most difficult aspect of historical understanding.16

**Historicizing Trauma**

It is hard to establish when the concept of trauma started its migration from the clinical literature into the historiographic nomenclature. Yet its rapid transmission into contemporary historiography, and the wide range of historical and culture studies which seem to have absorbed, digested and utilized this concept, testify to its being more than a rhetorical metaphor in the hands of historians and literary critics (see Lifton 1979; Felman & Laub 1991; Caruth 1995, 1996).

Any attempt to examine the trauma concept from within contemporary historical discourse must first acknowledge the paradigmatic shift in the

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15 It is interesting to recall that Freud repeatedly used the term ‘latency’ in his historiographic account of the Jewish people in Moses and Monotheism.

16 Arnold Cooper's (1987) distinction between the historical and the modernist model of transference may be quite useful here. The historical view of transference is likely to conceptualize transference phenomenon in terms of repetitions of actual historical occurrences, whereas from the modernist perspective the transference does not ‘conceal’ any important secret but rather recreates an internal fantasy world, which is shared by both patient and analyst.
psychoanalytic discourse on trauma. The evolution of this concept amongst clinicians may indicate the conditions under which scholars, whose inclination towards psychoanalysis is at best marginal, could nonetheless embrace it. It further seems that, by placing trauma alongside the concept of memory, Breuer and Freud's (1893-1895) conclusion that 'Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences' brought the concept of trauma to the forefront of psychoanalytic scrutiny and secured its position in future subject studies (Laplanche 1976; Sugarman 1994). Admittedly, this formulation had its own historicist appeal, since it invoked the impression that the knowledge of past happenings (together with the appropriate affect-discharge) is sufficient to recover one's mastery over one's present state (i.e. a symptom, an inhibition and so on). Without getting here into the debate over the place of actual trauma or fantasies of seduction in the historiography of psychoanalysis, I think it is safe to say that the transition in Freud's sensitivity from actual trauma towards its subjective meaning (i.e. his moving beyond the external sources of trauma and their perception to the representation of subjective internal stimuli) helped to make the concept of trauma a welcome tenet of post-World War I historiography (Schimek 1987).

When present-day clinicians use the word 'trauma' they are referring to the shattering of the outer layer which protects the individual's subjectivity from being invaded by external stimuli, and hence to a disruption in the continuity of the individual's self-identity—a collapse of the subject's representational capacities and an impasse in the capacity for metaphor formation and symbolization. Traditionally, trauma is understood as a reaction to change or loss, and is thus linked to the individual's inability to mourn. Freud's (1917) distinction between the work of mourning, a normal reaction to the loss of an emotionally significant object, and the melancholic or depressive reaction, which involves an unresolved, ambivalent, libidinal attachment to the lost object (whether real or symbolic), found its most compelling evidence in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (Freud 1920). In this controversial essay, which threatened to alienate psychoanalysis from many of its early proponents, Freud extended his theory of drives to include the death instinct, an ever-present counterpart of the libido. By closely observing the reactions of traumatized persons who survived a perceived threat, Freud reached the conclusion that the re-experiencing of trauma originates from

— It is interesting to note that contemporary psychiatric classification of trauma, in sharp contrast to its explicit phenomenological orientation, has retained the debate on the relation between the magnitude of the external stressor and the resulting post-traumatic stress disorder. This is embodied in the introduction of the controversial criterion A in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), which requires of the precipitating traumatic event to either involve actual or threatened death or serious injury, or pose a threat to the physical integrity of self or others. (See Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition, American Psychiatric Association, Washington, DC, 1994, pp. 424-429.)
the drive to return to the inanimate state. For Freud, the individual's reaction to trauma indicates that traumatic re-enactment is not a simple memory. Moreover, it is not an expression of the experience of threat, but rather the missing of that experience, which prompts the mind to internalize the stimulus and repeat it (in the form of nightmares, intrusive thoughts and so on). It is, in a way, an attempt to master what was never fully experienced and inscribed, an attempt to confront a threat that has passed. Thus the history of the traumatized individual is an endless repetition of the threat of disintegration and destruction.

In terms of its epistemological potential, trauma does not only imply a search for a narrative capable of accommodating inner psychic reality and sensibilities with external circumstances. At the same time, it may enable historians and psychoanalysts to hold two different but equally useful conceptions of hermeneutic activity, and hence to adopt a stance from which they could shift their interpretative capacities between a meaning-giving and a meaning-uncovering mode of operation. The concept of trauma, which incorporates this transformation in psychoanalytic thinking, may thus offer a unique opportunity to bridge these apparently contradictory epistemological perspectives. It follows that, whenever historians decide in favour of ‘trauma’, they are indirectly signalling their willingness to examine the complex relation between knowing and not knowing and are identifying with the subjective unknown meaning, which an event may have had. They may decide to proceed to uncover the symbolic or unconscious repercussions of the event, and may even propound an interpretation that differs from the one given by those directly affected by the trauma, who claim the trauma as theirs. But once the term trauma is chosen it will not limit itself to quantifying the magnitude of a historical phenomenon; it will inevitably force the historian and his readers to transgress their customary logic of cause and effect and to accept yet another paradox that is inherent in the idea of trauma: that we can only comprehend and know something after it has been repressed and made unknown. This paradox, which stands at the heart of the idea of trauma, is something that many historians find hard to agree and work with. It is not the historical reality of a violent event that prompts the traumatized individual to recall it. Nor is it an internal fantasy world, which makes use of

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18 It is important to note that one of the hallmarks of the post-traumatic stress disorder is the feeling of numbness and devitalization from which there is hardly any escape other than the awakening into a state of terror due to the re-experiencing of the threat. The survival of death leaves us in a state from which we can awaken only to the threat of death itself.

19 From a clinical perspective, it has been argued (Le Guen 1982) that the act of interpretation in analysis, which causes the return of the repressed and dispels forgetting, reproduces and actualizes the traumatism and may even function as a trauma in its own right.
past perceptual stimuli and renders them traumatic. A psychoanalytically informed historian who wants to make use of this concept meaningfully, and not rhetorically, should allow the phenomenon of trauma to transgress the limits of time and place. Trauma knows no such boundaries. It follows that no single event is worthy of the title ‘traumatic’ unless it appears in a belated form in a second, different context. For it is the present, not the past, which prompts an event to force itself upon our consciousness and claim its traumatic significance. The split in consciousness which often characterizes the clinical picture of the traumatized individual also attests to the impossibility of its direct recall—an impossibility that cannot be resolved by mechanistic notions such as repression and defence.

The result of such a half-way acceptance of trauma as an epistemological paradigm is evident in many historical debates that—though seemingly embedded in trauma discourse—tend to construct and deploy a kind of narrative that counteracts the process of mourning and internalization required to make a historical event an integral part of a society's self-understanding. This may become apparent in the historiography of national movements, which claim specific events in their past as traumatic, and thereby form a mythical collective past around them. It may also serve to refuel ethnic conflicts for the sake of stabilizing the group's self-identity through a sense of helplessness and victimization. Once an event is accorded a traumatic credence, or is ‘chosen’ to carry and transmit the group's self-representation from one generation to another (Volkan 1996), the historian is well advised to avoid colluding with such polarizing and instrumental use of trauma. Trauma, we may sum up, is a sensitive epistemological frame of reference, which dissolves easily into a cliché once we try to objectify it and apply it as a measuring device. The writing of history is neither a remedy nor a compromise formation between remembering and forgetting. It is a tributary of trauma (often of the very same it is trying to capture) and a testimony to the limits which face any attempt to narrate its memory.

The best example imaginable for indicating the conditions under which psychoanalysis and history as two epistemologies have fruitfully overlapped during the past two decades is the study of the Holocaust. This set of historical events has not only stamped the biographies of many leading historians and analysts of the past century; it has also forced both disciplines to test their traditional conceptual and representational categories, by asserting itself as an ‘event at the limits’ (Friedländer 1992, p. 3). What I am trying to invoke here is not those psychoanalytically-informed rational ‘explanations’ or insights into the ‘causes’ of such an outburst of hatred, cruelty and destruction. It is the very opposite epistemology, which I would consider more significant—namely, the ability not to understand. The ability to replace the restrictive rational discourse, by which the Holocaust is usually represented, with irrationality, or ‘contra-rationality’, as a mode of ascribing meaning to the actions of victims as well as perpetrators (Diner 1992). The
ability to allow history to be contaminated by the contingency of memory. The ability to contain many narratives without subjecting the event to any single overarching meta-narrative. The ability to write history from within a specific transferential relation to the subject of research. These are all modalities and ‘negative capabilities’ which we find in historical studies of the emotional cataclysm of the Holocaust. They could not have been possible without psychoanalysis. Here, of course, psychoanalysis as a critical theory is of far greater value than a metapsychology designed to fill gaps in memory or to overcome resistance due to repression. Yet, even as a hermeneutic discipline, psychoanalysis would fail to fulfill its role in the historiography of the Holocaust unless we are prepared to acknowledge its ethical dimension. For in sharp contrast to Freud's nineteenth century, which served as a tablet on which historians of the time inscribed stories of progress, the story of the twentieth century inevitably emphasizes narratives of moral atrocity or moral struggle (Maier 2000). It seems to me that those who insist on divesting psychoanalysis of its ethical dimension may find it difficult to export psychoanalytic theory outside the confines of their clinics.

**Memory, Desire and Intersubjectivity**

In a seminal paper Wilfred Bion (1967) offered his colleagues practical advice that shocked many of them. The proper analytic attitude, he declared, should be governed by a conscious effort on the part of the analyst to suppress his memory, his desire and any other faculty he is employing in his attempt to understand his patients. Bion's critics had every reason to react with surprise. Remembering and understanding were traditionally considered the main objectives of psychoanalytic therapy and, if the analyst is not allowed to employ these faculties for the benefit of the patient, who else could point to the distortions and hindrances that the unconscious is posing to the patient? Yet Bion insisted that psychoanalytic observation is concerned neither with what has happened, nor with what is going to happen, but with what is happening in the present. Memory and desire deal respectively with impressions of what is supposed to have happened and what has not yet happened. They therefore interfere with the true goal of analysis, which is always carried out in the present, without history and without future. Analysts must therefore discipline themselves in forgetting and eschewing desire and understanding, for otherwise they will be trapped by the same unconscious forces that prevent their patients from developing and maturing. The only way in which they can help their patients is by achieving the opacity of memory and desire that will enable them to sense the evolution of each session and interpret it (Bion 1970). ‘The analyst’, thus Bion argues, ‘should aim at achieving a state of mind so that at every session he feels he has not seen the patient before. If he feels he has, he is treating the wrong patient’ (Bion 1967, p. 273). From our present-day intersubjective
climate it is not difficult to criticize the obscure character of Bion's iconoclastic recommendations, let alone his emphasis on the feasibility of a *true* interpretation. However, I would consider his statements as instructive to historians as much as to psychoanalysts precisely because they touch on the dimension of truth and objectivity in both psychoanalytic and historical interpreting. Bion's formulations, when applied to the praxis of history-writing, could serve as an appropriate substitute for the ideal of objectivity whose decline is so often lamented in contemporary historiography. For it is not enough to accommodate evidence in a quasi-neutral or 'evenly-suspended attention'. The lost objects of history can easily turn into narcissistic investments that are transferred into the past. One way to approach the lost objects of history would be consciously to eschew any notion of familiarity that they arouse in us. Since once they appear familiar, the historian is likely to treat his objects of investigation as his objects of desire. He is likely to redirect them towards his innermost private archive, and to let the most personal mnemonic elements of this archive interfere with his perception of his present encounter with the object of study.

So are we not concerned here with two opposing perspectives on the nature of historical understanding the one emphasizing an empathic emersion in the subjectivity of the other via the careful monitoring of counter-transference identifications, the other seeking to alienate and detach ourselves from the other for the purpose of objectifying it? Not necessarily. The ideal of empathizing—doubtless a cornerstone of our ethos as psychotherapists—harbours in itself the danger of losing touch with the otherness of the object of investigation, be it a living patient or a historical text. And, as the work of Emmanuel Levinas (1972) suggests, witnessing—or indeed being ignorant of—the other is not synonymous with being indifferent to the other's suffering.

The origins of intersubjectivity in psychoanalysis, and its relation to hermeneutics and historiography, are beyond the scope of this presentation (see Ricoeur 1992; Gadamer 1975; Reeder 1998; Friedman 2000). Yet having evoked Bion, who is arguably one of the precursors of intersubjectivity in psychoanalysis, let us pursue this path a little further. After all, our subjectivity is moulded after the model of historical representation in which the 'past' is both distinct from, yet continuous with, the 'present'. Perhaps it is better to formulate this statement as a question: how does the turn from the primacy of the objective, natural science model of interpretation of defence and underlying, conflicting impulse affect the applicability of psychoanalysis to historical research? How can the historian make use of the remarkable shift towards the interactional, interpersonal, social-constructivist and inter-subjective perspective in psychoanalytic praxis and theory?

As a theory of knowledge, subjectivism—or, more specifically, interactionism—is frequently criticized for leaving no space in which psychic conflicts can make themselves known (Green 2000; Poland 2000; Hanly 1999).
One of the implications of two-person psychology is that the patient's history is created by the analyst-analysand interaction. The term ‘transference’, which presupposes a shift in time from past into the present, loses much of its original meaning and has to be substituted by the *transference-countertransference* interaction, which should always be understood in terms of the present (*Jacobs 1999; Ogden 1997, Gill 1982*). But the implication of interactive or intersubjective formulations in psychoanalysis is not that psychic facts can only be known through the patient-analyst interaction. It seems that a two-person psychology of the intersubjective type does not stop at the assertion that ‘it takes two’ to discover the truth about the past. It goes further and builds the whole notion of the patient's past and history on the present interaction between the object and the subject of investigation. It makes use of our recognition that, no matter how much we strive towards an objective *self-knowledge*, our subjectivity, our otherness, does not reside in an object-free space, since this very subjectivity came into being out of the (playful) interaction with objects that were once recognized and internalized as something other than the self. To put it bluntly: in intersubjective terms history is not revealed by the patient-analyst interaction—it is created by it. What they refer to as personal *history* is the narrated order of memories and experiences that is particular to their present interaction (*Spence 1982; Schafer 1983*). As the analytic process evolves, the perception of the patient's past changes. The past is said to exhibit a greater degree of freedom; it can be imagined, recounted and narrated from various perspectives and in different ways (*Stern 1997; Brenneis 1999*).

I have argued earlier that the best way in which historians could incorporate psychoanalysis in their toolbox is by acquainting themselves with its hermeneutic facet. But neither psychoanalysis as a humanistic discipline nor postmodern historiography should rest content while celebrating the relativity of concepts and abstractions. Need I remind historians that people are not texts, and that psychoanalysis (and this holds true even for the most extreme objectivist currents within the psychoanalytic tradition) is not concerned with the reading of a fixed mental text, but rather with the drama of the writing of the text? I am therefore not sure whether today's intersubjectivists are the most natural heirs to the hermeneutic tradition in historical and literary studies.20 By presupposing a privileged epistemological position from which the superiority of intersubjectivism is argued, and by declaring the biological extrinsic to psychoanalysis, we may end up with the same

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20 A similar claim is made by self psychologists following Kohut's (1984, pp. 34-42) belief that self-psychologically informed psychoanalysis due to its focus on self/object milieu via empathy is especially well equipped for intersubjective studies in general and, in particular, for applied, analytical psychohistorical work. Although reluctant to abandon the positivist ideal of past reconstruction in the clinical setting, Kohut provides a fine discussion of the merits and pitfalls of psychohistory.
militant objectivism which dominated American discourse on psychoanalysis for the greater part of the twentieth century. In any case, no true hermeneutic would give up the dialectic between the objective and the subjective dimension of our encounter with the other. To say that the only means by which we can know the other is through dialogue and reflection does not imply that our interpretations do not corner a real world that is independent of us as observers. Gadamer's (1975a) ‘fusion of horizons’ between the reader and his text is not synonymous with Stern's (1997) ‘shared experience’ nor with Ogden's (1994) ‘intersubjective analytic third’. Indeed, Gadamer's hermeneutics teaches us the importance of being faithful to a text while acknowledging its autonomy and separateness. ‘Hermeneutics’, writes Lawrence Friedman (2000, p. 237), ‘is a spectator sport. Fiddling with the text is forbidden.’

This brings me to the last element in my juxtaposition, which concerns the praxis of history writing. The narcissistic temptation to assert total control over the object of study through ideology or moral judgements is something of which historians, no less than clinicians, should be aware. In the case of history writing, the working through of transferential displacements is further complicated by the absence of the other's reaction. The well-known maxim ‘let the documents speak’ is perhaps the product of historians’ wish to balance their fantasies of omnipotence vis à vis their tacit transferential objects. For the more one attempts to analyse and objectify the remains of the past, the more they become invested with magical thinking—indeed fetishized—and become a substitute for the lost object (LaCapra 1985, 1989). The archive, the vehicle with which we sustain the fantasy of travelling back in time, may turn into a place where we can exert our narcissistic quests to the full. Here the objects of the past lie waiting for us to discover and identify them. Once fetishized, the archive is no longer considered a repository of traces of the past, but the thing itself—the lost object that has evaded the passing of time. In fact, the whole notion of an archive may correspond to this deep-seated desire to obliterate temporality and evolution (see Derrida 1998).

The practice of fetishism, however, is not restricted to the use of concrete objects as substitutes for lost objects of desire. The fact that historical writing presents an attempt affectively to master a specific past event or lost object, by means of undoing a temporal distance, may account for what Eric Santner (1992) called ‘narrative fetishism’. This special brand of narrative is constructed and deployed in order to ‘expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called the narrative into being in the first place’ (1992 p. 144). At the risk of overstraining the analogy between the function of historical representation and the mourning process of the individual, it could be argued that, in particular instances (such as the working through of the Holocaust and its meaning for those directly or indirectly affected by it (Moses 1993)), the authenticity of a particular historical narrative may be measured by its ability
to acknowledge the affective, indeed, traumatic repercussions the event might have for the historian and his readers.

The historian's disposition towards his sources is far too intricate a matter to be discussed here, but it would be reasonable to assume that it represents diverse elements in his or her personality and world of internal objects. I am reminded at this point of the historian Reinhard Koselleck (Hobsbawm 1997), who has distinguished between two kinds of historians: those who are always on the winning side, and those whose primary experience is that everything happened otherwise than hoped or planned. The second group, of those who let themselves be surprised, indeed defeated, by the course of history, has generated more lasting insights and has contributed most to historical understanding. Similar patterns can be recognized among the psychoanalytic schools of the twentieth century. There are those psychoanalytic practitioners whose explanatory needs are easily fulfilled by their theories, and even by their patients. Others are simply guided by faith in the analytic dialogical process and its openness. For them, psychoanalysis is not a reservoir of answers but a language, which touches on, yet allows itself to be surprised by, a wide range of human uncertainties and illogicalities.

Perhaps it is time now to return to that evening of 27 March 1907 and attempt a second reading of Freud's remarks on history writing. Let us recall that fantastic assembly of protagonists in the order of their appearance in Freud's speech: somnambulists, lovers, hysterics and historians. Don't they all alternate between the present and the past? Somnambulists, as we know, are most prone to injure themselves while wandering back in time, their eyes shut to the present. Lovers and hysterics will always keep one eye open to the present—to make quite sure it is safe to open both. Historians, however blind to the forces that attract them to the past, are left with the uneasy task of keeping their eyes, our eyes, as wide open to the present as possible.

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**Abstract**

At the turn of the nineteenth century, when the Freudian paradigm took its first steps towards becoming a modern amalgam of science and hermeneutics, history was considered the most established and instrumental discipline in man's quest to endow his thinking and action with meaning. The kinship between the disciplines, which could be traced back to the persona of Freud, took many shapes in the course of the twentieth century. Examined in perspective one could maintain that modern historiography and psychoanalysis have travelled the same distance in moving away from philosophical idealism, have shared some of the illusions of militant positivism and are accustomed to evoke the same criticism due to their claim to half-scientific, half-artistic epistemology. We start by considering the intellectual legacies and theoretical foundations that shaped the two disciplines' perspective of each other. We then proceed to juxtapose several historical moments in the evolution of psychoanalysis and history. Turning our attention to several key concepts and tropes, which form part of the contemporary objectivity-subjectivity discourse, we try to sketch an outline...
for a psychoanalytically-informed theory of history.
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