

History Telling
The Rise and Fall of Psychohistory

For Roger, Kate & Christopher

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Index of Main Characters

Chapter Two:

William M. Runyan (1947 –) Professor in the School of Social Welfare and research psychologist at the Institute of Personality and Social Research of the University of California, Berkeley: ‘Psychohistory isn’t dead. It just needs reimagining.’

John E. Mack (1929 – 2004) Professor at Harvard Medical School: ‘[I am interested in] what general applicability this intersystemic model [psychohistory] has to psychoanalysis as a general psychology, including work with individual patients.’

Frank E. Manuel (1910 – 2003) Professor of History at New York University and Brandeis: ‘[Psychology and history] have become mammoth academic enterprises, whose cohabitation, some might say, is doomed to sterility from the outset, like the improbable mating of a whale and an elephant.’

Chapter Three:

Erik H. Erikson (1902 – 1994) Developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst: ‘We may have to risk that bit of impurity which is inherent in the hyphen of the psycho-historical as well as of all other hyphenated approaches. They are the compost heap of today’s interdisciplinary efforts, which may help to fertilize new fields, and to produce future flowers of new methodological clarity.’

Walter C. Langer (1899 – 1981) Psychoanalyst and author of *The Mind of Adolf Hitler*: ‘I like to believe that if such a study of Hitler had been made years earlier, under less tension, and with more opportunity to gather first-hand information, there might not have been a Munich; a similar study of Stalin might have produced a different Yalta; one of Castro might have prevented the Cuban situation; and one of President Diem might have avoided our deep involvement in Vietnam.’

William L. Langer (1886 – 1959) Chairman of the History Department at Harvard University and President of the American Historical Association: ‘We may, for all we know, be on the threshold of a new era when the historian will have to think in even larger, perhaps even in cosmic, terms.’

Chapter Four:

Bruce Mazlish (1923 –) Professor in the Department of History at Massachusetts Institute of Technology: ‘Psychohistory is not *merely* the application of psychoanalysis to history but a true fusion of the two, creating a new vision.’

Robert J. Lifton (1926 –) Psychiatrist. Founder of the Wellfleet Psychohistory Group: ‘The Faustian intellectual temptation is to dismiss the paradox and make things simple. We do better, I am certain, to embrace the paradox. For it can be energizing.’

Chapter Five:

Lloyd deMause (1931 –) Founder of the *History of Childhood Quarterly*, the Institute for Psychohistory and the International Psychohistorical Association: ‘Sooner or later [it will be] necessary for psychohistory to split off from history and form its own department within the academy.’

Peter Loewenberg (1933 –) Professor Emeritus of History at UCLA and psychoanalyst: ‘The tool of cognition is the self – the emotional insight and sensibility of the researcher.’

Charles B. Strozier (1944 –) Professor of History and founding Director of the Center on Terrorism, John Jay College, City University of New York, Former Editor of *The Psychohistory Review*: ‘We were young, low-key and under the radar, this worked in our advantage at the time. We had absolutely nothing to lose.’

Chapter Six:

Peter Gay (1923 – 2015) Professor of History at Yale University: ‘There is little point in launching a critique of psychohistorical writings since the mid-1950s; they add up to very varied performances and are, in sum, by no means wholly depressing. To advert, even glancingly, to the fiascos of psychohistory is not to yield the ground but to clear it.’

David Stannard (1941 –) Professor of American Studies at University of Hawaii. Critic of psychohistory: ‘The quality of this work ranges from the elegant and sensitive writings of Erik H. Erikson, to the tawdry and crackpot disquisitions of too many to name without fear of overlooking others equally deserving of mention.’

Dominick LaCapra (1939 –) Professor of Humanistic Studies at Cornell University: ‘The typical procedure of psychohistorians has been to make more or less selective use of psychoanalytic concepts as they proceed to put individuals or groups from the past “on the couch”.’

Fools, visionaries, sufferers from delusions, neurotics and lunatics have played great roles at all times in the history of mankind and not merely when the accident of birth had bequeathed them sovereignty. Sigmund Freud

In short, we have an already shattered Humpty Dumpty who cannot be put back together again by any number of hyphenated or compound words: psycho-physical, psycho-somatic, psycho-biological, psycho-pathological, psycho-social, etc., etc. R. D. Laing

Chapter 1 Introduction

After we finished our interview, 89-year old psychohistorian Bruce Mazlish stood up from his living-room sofa and said: ‘There’s never been a history of psychohistory written.’ The Professor Emeritus of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) gave me a fatherly pat on the shoulder and added: ‘But now you’re here.’¹

I felt those words were designed – perhaps not consciously – to make an impression on a young historian. At times they served as a motivation to remain focused on the work ahead; at others they felt like a crippling burden. This book will argue that a wide array of ideas and projects became attached to the signifier ‘psychohistory’ over the course of time. Yet one idea runs through the history of psychohistory consistently: the idea that a researcher’s subjective responses to his or her object of study, responses conceived of by the Freudian psychohistorians as remnants of childhood experience, may have a significant impact on the process of writing history – the *transference* towards one’s object of study. The variety of responses that Mazlish’s remark sparked in me during the process of writing this book served me as a clear illustration of this idea.

This is not a psychohistory of psychohistory. The aim of this work is to trace the history of the signifier ‘psychohistory’ by critically examining the various projects that have become associated with the term over time. Historians and psychoanalysts associated with the movement have often generally defined psychohistory as the application of psychoanalytic thought to historiography. For example in *The Houses of History* (1999), one of a small number of university textbooks on historiography to devote an entire chapter to the field, the authors define psychohistory as ‘the use of psychoanalysis to aid our understanding of historical personalities, groups or trends.’² Similarly, in Routledge’s *The Freud Encyclopedia* (2002), psychohistory is defined as ‘the application of psychoanalysis to the study of history.’³ But as we shall see, a wide variety of ideas developed about what psychohistory was, or should become – including the idea that there could or should be such a thing even as non-psychoanalytic psychohistory. In fact, the cross-fertilisation of psychoanalytic and historiographical narratives produced a wide variety of texts and projects that cannot simply be categorised as either history or applied psychoanalysis. We will see that, roughly, three main ‘strands’ of psychohistory emerged: projects are best described as psychoanalytic biographies, or ‘psychobiographies’; studies that focus on the interaction between leaders and their followers; and projects that look at the history of child-rearing practices, and how their changing nature shaped the subjectivity of successive generations. This study has been written in the firm belief that psychohistory should be examined on its own terms.

From this perspective, I will argue that psychohistory emerged primarily as a subgenre of psychoanalytic literature, constructed out of the union between two disciplines – psychoanalysis and (academic) historiography – with their own presuppositions, narrative strategies and particular histories, in the United States in the wake of World War II. It is the story of how two discourses collided and in the hands of different authors produced a variety of projects. Although I have refrained as much as possible from applying pre-existing categories and concepts to the study, I have found psychohistorian Charles ‘Chuck’ Strozier’s understanding of psychohistory as an ‘interdiscipline’ particularly useful, as it implies that the

¹ Personal communication with Mazlish, January 15, 2014.

² Green, Anna, and Kathleen Troup. *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-century History and Theory*. New York: New York University Press, 1999. 59.

³ Erwin, Edward. *The Freud Encyclopedia: Theory, Therapy, and Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2002. 456.

field was functionally dependent on its two ‘parent’ disciplines.⁴ Although I will judge psychohistory on its own terms, the reader will find that it never fully emancipated itself from its parent disciplines, despite sustained efforts to do so by its practitioners. What I aim to show in this book is the construction of the ‘interdiscipline’ psychohistory.

In light of this, I would like to think about the history of psychohistory as a history of debates over the content of a signifier. A concomitant focus on breadth of coverage necessarily means that I have been less able to offer rounded treatments of the biographies of individuals. At any rate, and in contrast to the work of the psychohistorians themselves, the origins of particular modes of thought are not sought in the biographies of main characters. I have tried to show how and why intellectual positions varied among psychohistorians; why and how they were born out of particular intellectual communities and backgrounds; and how they changed shape in the hands of different authors. A guiding metaphor was the children’s game of ‘Chinese whispers’, also known as ‘Russian scandal’, in which a group of people whispers a word to each other in a circle and, when everyone has passed the word on at least once, one of them reveals how the word has changed as it was transmitted from person to person. As in the game, I was interested primarily in the points where communication between individuals breaks down – the lapses, miscommunications and misconstruings, both deliberate and coincidental, that led ideas, texts and relationships to change. Among other things, this approach helped me to explain why psychohistory was a failure in the eyes of many of its early practitioners.

As historian Lynn Hunt described in an unpublished essay: ‘Despite the cultural prestige of Sigmund Freud, psychological history or psychohistory failed to establish a comparable disciplinary beachhead.’⁵ Although many of the concepts that were developed and propagated by the psychohistorians are still successfully used inside and outside of academia, the history of psychohistory is the story of the failure of an intellectual movement.

Terminology

As Mazlish pointed out, psychohistory has seen very little sustained scrutiny outside of the movement itself.⁶ Attempts to describe the history of psychohistory have always been carried out with strong ideological agendas in the background – it has been propagated, vilified, resurrected, but never given a chance to speak for itself and *as a movement*. By focusing on the word, or signifier, ‘psychohistory’ and the various projects that became attached to that word over time, what seemed initially to be a trench war of incommensurable positions held by a myriad of scholars (psychoanalysts, historians, academic psychologists, political scientists) gradually became an understandable, coherent phenomenon with a history of its own. The edited volume, *Psychology and History: Interdisciplinary Explorations* (2014), by Cristian Tileagă and Jovan Byford, is a valuable reference for contemporary thought on the intersections between psychology and history – it contains a useful chapter by psychohistorian Paul Elovitz on the history of the psychohistorical movement. Petteri Pietikainen and Juhani Ihanus’ article ‘On the origins of psychoanalytic psychohistory’ (2003), based in part on interviews with Bruce Mazlish and Robert J. Lifton, formed a starting point for this research.

In reviewing the literature on psychohistory, one thing that jumps out immediately is the confusion about what exactly constitutes psychohistory, in other words: what makes a work psychohistorical and its author a psychohistorian? Jacques Szaluta’s book *Psychohistory:*

⁴ See Elovitz, Paul. ‘A Conversation with Charles B Strozier’, *Clio’s Psyche*, Volume 3, No. 4, November 22, 1996.

⁵ Hunt, Lynn. ‘Psychoanalysis and History’. Presented at the Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, February 22, Cambridge, MA.

⁶ Personal communication with Mazlish, January 15, 2014.

Theory and Practice (1999), for instance, provides background information on the lives of people that Szaluta, himself a practising psychohistorian, considers psychohistorians – such as Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson and Jacques Lacan. There is a case to be made that Erikson was a psychohistorian, although he himself at times would have denied it, but Sigmund Freud never called himself a psychohistorian, and Jacques Lacan certainly did not. Unfortunately, this trend is endemic of the field. The main criterion that we will use to determine if a work was psychohistory or not is simply whether the author identified it as such. I will refer to psychohistory as designating either the movement – a group of scholars who identified as psychohistorians; individual works produced by those scholars; the practice of applying psychohistorical knowledge; the signifier ‘psychohistory’; or the field at large – a common metaphor, which I use loosely to indicate all of the above. In this, I simply mirror the use of the word by the psychohistorians themselves. Although Erikson, who was crucial in the construction of the movement, while remaining radically ambivalent towards it, hyphenated the word (‘psycho-history’) and was adamant that the hyphen was important to show the provisional unity of the two disciplines, most of its users, more interested in the unifying potential of the word psychohistory for their movement, were quick to drop the hyphen. I use the unhyphenated word throughout this work for clarity and consistency.

One of the problems the psychohistorians faced in their attempts to anchor a stable meaning to the signifier ‘psychohistory’ was defining what type of historical work exactly counted as psychohistory and what did not. As we shall see, roughly three ‘strands’ of psychohistorical work emerged – so-called psychobiographical studies, carried out with psychoanalytic concepts more or less in the forefront; group analyses, usually constructed around the theme of the dynamics between leaders and followers; and the history of child-rearing practices and their influence on successive generations’ subjectivity and behaviour. Importantly, in this study I make a distinction between psychohistory and psychobiography. This is somewhat artificial, as I will show that a number of practitioners of both disciplines considered the two very similar or even identical. At points, their meanings blend into one. And although an important part of the various works labelled psychohistory was, essentially, psychobiography – and these works will be discussed, it is crucial to make a distinction between the two terms. After all, some psychohistory was not psychobiography – that is, dealt with more than individuals in history – and some psychobiographers did not consider their work psychohistory. I have chosen to follow psychobiographer Alan C. Elms in holding that psychohistory and psychobiography are separate projects; he considers them ‘sibling disciplines’.⁷ In contrast to Elms, I would argue that psychobiography, which, in contrast to psychohistory, reached the peak of its popularity in the 1980s and as a term is currently used more frequently than psychohistory, was *a product* of the emergence psychohistory. As such, psychohistory will be discussed in so far as it was a part of the history of psychohistory, but in the knowledge that a full history of psychobiography would require a book onto itself.

Generally speaking, and in relation to psychohistory, one might conclude that psychobiographies were closer to applied psychoanalysis as it was practiced by psychoanalysts before psychohistory. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, a well-known feminist historian who started her career as a psychohistorian and a frequent contributor to psychohistorical journals, wrote: ‘[Psychobiographies] are conceived within the shadow of the couch and the analytic session. Their goal seems less to understand the society in which the individual lived, than to demonstrate that historians, through the refracting glass of centuries, can duplicate a diagnostic process which contemporary analysts practice with difficulty.’⁸ There is some truth to this

⁷ Elms, Alan C. *Uncovering Lives: The Uneasy Alliance of Biography and Psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 4.

⁸ Smith-Rosenberg, Carol. ‘The New Woman and The Psycho-Historian: A Modest Proposal.’ *GUPH Newsletter*, December, 1975, Volume IV, No. 3. 4.

statement, however, our history will show that such generalisations do not do justice to the complexity of the various uses of both terms.

In the first chapter, 'Canon Fodder', I will argue that psychohistorians appropriated non-psychohistorical works into what I call a psychohistorical canon, in order to unify their widely varying projects through establishing a common heritage. In the second chapter, 'What do you make of Adolf Hitler?', I discuss two events that have come to signal the beginning of the movement in the telling and re-telling of the story of psychohistory by the psychohistorians themselves. Here I use the term 'legend' loosely to describe this telling and re-telling of the story of psychohistory, and I have found inspiration in the description of the 'legend of psychoanalysis' by Sonu Shamdasani and Mikkel-Borch Jacobsen in their book *The Freud Files* (2012). The authors use the term legend to denote a hypothetical 'story' of psychoanalysis (a mix of history, theory and myth) that, through repetition, takes on a certain more or less fixed form, and yet remains open (that is, malleable) enough to be welded onto other stories in different contexts: such as, for example, the 'stories' of phenomenology, Marxism, structural linguistics, and, more recently, neuroscience. Particular 'elements' of the legend can be dropped or included to fit the story it is being included in. We shall see that it was a particular 'legend' of psychoanalysis that was used in the construction of psychohistory as an interdisciplinary, and that psychohistory itself also became a legend, albeit a less successful one than psychoanalysis.

When it suited their needs, the psychohistorians identified work by scholars who had not self-identified as psychohistorians as psychohistory; at other times, they distinguished their work from earlier applications of psychological thought to history. For the most part, they were uninterested in seeking out the origins of the term psychohistory itself. As a result, many of them claimed that Erik Erikson coined the term, which he may have believed himself; psychohistorian Robert J. Lifton corrected them and claimed in his edited volume *Explorations in Psychohistory* (1975) that Isaac Asimov was the first to use the term in his series of science fiction novels, *Foundation* (1942).⁹ In Asimov's fictional stories, psychohistorians were essentially computer analysts who, because of their use of enormous amounts of data, were very nearly able to predict the future of their worlds.¹⁰ As Lifton has consistently argued that real-life psychohistory was more akin to literature than science, it is not hard to see why he was wont to believe that the term psychohistory – an imagined science – had its origins in a fictional story entitled *Foundation*. But as psychohistorian Paul H. Elovitz has shown, both claims are false. L. Pierce Clark, an American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, used the term psychohistory with and without a hyphen, as well as *psychobiography*, as early as the 1920s to denote his applications of psychoanalytic thought to historical figures. It is unknown if Erik Erikson, whose early 'psycho-historical' work *Young Man Luther* became a blueprint for good psychohistory within the movement, was aware of this work. He might well have been, as he was actively engaged with the work of Clark's contemporary – psychobiographer Preserved Smith. As Elovitz has shown, Clark was editor of the journal *Archives of Psychoanalysis* created in 1926, in which he published work by Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud, Georg Groddeck, Wilhelm Reich, and his own work, such as: 'A Psychohistorical Study of Akhnaten, First Idealist and Originator of a Monotheistic Religion.' The journal was discontinued in 1927.¹¹

But even further back, in his book *Psychology, General and Applied* (1915), Hugo Münsterberg entitled a chapter: 'The Psychohistorical Sciences'. He wrote: 'We can apply the results of a theoretical science in order to be helped in our practical endeavours, but we can

⁹ Lifton, Robert J., and Eric Olson. *Explorations in Psychohistory; the Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975. 17.

¹⁰ Asimov, Isaac. *Foundation* (1951). London: HarperCollins, 1995.

¹¹ Elovitz, Paul. 'Two of the Earliest American Psychobiographers: Preserved Smith and L. Pierce Clark', in *Altaalla*, Norderstedt, Saksa: Books on Demand, 2014.

also apply it in order to solve other theoretical problems.’¹² And further: ‘No doubt we can also in this sense apply psychology, both individual and social, in the service of many other theoretical sciences. Wherever we have the products of man’s activity in his prehistoric or historic life, in language and religion, in state and legal institutions, in literature and art, in customs and folk lore, we can make use of psychology in the study of the given facts.’¹³ Francis Hackett, in his biography of Henry VIII, published in 1929, wrote that: ‘To be *then*-minded, to use imagination and intuition, to suggest life – this is the task of the psychohistorian.’¹⁴ The book is an imaginative reconstruction of the life of Henry VIII, without reference to any psychological theory and without the use of any psychological jargon. The first use of the term to denote a form of historiography was apparently used in 1905, in a translation of Karl Lamprecht’s *What is History?* By E.A. Andrews.¹⁵ The original German was: *psychologischen Geschichtschreibung*.¹⁶

Psychohistory: An American Affair

Although some of its ideas were successfully transported out of the United States, psychohistory as an intellectual movement was a markedly American phenomenon. As T.G. Ashplant observed, the application of psychoanalysis in history did not become popular in Great Britain until the 1980s, and the term psychohistory was never popular there.¹⁷ Besides authors such as Cypriot-born psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan and Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakhar, who both identified as psychohistorians, psychohistory as a term was not greatly popular with practitioners of either psychoanalysis or history, or a combination of the two, outside of the United States. We will limit our study to the dominant, American psychohistorical movement.

Psychohistory emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. One of the structural conditions for the emergence of psychohistory was the reimagining of American academia after World War II. The great expansion that took place in the United States helped redefine and promote the social sciences and led to a new demarcation of traditional boundaries between disciplines. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz put it: ‘It was, in any case, social science in full cry; headier and more confident than ever before or since.’¹⁸ In its traditional form – unaided by the social sciences – academic history was increasingly perceived as having lost relevance in the modern world. At the same time, historians were encouraged to tread into the limelight of public debates and share their knowledge with a wider public, which led to the popularisation of history as a semi-literary genre. Over the course of time, psychohistory was often associated with other attempts to marry insights from the social sciences with history, such as quantitative history; although the psychohistorians had a hard time planting their seed in academia, a surprising number of their works in the field became bestsellers.

The history of psychohistory is intimately bound up with the history of psychoanalysis. In 1938, Franz Alexander, a psychoanalyst who emigrated to the United States from Berlin, delivered his Presidential Address – entitled ‘Psychoanalysis Comes of Age’ – to the American

¹² Münsterberg, Hugo. *Psychology, General and Applied*. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1915. 352.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Foreword to: Hackett, Francis. *The Personal History of Henry the Eighth*. New York: The Modern Library, 1929.

¹⁵ ‘As the following will show, the affirmation of the second alternative suffices for the establishment of the main facts of a psycho-historical science.’ In: Lamprecht, Karl. *What is History? Five Lectures on the Modern Science of History*. London: Macmillan & Company, Ltd., 1905. 152.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Ashplant, T. G. ‘Psychoanalysis in Historical Writing.’ *History Workshop Journal*. 26, No. 1, 1988. 103.

¹⁸ Geertz, Clifford. *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995. 100.

Psychoanalytic Association.¹⁹ In the paper, Alexander proposed that psychoanalysis should become a scientific discipline in his adoptive country. Specifically, he meant that American psychoanalysis should strengthen its ties with psychiatry, denounce the more speculative elements of Freudian theory, and find for itself a new foundation in observation as opposed to philosophical speculation and theory-building. His call did not fall on deaf ears. Alexander argued for the operationalisation of the natural scientific aspects of psychoanalytic theory and practice; this included a monopolisation of the rituals of psychoanalysis by medical practitioners. Until the 1980s, those rituals were, as a rule, only performed by psychiatrists in the United States.²⁰ Due in part to American psychoanalysis's near-total coincidence with psychiatry at the time, a medical interpretation of the concept of cure was carried over on to psychotherapy, whose desired outcome now – generally speaking – became happiness and normality. Historian Eli Zaretsky, who started his career as a frequent contributor to psychohistorical journals, has observed that psychoanalysis emerged in Europe after World War II as a system of thought pitched against an established patriarchal order, while it emerged in the United States as a method of 'cure and self-improvement'.²¹ As Nathan Hale has shown, psychoanalysis was in fact adapted to indigenous psychological currents in the United States.²²

This 'curative conception' of the role of psychoanalysis was not limited to an application to the patient and his or her illness. In 1950, the president of the American Institute for Psychoanalysis (AIP) declared in a speech: 'Sick people do sick things, and war is a sign of sickness.'²³ Psychoanalysis, he thought, held the cure. In the following decade, various diagnosticians of society and politics emerged in the United States, all of them convinced that psychoanalysis might help to remove its moral and political illnesses. As I will suggest, the intended scientisation of psychoanalysis and the monopolisation by medical doctors of its rituals produced a space for the expression of seemingly more speculative elements contained in psychoanalytic theory, such as its cultural applications. Psychohistory became a vessel for those more speculative elements of psychoanalytic thought.

In his well-known paper 'Concerning Wild Psycho-analysis' (1910), Freud introduced the concept of wild analysis to describe unsanctioned attempts at practicing psychoanalysis, characterised at the time by premature interpretations without adequate regard for resistances and transference. 'In the spring of 1910,' Freud wrote, 'we founded an international psychoanalytic society, in order to be able to disclaim responsibility for the acts of all who do not belong to us and who call their medical practice "psychoanalysis".'²⁴ Besides laying the groundwork for the regulation of the practices and thought of psychoanalysis, Freud's institutionalisation of psychoanalysis created an anti-discipline: wild analysis. When one understands wild analysis as the unsanctioned application of Freudian ideas and rituals, psychohistory becomes a prime example.

Although some of its proponents were, or went on to become, practicing psychoanalysts, psychohistory was generally treated with apprehension by established

¹⁹ Makari, George. 'Mitteleuropa on the Hudson: On the Struggle for American Psychoanalysis after the Anschluss', in: Burnham, John C. *After Freud Left: A Century of Psychoanalysis in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. 119.

²⁰ For a detailed account of this history, see Hale, Nathan G. *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

²¹ Zaretsky, Eli. Quoted in: Samuel, Lawrence R. *Shrink: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in America*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013. xii.

²² Hale, Nathan G. *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

²³ Samuel, Lawrence R. *Shrink: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in America*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013. 73.

²⁴ Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. (1910). London: Vintage, 2001. 226.

psychoanalysts as well as historians. Psychohistory was seen as transgressive by a great number of practitioners within both of its parent disciplines. A history of the movement, then, also offers a lens onto the presuppositions and reigning taboos of the discourses that it drew from at the time. Testament to its impact is the publication of an official report by the American Psychiatric Association entitled *The Psychiatrist as Psychohistorian: Report of the Task Force on Psychohistory of the American Psychiatric Association* (1976) in which the potential threats of psychohistory – including the threat to United States national security – were elaborately discussed.²⁵ Like his American followers, Freud was more concerned with the potential damage to the image of psychoanalysis than with analysis' lack of effectiveness. 'For as a matter of fact,' Freud wrote in 1910, 'such wild analysts do more harm to the subject [psychoanalysis] than to the individual patient. It has often been my experience that such an awkward procedure, even if it at first caused an aggravation of the symptoms, has nevertheless achieved a cure in the end. Not always, but quite often.'²⁶ The forbidding response of American psychoanalysts towards psychohistory was partly to blame for many of the psychohistorians' self-conception as 'rogue' and 'pioneering'. Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse put it as follows at the time: 'As psychoanalysis has become socially and scientifically respectable, it has freed itself from compromising speculations.'²⁷ Psychohistory, we shall see, came to be used for a scala of compromising purposes: as a vehicle for cultural and political critique; journalism; slander; a philosophical challenge of the underpinnings of academic history-writing; poetry; and the emancipation of women, children and persons with dark skin. If, as psychohistorian Robert J. Lifton once put it, the union of psychoanalysis and history was indeed a 'logical marriage', psychohistory was undoubtedly its 'wild child'.²⁸

Contexts and Concepts

As Georg Iggers described in *Historiography in the Twentieth Century* (1997): 'The various kinds of social-science oriented history spanned the methodological and ideological spectrum from quantitative sociological and economic approaches and the structuralism of the *Annales*-school to Marxist class analysis. In different ways all these approaches sought to model historical research more closely after the natural sciences.'²⁹ Psychohistory, as we shall see, was a part of this movement. However, like postmodern history, which according to Iggers rejected 'the distinction between fact and fiction, history and poetry', psychohistory was also sceptical about the neutrality of the historical observer.³⁰ Like authors such as Roland Barthes, Paul de Man and Hayden White, psychohistory problematised and opened up for scrutiny the relationship between the author and his text. Psychohistory, as we shall see, occupies a space in-between the natural-science model of history and postmodern history. All psychohistorical projects shared a belief that the historian should not ignore the subjectivity of historical actors. With the advent of Freudian thought in the United States after World War II – undoubtedly in part the result of a Cold War-need to formulate an alternative intellectual explanation to 'the means of production' and 'the division of labour' – the scientific study of the internal world of persons who lived in the past seemed possible and within reach. Gradually an awareness of the

²⁵ See Chapter Three.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization* (1955). London: Sphere Books, 1969. 25.

²⁸ Lifton, Robert J., and Eric Olson. *Explorations in Psychohistory; the Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975. 13.

²⁹ Iggers, Georg G. *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, Published by University Press of New England, 1997. 3

³⁰ *Ibid.* 10.

historian's own subjectivity, through the psychoanalytic concepts of transference and countertransference, was added into the equation.

In the third chapter – 'Wellfleet' – we will look at the birth of psychohistory as a movement. From its inception onwards, the concepts of transference and countertransference would be key for the movement. In his historical work on Mahatma Gandhi, which formed the basis of discussions at the earliest Wellfleet psychohistory gatherings, Erik Erikson became aware of the 'countertransference' he experienced in relation to his object of study.³¹ He then developed the concept of 'disciplined subjectivity' as a way of harnessing that form of transference – using it productively. Psychohistorian Peter Loewenberg revisited the concept of transference towards one's object of study at length in various works.³²

The concepts of transference and countertransference constitute an entire chapter in the history of the dissemination of psychoanalysis. Freud first discussed the concept in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895). In the famous Dora Case, Freud saw his own therapeutic failure as a result of his neglect of the transference: 'I did not succeed in mastering the transference in good time [...] I was deaf to its first warning [...] So I was surprised by the transference.'³³ In 1910, Freud wrote: 'We have become sensitive to the 'counter-transference' which arises in the doctor as a result of the patient's influence on his unconscious feelings, and we are close to insisting that he shall recognize this counter-transference in himself and master it.'³⁴ By the 1950s, countertransference was being used as a productive conceptual tool. American psychoanalyst Frieda Fromm-Reichman wrote: 'The psychiatrist who is trained in the observation and inner realization of his reaction to patient's manifestations can frequently utilize these reactions as a helpful instrument in understanding otherwise hidden implications in patient's communications. Thus the therapists' share in the reciprocal transference reactions of doctor and patient in the wider sense of the term may furnish an important guide in conducting the psychotherapeutic process.'³⁵ By that time, the concept had been considerably broadened. Psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich wondered: 'Is not all love transference love?'³⁶ And Freud himself noted: 'It must not be supposed [...] that transference is created by analysis and does not occur apart from it. Transference is merely uncovered and isolated by analysis. It is a universal phenomenon of the human mind, it decides the success of all medical influence, and in fact dominates the whole of each person's relations to his human environment.'³⁷ Loewenberg understood the concept as follows: 'I subscribe to, and will use here, the modern concept of countertransference which is "to designate all of the feelings produced in the analyst by the patient". Whereas countertransference was formerly viewed as an intrusion in the analysis to be guarded against and overcome, it is now welcomed, listened to, analyzed, and utilized in treatment and research. Today the countertransference is an appropriate part of any case report and should become an accepted element in historical writing.'³⁸

Depending on their interpretations of psychoanalysis, some psychohistorians saw their transference towards their object of study as something that needed to be overcome in order to

³¹ Erikson, Erik H. *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence*. New York: Norton, 1969.

³² See Chapter Four.

³³ Freud, Sigmund and James Strachey. *Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905). London, Vintage, 2001. 1-122.

³⁴ Freud, Sigmund and James Strachey. *The Future prospects for psycho-analytic therapy* (1910). London, Vintage, 2001. 139-151.

³⁵ Quoted in Loewenberg, Peter. *Fantasy and Reality in History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. 12.

³⁶ Quoted in Corrington, Robert. *Wilhelm Reich: Psychoanalyst and Radical Naturalist*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 103.

³⁷ Freud, Sigmund, and James Strachey. *An Autobiographical Study: Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety; the Question of Lay Analysis and Other Works*; (1925-1926). London: Vintage, 2001. 41.

³⁸ Loewenberg, Peter. 'Historical Method, the Subjectivity of the Researcher, and Psychohistory', in: *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 14, No. 1, Fall 1985. 34.

be able to write with more critical distance. When I asked what Mazlish thought of the concept, he answered: 'It is an interesting concept. But the analysis [of one's own transference] should remain personal. Something one takes into account before one starts on a project, nothing more.'³⁹ At their most radical, however, other psychohistorians interpreted historical texts as symptoms: dream-like tableaux, with facts and sources serving as manifest content for the historian's unconscious preoccupations. 'If the criterion for judgment is almost exclusively internal,' as H. Stuart Hughes put it, a fellow-traveller of the psychohistorical movement, 'if an account is to be accepted or rejected primarily for its artistic and philosophical elegance – then it is difficult to see where the writing of history differs from the strictly imaginative exercises of the human spirit.'⁴⁰ Many psychohistorians were keenly aware of the subjective component in writing history, and history's poetical dimension. This aligns them theoretically, at least in part, with postmodern authors such as Foucault (who were, not incidentally, also in dialogue with psychoanalytic thought), who notoriously wrote: 'I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions. I do not mean to say, however, that truth is therefore absent. It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth. One "fictions" history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one "fictions" a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth.'⁴¹

There is, no doubt, a strong subjective – or 'fictional' – element to the writing of history, but the main role of the historian, it seems, can never be entirely fictional, as he invariably deals with facts and referents in reality that are not his own and that are somehow *external* to his subjectivity. I agree with the psychohistorians that an important part, perhaps the most interesting part, of the subjective component of writing history might take place outside of the awareness of the author. This has led me to think about the role of the historian less as that of a producer of fictions than a creator of montages – someone who creatively assembles traces of the past. This is close to Walter Benjamin's position on the subject, for whom, as Benjamin-scholar Philippe Simay says in reference to Benjamin's historical work, 'montage is the construction in which fragments come into connection in order to form a constellation intelligible to the present, because no kind of continuity exists between them and it.'⁴² The historian, who acts as a mediator between past and present, creates the continuity. Benjamin interestingly problematises this conception when he speaks about his own use of quotations: 'Quotations in my work are like wayside robbers who leap out, armed, and relieve the idle stroller of his conviction.'⁴³ This self-reflective attitude towards one's subjective involvement in the process of writing seems to me interesting and productive.

The reader is welcomed to read this work along these lines, and to analyse any patterns and repetitions, omissions and foreclosures – but I myself will abstain from interjecting personal narrative into the history. Nevertheless, the history of psychohistory is a story rife with intrigue, weird lacunae, shattered hopes and thwarted ambition. I have found it impossible to remain unaffected by it. Some theories held by psychohistorians stretch the imagination far beyond what scientific credibility, let alone common sense, should allow for. As one-time psychohistorian Peter Gay put it: 'The syllabus of errors rehearsing the offenses of psychohistory looks devastating and seems irrefutable: crimes against the English language,

³⁹ Personal communication with Mazlish, January 15, 2014.

⁴⁰ Mollenhauer, Bernard, and H. Stuart Hughes. 'History as Art and as Science'. *Books Abroad* 38, No. 4, 1964. 18.

⁴¹ Foucault, M. 'The History of Sexuality' (an interview), in: *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. 193.

⁴² Simay, Philippe. 'Tradition as Injunction', in: Benjamin, Andrew E. *Walter Benjamin and History*. London: Continuum, 2005. 147.

⁴³ Quoted in Salzani, Carlo. *Constellations of Reading: Walter Benjamin in Figures of Actuality*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009. 317.

crimes against scientific procedures, crimes against common sense itself.’⁴⁴ But I came to the topic from a background in philosophy and psychoanalytic studies – both fields that demand a high tolerance for what psychohistorian Robert J. Lifton has called ‘disciplined thought’ as well as ‘far-out speculation’.⁴⁵ My background in multiple fields helped me to understand the problems that psychohistory faced as an ‘interdiscipline’. The reader will not be surprised to find that this academically scruffy group of self-proclaimed pioneers grew on me over time.

Last of all, this history takes the shape of a ‘rise and fall’ narrative, but it is important to emphasise that psychohistory is not dead. Psychohistory may have fallen; I see no reason why it could not stand back up again. There are undoubtedly methodological tensions in the union of psychoanalysis and history that are problematic – they will be discussed in the course of this work – but I can think of no reason why those tensions could not be overcome or set to work productively. They have been in the past. And in fact, psychohistory’s contradictions *are* currently being used productively by an array of scholars who work under new umbrella-terms such as ‘psychoanalytic studies’ and ‘psychosocial studies’. My work, however, is concerned with the term psychohistory and its use among a community of scholars who considered themselves a movement. There are currently still a handful of people doing work entitled psychohistory, but they are a minority and would probably agree that they are fighting a Quixotic battle against the tide of academic vogue.

Much of the material in this work is based on interviews held with protagonists of this study. I have tried to give the psychohistorians a voice, to have them jump out – like Benjamin’s wayside robbers – and give their interpretations of the history of psychohistory, always, however, against a background of critical reflection. In an article in 2003, Bruce Mazlish reiterated the need for a history of psychohistory. The field, he held, had been grossly misunderstood and misrepresented. A proper history of psychohistory, he felt, should focus on ‘why and how psychohistory arose and what contributions, along with errors, it has made to our understanding of the past. Only in the light of the history of psychohistory can one fully judge its aspirations, achievements and shortcomings.’⁴⁶ It has been my aim to write such a study.

⁴⁴ Introduction to Strozier, Charles B., and Daniel Offer. *The Leader: Psychohistorical Essays*. New York: Plenum Press, 1985. ix.

⁴⁵ Lifton, Robert J., and Eric Olson. *Explorations in Psychohistory; the Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975. 14

⁴⁶ Mazlish, Bruce. ‘The Past and Future of Psychohistory’, in: *The Annual of Psychoanalysis*, Volume 31, *Psychoanalysis and History*, 2003. 265.

Section I

The Legend of a Movement's Childhood

Chapter 2 Canon Fodder

Creating a Prehistory for Psychohistory

From psychohistory's beginning onwards, its practitioners were obsessed with their movement's past. This is perhaps unsurprising, as the theories of psychoanalysis invite and reward retrospection. And like Freud, who attempted to canonise psychoanalysis by placing himself and his work in a line of thinkers such as Copernicus and Darwin, the psychohistorians felt that their movement was in need of a tradition of thought.⁴⁷

They did not make it easy for themselves. From psychoanalysis, they borrowed the assumption that the past is implied in the present, and that an experience of the present inevitably imposes itself on any understanding of the past. As a result, most of them were aware of the strong subjective component in writing history. There were contrasting views of what history is and does, and practitioners adhered to a variety of schools of psychoanalytic thought. On top of this, practitioners of psychohistory were caught between the evolving demands and constraints of two parent disciplines in flux. These are all slippery theoretical positions – blurring past and present, fact and interpretation, scientific genres. Besides the obvious difficulties of explaining to the outside world what psychohistory was, and why it was worthwhile, these positions inevitably led to a confusion of tongues among psychohistorians themselves. As a result, much of the work done by psychohistorians was aimed at anchoring a stable meaning to the term psychohistory. And as the movement consisted principally of historians and psychoanalysts, they adopted a strategy that came naturally to them: turning to the past. It seems that by constructing a history for psychohistory, they were hoping to find unity in the present. In the telling and re-telling of their history, not only did they create a narrative of the birth of their field – they also created a heritage, a prehistory.⁴⁸ Here we will examine this heritage critically, well aware that in the process we are writing a prehistory for psychohistory of our own.

This raises the question: how do we know that we are not simply dealing with historians and psychoanalysts investigating neutrally the origins of their new movement? The answer, in part, lies in the way the psychohistorians presented their findings. In this chapter we shall discuss critically three attempts at constructing such prehistories for psychohistory, by John Mack (1970), psychoanalyst; Frank Manuel (1971), historian; and William McKinley ('Mac') Runyan (1988), academic psychologist. As we shall see, the authors assimilated historical and psychoanalytic works and authors – who had not identified as psychohistorians or even used the term at all – into a psychohistorical canon. Looking back over the long history of the interactions between psychological and historical thought, they retroactively labelled the fruits of those interactions 'psychohistory' or 'psychohistorical'. They drew titles and characters from both parent fields: history and psychoanalysis, and often actively identified authors of such prehistorical works as psychohistorians.⁴⁹ Instead of presenting and analysing the past, the psychohistorians were actively intervening in it, moulding it for their cause.

This instrumental teleology had several purposes. First, and most broadly, it served to justify the marriage of psychoanalysis and history. It did so by showing that there had been concern for the historical in psychology and the psychological in history long before Erikson and Langer and his 'Next Assignment'. This gave weight and prestige to psychohistory as a

⁴⁷ For a detailed account of Freud's attempt to canonize himself and his movement, see Borch-Jacobsen, Mikkel, and Sonu Shamdasani. *The Freud Files: An Inquiry into the History of Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

⁴⁸ See Chapter Two.

⁴⁹ For example: 'Freud was the first psychohistorian', in: Erwin, Edward. *The Freud Encyclopedia: Theory, Therapy, and Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

project. In such accounts, the movement appeared as a natural outgrowth of earlier attempts to integrate the two disciplines. An example of these accounts can be found as early as 1960, in Bruce Mazlish' *Psychoanalysis and History* (1960). In the introduction to that collection of essays, the author claimed Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown as predecessors to his own project.⁵⁰ At times, however, earlier interactions between psychoanalysis and history were explicitly framed as failures in order to justify current theoretical positions, or to emphasise the novelty of psychohistory in general. This latter position often involved ridiculing the early psychoanalytic applications of theory to historical subjects in Freud's work and that of his first followers. In these cases, the message was clear: psychohistory, albeit concerned with the same problems as the pioneers of psychoanalysis, is doing things differently.⁵¹

John E. Mack: Psychohistory for Psychoanalysts

Psychohistory had to be sold to both historians and psychoanalysts. By 1980, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst John E. Mack (who would later become notorious for his clinical work with alien abductees) wrote: 'The fruitful applications of psychoanalytic concepts to biographical and historical subjects grow in range and depth, despite disclaimers among the practitioners – including myself – that we are not doing anything so crude or simple as 'psychobiography' or 'psychohistory'.'⁵² Nine years earlier, however, Mack still unabashedly identified as a psychohistorian.

Mack was involved in the Group for Applied Psychoanalysis (GAP) with historian Bruce Mazlish, and published a long article entitled 'Psychoanalysis and Historical Biography' in the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* in 1971. In the article, Mack discussed the methodological problems inherent in psychoanalytic biography; he looked at the biographical study of public figures, and gave a detailed overview of the history of psychoanalytic approaches to biography. In psychohistory he found particularly important 'what general applicability this intersystemic model has to psychoanalysis as a general psychology, including work with individual patients.'⁵³ What had been insufficiently developed in psychoanalytic theory was, Mack held, 'an understanding of the place of the individual patient and his associative "material" in a dynamic context or matrix which takes into account [...] other psychological elements and reality systems which the psychologist-historian has come to look upon as an essential part of his study.'⁵⁴ By showing how psychohistory emerged out of earlier interactions between psychoanalysis and history, Mack hoped to show that psychohistory was able to instruct psychoanalysis on how to include sociological, anthropological and historical materials in its clinical work. Mack was writing for a psychoanalytic audience.⁵⁵

In a message tailored for his readers, Mack showed how the use of anthropological and sociological material, as well as the biographical study of 'great men', went as far back as Freud and the Wednesday Psychological Society's meetings in Vienna. He wrote: 'It was in these years (1906-1910) that the early interest in psychoanalytic biography, or 'pathography', as it was frequently referred to at that time, began to take hold.'⁵⁶ The group used these

⁵⁰ Mazlish, Bruce. *Psychoanalysis and History*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963.

⁵¹ For other psychohistorical prehistories, see: Africa, 1979; Gedo, 1972; Hoffman, 1982, 1984; Mazlish, 1977; Strozier and Offer, 1985.

⁵² Mack, John E. 'Psychoanalysis and Biography: Aspects of a Developing Affinity.' *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 28, 1980. 544.

⁵³ Mack, John E. 'Psychoanalysis and Historical Biography'. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 19, No. 1, 1971. 177.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 143 – 177.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 145.

pathographies, Mack argued, for evidence of the expression of the sexual component instincts in their normal or pathological forms. At this point, any historical analysis that took place was still fully in service of furthering psychoanalytic theory. Mack believed that this changed with Freud's own writings on historical figures. Around this time, the period following World War I, the public became receptive, 'as it had been at various times before the nineteenth century, to factual and psychological realism in biography.'⁵⁷ He pointed out that Lytton Strachey's biographical works had been of seminal importance in stimulating a receptivity for psychoanalytic works in the English-speaking world. In *Eminent Victorians*, and in his biography of Queen Victoria, Strachey had exposed (often embarrassing) details of his subjects in an uncompromising way. In the years following, 'Strachey's delight in exposing the virtuous and reducing the mighty stimulated a whole "debunking" school of crude imitators for whom Freudian concepts of sexuality and psychopathology, misunderstood and misapplied, furnished splendid ammunition.'⁵⁸ In the 1920s and 30s, Mack held, 'dozens of "Freudian" studies were done of people such as Luther, Jefferson, Hamilton, Poe, Lincoln and Melville, with varying degrees of insight and understanding of psychoanalytic concepts'.⁵⁹ Mack included the infamous biography of Woodrow Wilson written by Freud and Bullitt in his list.

Things were different now, Mack believed. With the development of ego psychology – in the decades since Freud published 'The Ego and the Id' and 'Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety' – new, more serious, possibilities in the field of psychoanalytic history had opened up. Ego psychology accepted 'the inevitability of certain phase-specific childhood problems in psychosexual development and emphasizes the way in which each individual deals with these conflicts.'⁶⁰ But after ego-psychology's amendments of psychoanalytic theory, Mack held, it also became possible to 'study the product of the creative individual, not simply as revealing childhood drives, experiences, traumata, disappointments, and memories; but as complex transformations, efforts of the ego to "renegotiate" the settlements of childhood and to surmount these early struggles through work.'⁶¹ With the development of ego psychology, Mack seemed to say, psychoanalysis had grown up. Like many American psychoanalysts, Mack was wary of Freud's drive theories and favoured a more 'symbolic' interpretation of Freud, based on the founder's later works. Psychoanalysis, he thought, was now ready for its application to other fields. Erik Erikson's work held special promise. Trained by Anna Freud in ego psychology, Erikson was 'the first psychoanalytic biographer to integrate the multiplicity of variables that determine the relationship between the great man's personality, his creative work, and his time.'⁶² It seems that Mack was arguing that, through the developments in ego psychology, an application of psychoanalytic theory to history might now be able to transcend biographical work – and become something unto itself: psychohistory.⁶³

In 1976, Mack was one of the consultant psychiatrists for the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) document 'The Psychiatrist as Psychohistorian'. Those psychiatrists were assigned the role of deciding in the APA's name what was good psychohistory and what was not.⁶⁴ In 1977, he published his highly successful psychobiography of T.E. Lawrence, for which he received a Pulitzer Prize. In the following years, Mack grew more and more critical of psychohistory as a discipline. He was killed in 2004 by a drunk driver in London, where he was attending a conference sponsored by the T.E. Lawrence Society.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 148.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 150.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ The theoretical underpinnings of ego psychology are, for that reason, discussed elaborately in Chapter 2.

⁶⁴ Hofling, Charles K. *The Psychiatrist as Psychohistorian: Report of the Task Force on Psychohistory of the American Psychiatric Association*. Washington: APA, 1976.

Great Men – the 1920s

As the discussion of John Mack's paper shows, both proponents and critics (as well as proponents-turned-critics) of psychohistory dismissed early psychoanalytic history as crude and amateurish. Louise Hoffman, also a psychohistorian, has argued that such views need qualification.⁶⁵ Hoffman was milder on the earlier practitioners of psychoanalytic history, and more critical in her use of the term psychohistory. She avoided retroactively applying the term psychohistory to earlier interactions between psychoanalysis and history. She made the case that early psychobiographers derived many of their methods from established biographical traditions, so that neither their virtues nor their vices could be attributed to psychoanalysis alone. Early psychobiographies reflected shifting historiographical emphases, and psychoanalytic theory provided biographers and historians with a systematic methodology to transcend previous approaches to psychological description.

Hoffman showed that by the 1920s the psychoanalytic approach to biography had become quite common in the United States and in Europe. Not only psychoanalysts were writing psychoanalytic biographies – historians, physicians and others were undertaking psychoanalytic studies too. Their subjects included political leaders, famous writers, and spiritual leaders. Traditional disciplines largely remained resistant to the genre, so that articles of this kind were mainly published in psychoanalytic or psychological journals. This changed after 1930, when the lives of living leaders came under psychoanalytic scrutiny, and psychoanalytic interpretations percolated into mass culture in the United States and in Europe. The term psychobiography, denoting psychoanalytic biography in particular, Hoffman found was introduced by American psychiatrist L. Pierce Clark, who collaborated closely with historians Harry Elmer Barnes and James Harvey Robinson.⁶⁶

If we accept Hoffman's analysis, what Mack referred to as pathography could be more accurately described as early applied psychoanalysis. These early explorations of psychoanalytic history focused on great men, and their main emphasis was on pathological characteristics. This was an extension of previous biographical approaches in the style of historian and philosopher Thomas Carlyle, who famously proposed a view of history as dominated by heroes, and who attempted an intuitive psychological method to analyse them. It was he who wrote: 'The history of the world, I said already, was the biography of Great Men.'⁶⁷ But another important contributing factor to this early 'great-men approach' in psychoanalytic history was the growth of scientific psychology. This spawned the genre of what is more accurately described by 'pathography', and whose practitioners described the lives of notable individuals known to have been emotionally disturbed, or described as being geniuses. As Hoffman pointed out, the connection between non-Freudian pathographies and the early Freudian biographies was made by Franklin Fearing, an American psychologist from Ohio, as early as 1927. Fearing described a number of these pre-Freudian studies and then discussed psychoanalytic concepts, which biographers at the time found useful:

These studies of the genius – in so far as the 'great' personages of history *are* geniuses – seem to point to the conclusion that psychopathy or neurotic tendencies are frequent

⁶⁵ In her paper: Hoffman, Louise E. 'Early Psychobiography, 1900-1930: Some Reconsiderations'. *Biography* 7, No. 4, 1984. 341-51.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ 'The Hero as Divinity' in Carlyle, Thomas. *Heroes and Hero-worship* (1840). London: Collins, 1900.

components in the personality make-up of the genius. With psychoanalysis, a new school of biographical writing and interpretation is coming into being.⁶⁸

As Mack noted, applied psychoanalysis and scientific pathography allowed the historian to analyse the historical subject's exaggerated characteristics, or pathology, and therefore promised a glimpse on the psychological mechanisms of genius. Undoubtedly this was part of their attraction for large audiences. But besides the early great-men approach, which resonated for a long time in the history of psychohistory, a number of historians emerged who advocated an entirely new kind of psychoanalytically inspired history. In Europe, more specifically in France, the *Annales* school advocated a new form of history that included social scientific research.⁶⁹ In the United States, the historians who first used psychoanalysis systematically were the historians who promoted the so-called 'New History', such as the earlier mentioned James Harvey Robinson and Harry Elmer Barnes. Like the *Annales* historians, they proposed a cross-fertilisation of history and the social sciences, and opposed the perceived 'departmentalisation' of academia. Barnes wrote about his predecessors:

History was in a condition not unlike that in which the physicist, chemist, or biologist would find himself if supplied with a vast body of notebooks containing the carefully set down records of countless experiments, but without any real attempt to interpret the significance of this mass of material or to derive from it great scientific laws of general applicability.⁷⁰

To be able to interpret this data correctly, more scientifically, Barnes believed history needed assistance from social science, including the relatively new field of psychoanalysis. In a 1921 article, he discussed how:

Vital biography must deal with those intimate features of private life which reveal the deeper complexes in the personality, and cannot content itself with a superficial presentation of certain objective achievements nor accept as valid expressions of doctrine which may be only elaborate forms of disguise or extended secondary rationalization.⁷¹

New methods and standards would have to be adopted in interpretative historical biography, and psychoanalysis was to provide them. Armed with his new psychological concepts, Barnes went on to enthusiastically describe George Washington's Jehovah complex, the inferiority complex of Thomas Jefferson, and the intense sadism of Andrew Jackson. Psychoanalytic biographers such as Barnes argued that academic psychology was irrelevant to the tasks of the psychiatrist and the biographer.⁷²

Among these early Freudian historians, the biographer's own motives went largely unexamined; the Oedipus complex was their central concept. Like Freud and his early followers, they assumed that the Oedipal situation was a universal pattern independent of

⁶⁸ Hoffman, Louise E. 'Early Psychobiography, 1900-1930: Some Reconsiderations'. *Biography* 7, No. 4, 1984. 343.

⁶⁹ Bizière, Jean Maurice. Psychohistory and Histoire des Mentalités. *The Journal of Psychohistory*, Volume 11, No. 1, 1983. 89.

⁷⁰ Barnes, Harry Elmer. 'Psychology and History: Some Reasons for Predicting Their More Active Cooperation in the Future'. *The American Journal of Psychology*, Volume 30, No. 4, 1919. 337.

⁷¹ Hoffman, Louise E. 'Early Psychobiography, 1900-1930: Some Reconsiderations'. *Biography* 7, No. 4, 1984. 344.

⁷² *Ibid.*

cultural variations that could be applied regardless of background or context.⁷³ Historian Ralph Harlow valued psychoanalysis for its insight into the ‘internal forces’ behind the behaviour of historical figures, in addition to the external forces that had been the traditional objects of study. Both Harlow and Barnes became interested in the dynamics of leadership, a conceptual point where the internal world of the leader and the external needs of a collective intersected. Their work would in turn become a model for later psychobiographies, particularly those of Hitler. It is not hard to see why, as Harlow wrote of Samuel Adams:

A man of this type can convince a community that it is persecuted when really it is very well off. Then, when a large share of the people have become fanatics, the abnormal nervous and mental organization of perhaps one man may easily precipitate a needless war.⁷⁴

The Early Freudians

Nearly all psychohistorians called themselves Freudians, all of them positioned their writings in relation to Freud’s ideas, and some of them engaged directly with his work. Three of Freud’s texts were of particular significance to the movement: *Leonardo da Vinci, A Memory of His Childhood* (1910); *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1922); and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). ‘Psychohistory for the early Freudians was not trivial,’ Strozier and Offer wrote in the introduction to their book *The Leader: Psychohistorical Essays* (1985); in fact, they said, ‘everything hung on it.’⁷⁵

The paper on DaVinci was influential primarily because it showed that psychoanalytic ideas could be creatively applied to historical characters. Freud told a story that was similar to, and could be supplemented with, existing forms of biographical narrative. The Leonardo study became something of a blueprint for later applications of psychoanalytic thought to biography. Before Freud and Bullitt’s study of Woodrow Wilson surfaced in 1967, the editors of the Standard Edition of the *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* described the Leonardo piece as ‘not only the first but the last of Freud’s large-scale excursions into the field of biography.’⁷⁶ As psychiatrist Robert Coles put it in the early 1970s: ‘What Freud tried to do over a half century ago still is being done, sometimes under the name of psycho-history.’⁷⁷ Freud himself was very pleased with the work. In a letter to Lou Andreas Salomé he called it ‘the only beautiful thing I have ever written’.⁷⁸

For psychohistorians, the book achieved at least three important things: 1) It reconstructed (episodes from) Leonardo’s childhood and explained his adult behavior on the basis of these reconstructions; 2) It emphasised his sexual experience, both in adulthood and – in the specifically Freudian sense – in childhood. Freud wrote: ‘If a biographical effort really endeavors to penetrate the understanding of the psychic life of its hero it must not, as happens in most biographies through discretion or prudery, pass over in silence the sexual activity or

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 348

⁷⁵ Strozier, Charles B., and Daniel Offer. *The Leader: Psychohistorical Essays*. New York: Plenum Press, 1985. 22.

⁷⁶ Freud, Sigmund, James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. London: Hogarth Press, 1957. 60.

⁷⁷ Coles, Robert. ‘Shrinking History Part 1’. *New York Review of Books*, February 22, 1973.

⁷⁸ Strozier, Charles B., and Daniel Offer. *The Leader: Psychohistorical Essays*. New York: Plenum Press, 1985. 30.

the sex peculiarity of the one examined.’⁷⁹; 3) It linked Leonardo’s outstanding behavior and achievements with the vicissitudes of his desire, thereby establishing a connection between ‘pathology’ and ‘genius’, while at the same time problematising both categories. Freud later wrote: ‘belief in a stiff frame of normality and a sharp line of demarcation between normal and abnormal in the psychic life has long since been abandoned by our science.’⁸⁰ As we shall see in further chapters, many psychohistorians successfully reproduced the first two points. Some, however, found it irresistible to measure their subjects to an assumed standard of normality derived from present experience, thereby using psychoanalytic theory to pathologise them.

Freud’s *Group Psychology* was important because it opened up ways of thinking historically and psychoanalytically about the behaviour of groups, and thus transcend biography. History in general is concerned not only with individuals but rather with groups, large and small. Psychoanalysis as a discipline deals mostly with patients individually, sometimes with couples, and in rare cases with families and groups. *Group Psychology* was Freud’s attempt to show that psychoanalytic concepts could be successfully applied to an analysis of group behaviour. The *Group Psychology* book also addressed explicitly the problem of leader- and followership. In the book, Freud described his theory of the psychology of mass movements. He wrote: ‘The impulses which a group obeys may according to circumstances be generous or cruel, heroic or cowardly, but they are always so imperious that no personal interest, not even that of self-preservation, can make itself felt.’⁸¹ Crucially, Freud argued that the group-member’s superego could be replaced by the father-figure leader, so that self-criticism was virtually annihilated. Although this idea would become highly influential in psychohistorical leader-led analyses, especially of the Nazis, it was also limited and limiting. Psychohistorians John Demos and Bruce Mazlish concluded that: ‘To put the matter bluntly, Freud did not have a credible group psychology to apply to most historical materials.’⁸² Other psychohistorians agreed. To account for the subjectivity experienced in, and the behaviour of, groups, psychohistorians were forced to adopt or mint new concepts such as ‘psychic repository’, ‘symbolic field’, ‘social unconscious’, and even ‘racial unconscious’.⁸³

Moses and Monotheism was particularly influential because it showed that the subject-matter of psychoanalytic thought about the past was not always concrete fact, but could also be ‘past subjectivity’, or: myth, legend. Freud had intended his study to be called *Moses and Monotheism: A Historical Novel*, but had, in the end, decided against it.⁸⁴ The position that Freud adopted in the text problematised the historian’s search for an ‘objective’ account of the past. This position was highly influential among psychohistorians. Although he generally rejected some of Freud’s most fundamental assumptions, psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton would claim that *Moses and Monotheism* was one of psychohistory’s foundational texts.⁸⁵ Its emphasis on psychic reality allegedly inspired him to search for the symbolic expressions of

⁷⁹ Freud, Sigmund, James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Early Psycho-analytic Publications. Vol. 11, 1910, Five Lectures on Psycho-analysis, Leonardo Da Vinci and Other Works*. London: Vintage, 2001. 73.

⁸⁰ Freud, Sigmund, and William C. Bullitt. *Thomas Woodrow Wilson, Twenty-eighth President of the United States; a Psychological Study*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967. xiv.

⁸¹ Freud, Sigmund, James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, Alan Tyson, Sigmund Freud, and Sigmund Freud. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Early Psycho-analytic Publications. Vol. 18, 1920-1922, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works*. London: Vintage, 2001. 41.

⁸² Mazlish, Bruce, and John Demos. ‘Psychoanalytic Theory and History: Groups and Events’. *Annual of Psychoanalysis*, 1978. 41.

⁸³ See, for instance, the discussion of Joel Kovel’s work in Chapter Five.

⁸⁴ Lifton, Robert J. ‘On Psychohistory’, in *Explorations in Psychohistory: the Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975.

⁸⁵ Lifton, Robert J. ‘On the Nature of Psychohistorical Evidence’, in *Explorations in Psychohistory: the Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975.

people who had undergone shattering experiences such as thought reform and nuclear holocaust. History, for Lifton, had less to do with an accumulation of facts, and more with a critical examination of the changing symbolic structures and events that produced particular personalities and experiences at a given point in time. Lifton was not so much in search of facts, as of the symbolic expressions of the interpretation of facts. Similarly, historian Bruce Mazlish, although more conservative in his ideas about what history could be and do, acknowledged that Freud in *Moses and Monotheism* considerably extended the historian's toolkit, as he took the book to show that 'psychic facts' were also facts that a historian could lay bare.⁸⁶

Undoubtedly the most direct and lasting influence that Freud and his earliest followers' works had on psychohistory was through their take on biography. But not only Freud's own texts served as examples. Psychohistorians such as Strozier and Offer found inspiration in the largely forgotten work of Freud's earliest followers. 'Nevertheless,' they reminded their readers, 'it is worth remembering that Freud was the one with original ideas in the group.'⁸⁷

The Case of Young Amenhotep

Karl Abraham (1877-1925) was an important early follower of Freud. His theories about mother-infant interactions became highly influential in the development of post-Freudian psychoanalysis, especially in object-relations theory. In his lifetime, he was known as a staunch defender of Freud's work, especially of the libido theory and the theory of psychosexual development. Freud called him his 'Rocher de Bronze'.⁸⁸ Abraham became best known for his work on character formation, his extension of Freud's psychosexual phases, and his theories on the aetiology of depression. He also played an important part in bringing psychoanalysis to prewar Berlin, and helped promote and standardise psychoanalytic training.⁸⁹ In 1912, Freud's 'best pupil' published a detailed study of pharaoh Amenhotep IV in the first edition of *Imago - Zeitschrift für anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften* (later known as: *Natur- und Geisteswissenschaften*). Freud was very pleased with Abraham's work, and called the essay 'a new orientation' for psychoanalysis. Years later, psychohistorians Strozier and Offer called it the gem of early psychohistory.⁹⁰

Freud created *Imago* as the third official psychoanalytic periodical under his name. The other two journals were the successful *Jahrbuch für Psychoanalyse* and the *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse*. Hanns Sachs and Otto Rank were appointed as editors of the new publication. The two earlier journals were specifically oriented towards clinical applications and developments, while *Imago* served solely as a forum for dialogue with neighbouring fields. In a letter to FÉrenczi in 1911, Freud wrote that *Imago* was to be 'totally removed from medicine and dedicated to the literary, mythological, and philosophical applications of ΨA .'⁹¹ In the first decade of the journal's existence, only five out of 138 articles dealt directly with the application of psychoanalysis to history.⁹² Some of *Imago's* most notable early publications were Isidor

⁸⁶ See Chapter Four for a discussion of the similarities and differences between Lifton and Mazlish's interpretation of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*.

⁸⁷ Strozier, Charles B., and Daniel Offer. *The Leader: Psychohistorical Essays*. New York: Plenum Press, 1985. 24.

⁸⁸ Bentinck, Anna. 'Karl Abraham, een vergeten analyticus', *Tijdschrift voor Psychoanalyse*, No. 1, 2004.

⁸⁹ Makari, George. *Revolution in Mind: The Creation of Psychoanalysis*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008.

⁹⁰ Strozier, Charles B., and Daniel Offer. *The Leader: Psychohistorical Essays*. New York: Plenum Press, 1985. 30.

⁹¹ Letter from Sigmund Freud to Sándor Ferenczi, May 28, 1911. *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi Volume 1, 1908-1914*. 285-287.

⁹² Strozier, Charles B., and Daniel Offer. *The Leader: Psychohistorical Essays*. New York: Plenum Press, 1985.

Sadger's biographical portraits of poets, Ernest Jones' two-part article on the psychology of salt and Lou Andreas-Salomé's analysis of the 'female type'.

In his article, Abraham examined the short life of Egyptian king Amenhotep IV, who ascended the throne when he was only ten years old; proceeded to change entirely the face of Egyptian art, religion and culture; adopted the name Ikhnaton (after his new deity sun god Aton), and died at the age of twenty-eight.⁹³ Abraham based his analysis on two main sources: the 'Amarna-tablets', discovered in the Egyptian village of el-Amarna in 1880, and hieroglyphic texts, as well as on secondary literature. 'The works of Breasted and Weigall,' Abraham wrote, 'deserve particular mention in this connection.'⁹⁴ Abraham followed Weigall's arguments closely. Abraham reassured his readers that he was well aware of the difficulties involved in analysing a character so far removed from his and his readers' contexts. Yet he wrote with the firm conviction that 'a man living even so remote a cultural past was ruled by the same complexes, the same psychological mechanisms, as those which Freud and his school have discovered in contemporary men and women.'⁹⁵ Was Abraham writing a pathography? He wrote his article with a keen awareness of the political situation in Egypt at the time (around 1300 B.C.), and detailed knowledge of the function and role of art, of religion and of myth. Obviously, he was writing as a psychoanalyst, for psychoanalysts, with the conviction that psychoanalytic theory could, to some degree, be successfully carried over onto the study of history in order to provide new insight. In a letter to Freud, Abraham wrote:

I know that its theme will interest you: it is about Amenhotep IV and the Aton cult. The subject has a particular attraction for me—to analyse all the manifestations of repression and substitutive formation in a person who lived 3,300 years ago. The Oedipus complex, sublimation, reaction formations—all exactly as in a neurotic today.⁹⁶

It would seem that Abraham was looking for confirmation of Freud's theories in young Amenhotep, 'the first individual in history' as historian James Breasted referred to him. But Abraham's portrait did not provide a simple diagnosis, nor did he carelessly apply diagnostic labels. His Amenhotep, or Ikhnaton, emerged as a troubled young king who was married at the age of nine, who worshiped his beautiful mother, and who hated his brutal father, Amenhotep III. Abraham postulated that the young pharaoh must have had a particularly strong attachment to his mother, who served as regent-queen after the death of his father. The portrait-bust of queen Tiy in the Berlin Museum was so beautiful to him (see Fig. 1), 'so strikingly alive', that it led Abraham to the following conclusion: 'It must seem very plausible that the high-strung, sensitive son should have had a fixation on just this mother'.⁹⁷

⁹³ Many facts about Amenhotep's life are contested. Here we will follow the account given by Karl Abraham in 1912.

⁹⁴ Abraham, Karl. 'Amenhotep IV (Ikhnaton)'. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, Volume IV, October 1935. 537.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 538.

⁹⁶ Abraham Karl, and Sigmund Freud., ed. Ernst Falzeder. *The Complete Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham 1907-1925*. London: Karnac. 146.

⁹⁷ Abraham, Karl. 'Amenhotep IV (Ikhnaton)'. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, Volume IV, October 1935. 543.



Fig. 1. Queen Tiy, Berlin Museum

Ikhnaton's libidinal attachment to his mother, Abraham argued, was neatly shifted onto his wife. Contrary to custom, he did not take a harem, and he remained entirely faithful to his wife, Nefertiti, who bore him only daughters.⁹⁸ After Amenhotep III's death, queen Tiy had begun to favour the worship of Aton, the sun god, over the traditional deity Amon. But young Amenhotep carried this development further – replacing the gods of his ancestors with the single deity Aton, who came to be represented as a sun whose rays ended in hands embracing the king. Abraham concluded that the young king had symbolically replaced his father with a new, more loving one: the sun. This personal decision had major political consequences. At seventeen, Amenhotep moved the capital of Egypt some 450 kilometres north of Thebes. He gave the city the name Achetaton – horizon of Aton. In his attempt to break completely with previous religious tradition, Amenhotep had a completely new style of art created:

To one who knows Egyptian art certain peculiarities in the pictures of the king are conspicuous, distinguishing them at first sight from the works of the preceding period: the long drawn skull and neck, the protruding abdomen, and the over-long hips and thighs.⁹⁹

Abraham argued that: 'In order to accomplish such comprehensive reforms in the life of the people, the king required not only great energy, but also a practical sense which would enable him to take into account the forces that were certain to oppose him.'¹⁰⁰ But Ikhnaton lacked this capacity. During his brief reign, 'the young king remained a passive onlooker while the world empire which his predecessors had built up was falling to ruin. His greatness lay in

⁹⁸ Nefertiti, whose bust was recovered in the year that Abraham published his paper, also became world-famous for her extraordinary beauty. The object allegedly sparked an 'Egyptian craze' in women's fashion in the years following the discovery.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 547.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 563.

another realm—in the realm of ideas.’¹⁰¹ In Ikhnaton’s newly-founded religion, Abraham held, ‘probably for the first time in the history of the spiritual life of mankind, love is extolled as a world-conquering force.’¹⁰²

It would appear that Ikhnaton set up a cult of love. The only aggression in his reign, the psychoanalyst concluded, was aimed against his father. Priests of Amon were persecuted; his father’s name removed from all inscriptions. At the same time, the young king showered his wife with epithets such as ‘mistress of his happiness’, and sought to make propaganda for a new conception of marriage and the relations between men and women. He laid out gardens where he could enjoy the flowers and animals, and took a particular interest in music. But the more this allegedly effeminate king ‘effaced, in his idealism, the distance between himself and his people,’ Abraham judged, ‘the more he antagonized the priests of the old deity; the more radically he sought to execute his reforms, the more he lost his masses.’¹⁰³ Abraham told the story of a king whose neurosis made him lose the sway over his population. In his view, Ikhnaton ‘closed his ear to the cries for help from his Asiatic subjects and was blind to the horrors that were enacted in his provinces.’¹⁰⁴ As such, his paper became the story of how a man’s particular character structure made him unsuitable as a leader. Abraham’s interest was not only on the psychological mechanisms that Young Amenhotep allegedly displayed, he was also interested in showing the dynamics that were at play between a leader and his followers.

An interest in the specific qualities of a leader and the attraction for his followers would become crucial in the psychohistorians’ legendary history of psychohistory. In the psychohistorians’ accounts, Erik Erikson’s work would be distinguished from earlier applications of psychoanalytic thought to historical subjects, in particular in biographies, precisely for its strong emphasis on the role of a leader’s pathology and its resonance, or rather the lack thereof, with his or her followers.¹⁰⁵ This emphasis supposedly set Erikson’s work apart from the ‘applied psychoanalysis’ produced by the early Freudians; it justified the use of a new term for psychoanalytic history-writing: psychohistory. But in Abraham’s forays into Egyptology we see very similar concerns, problematising the sharp distinctions made by psychohistorians between psychohistory, pathography and (psycho-)biography.

A Disastrously Bad Book

While the psychohistorians may have ridiculed the early Freudians’ historical works for strategic purposes, Freud himself was more often than not exempted from criticism. ‘In the name of “applied psychoanalysis”,’ Robert Coles put it, ‘the lives of an assortment of political leaders, generals, artists and writers have been examined, and as one goes through those attempts, one keeps coming back to [Freud’s] Leonardo study – and to Freud’s superior qualities as a thinker and writer.’¹⁰⁶ But as we have seen, not all of the work done by Freud’s early followers amounted to uncritical applications of Freud’s ideas, and neither was all of Freud’s work brilliantly innovative. In the latter case, there was one notable exception that even the psychohistorians could not overlook: *Thomas Woodrow Wilson: Twenty-eighth President of the United States - A Psychological Study*. Freud co-authored the book with William Bullitt, a diplomat and his former analysand. It was published posthumously in the United States in 1967, to devastating reviews. William C. Bullitt worked as an American diplomat and foreign

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 538.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 558.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 563.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 564.

¹⁰⁵ See for example: Pomper, Philip. *The Structure of Mind in History: Five Major Figures in Psychohistory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

¹⁰⁶ Coles, Robert. ‘Shrinking History Part 1’. *The New York Review of Books*, February 22, 1973.

correspondent in Europe under President Woodrow Wilson. He was also a novelist, known for his scathing lampoonings of the American elite. In 1926, *The New York Times* wrote about Bullitt's novel, *It's Not Done*: 'It is a volley, a propaganda novel, directed against a single institution, the American aristocratic ideal, and whose defect is that the smoke does not quite clear away so that one can accurately count the corpses.'¹⁰⁷ Bullitt was analysed by Freud in the 1920s. After the analysis, Freud and Bullitt agreed to write a psychoanalytic study of President Wilson together – Bullitt was to provide the data on Wilson's life, and Freud and Bullitt would together write an analysis of his personality.

The response to *Woodrow Wilson* amounted to no less than widespread disavowal, bordering on pandemonium. On its publication, the American Psychoanalytic Association discussed denying Freud's authorship of the book as a possible PR strategy.¹⁰⁸ Erik Erikson suggested in *The New York Review of Books* that Freud could have only agreed to such a 'disastrously bad' publication because Bullitt helped him and his family flee the Nazis.¹⁰⁹ Anna Freud reportedly 'disliked the book' as soon as she read it. She 'had hopes that it could be changed to a large extent. This proved impossible.'¹¹⁰ In a review, historian A.J.P. Taylor wondered: 'How did anyone ever manage to take Freud seriously?'¹¹¹

Publishers marketed the book as 'Freud's only study of a politician of his own time.'¹¹² Psychohistorians, aware of the importance of this document for their budding movement, were keen to show that Freud could not have been the author of certain passages. John Voss, the executive officer of the American Association of Arts and Sciences, who had just procured a large grant for the upcoming two Wellfleet psychohistory gatherings, wrote in a letter to Erikson: 'I suggested to Bruce [Mazlish] that it might be interesting to do a computer-word analysis of the text to find out how much of it was Freud and how much of it was Bullitt. My guess would be that the actual author of 90% of the volume would be the latter.' In his introduction to the book, Freud clearly stated: 'For the analytic part we are both equally responsible; it has been written by us working together.' It is significant that the Bullitt-Freud book appeared in 1967. The first Wellfleet psychohistory gathering was held in 1966, and interest in the application of psychoanalytic thought to history was growing steadily around that time.¹¹³ Psychohistorians were afraid that the publication of the book would endanger their movement. *Woodrow Wilson* became an example of how psychohistory should not be written. Stylistically speaking, the book is weak: the tone is hostile and at points contrived. In content, however, it does not essentially differ much from Freud's earlier work. Much as in Freud's Leonardo piece, Bullitt and Freud reconstructed Wilson's childhood, and from there analysed his behaviour as President. It seems likely that Freud did in fact have something to do with the analysis, and that the book was later re-written by Bullitt. The authors focused specifically on Wilson's relationship with his father:

The outlets employed by Wilson's Ego for his passivity to his father were all outlets approved by his Super-Ego. His chief outlet was through direct submission to the will of his father. He did what his father wanted him to do and did not do what his father

¹⁰⁷ Review: *It's Not Done*. *The New York Times*, April 11, 1926.

¹⁰⁸ 'Annual Meetings—May, 1967'. *Bulletin of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 23. 887-906. Review of William Bullitt and Sigmund Freud, Thomas Woodrow Wilson: A Psychological Study (1967), in *The New Statesman and Nation*, May 12, 1967, 653-54.

¹⁰⁹ Erikson, Erik H. 'The Strange Case of Freud, Bullitt, and Woodrow Wilson: I'. *The New York Review of Books*, February 9, 1967.

¹¹⁰ Letter from Anna Freud to Paul Roazen, dated March 15, 1967. Quoted in Dufresne, Todd. *Freud Under Analysis: History, Theory, Practice: Essays in Honor of Paul Roazen*, London: Jaron Aronson Inc., 1997. 282.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Gay, Peter. *Freud for Historians*. Oxford: Oxford University Press., 1985. 93.

¹¹² *Psyche. Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse*, 62. 2008. 61.

¹¹³ For a more detailed discussion, see Chapters Three and Four.

did not want him to do. He accepted his father's thoughts without question and his father's leadership with adoration.¹¹⁴

As Erikson remarked in his review of the book, it is unlike Freud to speak about the ego in hydraulic terms such as 'outlets', and yet the theory applied is solidly Freudian. The book is centred around Wilson's compromise of the Fourteen Points and his acceptance of the Versailles Treaty:

His (Wilson's) mental life from April to September 1919, when he collapsed completely and permanently, was a wild flight from fact. The mental disintegration is an additional indication that in the second week of April 1919 he could not face his femininity and fear but merely embraced with finality the rationalizations which enabled him to avoid looking at the truth. At the crisis of his life he was in fact overwhelmed once more by his passivity to his father and by fear. He seems never to have let his knowledge of this fact rise into his consciousness. It seems clear that when he decided to allow the Fourteen Points to be transformed into the Treaty of Versailles he was conscious of only the most noble motives. He betrayed the trust of the world as a matter of principle.¹¹⁵

In an extensive review of the book in the *New York Review of Books*, Erikson grudgingly agreed with Freud and Bullitt's interpretation. 'For one does find in the lives of a number of men and women of messianic bent and historic performance a comparable relation of parent and child, which makes it incumbent on the child to fulfill the parent's ideal image and to redeem his own shortcomings.'¹¹⁶ Some of these more primitive dynamics, Erikson held, were correctly suggested in the book. 'Yet the decisive factors in any historical study are not only how the parent could coerce the child, and the child convince the parent,' he thought, 'but how the child became a man who could make his contemporaries believe that he was filling a place in history, that he was a principle force in history.'¹¹⁷ In Freud and Bullitt's book, Erikson recognised the biographical truth, but missed the sociological and historical context to Wilson's life. It was only through the achievements of ego psychology, and Erikson's own identity concept, that he felt that these fields were successfully married to a psychoanalytic viewpoint. By properly embedding the psychoanalytic actor in his or her historical context, Erikson sought to find out why a person became attractive as a leader to his or her followers.¹¹⁸

Hitler's Doctors – the 1930s

Erikson was by no means the first to be interested in such problems. Psychoanalytic investigations into the dynamics between messianic leaders and followers took flight in the 1930s. The first significant wave of applications of psychoanalytic thought to historical events undoubtedly came with the rise of Nazism. Historian Daniel Pick has recently shown how psychoanalysis engaged with Nazism extensively in the years leading up to, during, and directly after the war.¹¹⁹ He showed that psychoanalytic studies received widespread attention

¹¹⁴ Freud, Sigmund, and William C. Bullitt. *Woodrow Wilson: A Psychological Study* (1966). New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1999. 65.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 264.

¹¹⁶ Erikson, Erik H. 'The Strange Case of Freud, Bullitt, and Woodrow Wilson: I', *The New York Review of Books*, February 9, 1967.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ See Chapter Two.

¹¹⁹ See Pick, Daniel. *The Pursuit of the Nazi Mind: Hitler, Hess, and the Analysts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

for the first time in this period, and occasionally even government funding. Similarly, the psychohistorians put a lot of weight on this period in their reconstructions and prehistories. In their view, it seems that Nazism and World War II prepared the world for psychohistory. Psychohistorian Peter Loewenberg judged that it was ‘The first systematic large-scale application of the social and behavioral sciences to a current historical problem.’¹²⁰ Louise Hoffman even claimed that ‘psychobiography – in the sense of a sustained, systematic, and intensive scrutiny of an individual life – may be said to have emerged out of psychoanalytic investigations of Adolf Hitler and his contemporaries.’¹²¹ When asked what spurred the sudden increase in interest about the application of psychoanalysis in the 1950s, Bruce Mazlish answered simply: ‘the war.’¹²²

Freud did not offer a specific analysis of Nazism at the time. Although it has been argued that *Moses and Monotheism* was a covert attempt at evaluating the tradition of Jewish thought on the eve of World War II, by this time Freud was too old and sick to concern himself with political affairs directly.¹²³ As a prominent Jew his concerns about the rise of fascism were practical, not theoretical. But his immediate followers were quick to respond to the fascist threat by making use of psychoanalytic thought. Hitler and his movement appeared so outrageous - and so dangerous - that the unconscious became a helpful, if not necessary, category to explain them. Franz Alexander said of fascism that it could not ‘be understood in terms of common sense or indeed of consciousness at all’.¹²⁴ At times these psychoanalytic critiques of Nazism were coupled with an explicit political stance. The psychoanalytic rebel Wilhelm Reich published his book *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* in 1933, in which he argued that the repression of childhood sexual impulses led to a susceptibility to authoritarian thinking. ‘At first,’ he wrote, ‘the child has to submit to the structure of the authoritarian miniature state, the family; this makes it capable of later subordination to the general authoritarian system.’¹²⁵ For his communist sympathies, Reich was banned from the International Psychoanalytic Association; for his criticism of Stalin he was ousted from the German Communist Party.¹²⁶ What Reich’s case shows is that psychoanalytic theory could be successfully adopted to serve various political positions, including those on the far left.

Concern about Hitler’s mental stability was expressed in the American media at the time, and is evidence of the fact that there was a demand for psychological explanations of Nazism. As early as 1922, Cyril Brown of the *New York Times* credited Hitler with ‘extraordinary powers of swaying crowds to his will’.¹²⁷ A review of a non-psychoanalytic biography of Hitler quoted the author as diagnosing its subject with a ‘split-personality’ in 1936.¹²⁸ In 1938, *The New Republic* published an article entitled ‘Is Hitler Crazy?’ And a well-

¹²⁰ Quoted in: Hoffman, Louise E. ‘Psychoanalytic Interpretations of Adolph Hitler and Nazism, 1933-1945: A Prelude to Psychohistory’. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 11, No. 1, Fall 1982. 68.

¹²¹ Hoffman, Louise E. ‘Psychoanalytic Interpretations of Adolph Hitler and Nazism, 1933-1945: A Prelude to Psychohistory’. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 11, No. 1, Fall 1982. 70.

¹²² Personal communication with Mazlish, January 15, 2014.

¹²³ Zaretsky, Eli. *Political Freud: A History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. 108.

¹²⁴ Quoted in: Hoffman, Louise E. ‘Psychoanalytic Interpretations of Adolph Hitler and Nazism, 1933-1945: A Prelude to Psychohistory’. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 11, No. 1, Fall 1982. 69.

¹²⁵ Reich, Wilhelm. *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*. New York: Orgone Institute Press, 1946. 28.

¹²⁶ See Makari, George. *Revolution in Mind: The Creation of Psychoanalysis*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008.

¹²⁷ Brown, Cyril. ‘New Popular Idol Rises in Bavaria: Hitler Credited With Extraordinary Powers of Swaying Crowds To His Will’. *The New York Times*, November 21, 1922.

¹²⁸ M’Cormick, Anne O’Hare. ‘Two Brilliantly Revealing Accounts of Hitler’s Life; The Books of Heiden and Olden Should Be Read for the Light They Cast on Contemporary Germany’. *The New York Times*, May 24, 1936.

known book at the time was *Inside Hitler*, by Kurt Krüger; later editions of that book were published under the title *I was Hitler's Doctor*.¹²⁹

The theories of psychoanalysis – especially Freud's reformulations of his theory in the 1920s – slotted into the confusion and cultural malaise of the times. His concepts of id, ego and superego, proposed in *The Ego and the Id* in 1923, provided a schema that was easily applicable (and just as easily misapplied) to contemporary persons and situations. As Daniel Pick put it: 'Under-achievers, over-achievers, criminals, religious devotees, obsessive hand-washers, manic party-goers or depressed recluses, tyrants, gang-leaders, "slavishly" acquiescent fascist followers, and any number of other people could be thought about in relation to the strength, weakness, and particular timbre of the superego.'¹³⁰ Similarly, the irrational anger and perverse pleasure inherent in the National Socialist doctrine could be explained by the unruly drives contained in the id. Generally speaking, however, psychoanalyses of National Socialism and Hitler at the time were hasty generalisations based upon scant material. But psychoanalysts argued that in applying their methods to current events and personalities, the benefits outweighed the theoretical problems. Nazism was an evil that needed uprooting, and psychoanalysis was one way of showing just how 'sick' the ideology and its followers were. British psychoanalyst Edward Glover called these works 'tracts for the times', and acknowledged that they were far from objective.¹³¹ Many of the authors were political refugees themselves, personally threatened by the Nazis and politically active. Some of the early cases of applied psychoanalysis were in fact political statements cloaked in psychoanalytic terminology.

An early example of how the psychoanalytic theory was put to work in service of political ideas was the book *Subconscious Europe*. It was published in 1931 by an author named Fedor Vergin. Very little is known about both the author and work. In the book, Vergin gave a typology of the unconscious of different nations. He applied psychoanalytic theory to wide range of phenomena: political figures such as Hitler and Wilhelm II, nations such as Britain, Austria and Hungary, and political ideologies such as socialism and fascism.¹³²

The author argued that every European citizen inherited psychological inhibitions distinctive of his or her nation, and was raised to believe in specific semi-religious conceptions. On top of this, he believed in a primitive magic that – all taken together – Vergin thought produced particular complexes, mass-illusions, and collective hallucinations. As these illusions differed for every European nation, they also differed for every national group. 'The British,' Vergin wrote, 'do not aspire to be different. They comply happily, and with a sense of humour, always poking fun at themselves, but never giving up on their mental ideals. In this they are like no other nation on earth.'¹³³ Only a few heroic ('rational') political leaders were able to transcend their national pathologies in order to strive for health: a unified Europe. Vergin was probably the first psychoanalytic author to pathologise Hitler. He judged that Hitler's ideology was based on two pathological female images – the pure mother and the loose woman. Hitler's representation of Germany oscillated between a 'pure motherland' and a submissive mass that would bend to any strong man's will.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Hoffman, Louise E. 'Psychoanalytic Interpretations of Adolph Hitler and Nazism, 1933-1945: A Prelude to Psychohistory. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 11, No. 1, Fall 1982. 83.

¹³⁰ Pick, Daniel. *The Pursuit of the Nazi Mind: Hitler, Hess, and the Analysts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 19.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Vergin, Fedor. *Das Unbewusste Europa. Psychoanalyse der europäischen Politik*. Wien-Leipzig: J. Hess&Co. Verlag, 1931.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 212.

¹³⁴ Stam, A. 'De Medische en Psychologische beoordeling van Hitler, Een bibliografische verkenning met historische kanttekeningen'. *Tijdschrift voor Psychiatrie*, No. 10, 1979. 516.

Vergin was concerned with the political developments in Europe, and his book was an appeal for a unified continent, clothed in psychoanalytic jargon. He drew on Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious and William McDougall's concept of the group mind. 'A political idea like that of the United States of Europe,' he wrote, 'suffers from the lack of essential psychological conditions and propaganda on its behalf. It is rendered useless by ignorance of psychoanalysis.'¹³⁵ He outlined the catastrophes which would result if his psychoanalytic utopia was not brought about: Europe would soon find itself rushing into a 'fresh nationalist war with the same fresh, and to many, quite inexplicable transports of joy, which it displayed in 1914.'¹³⁶ *Subconscious Europe* ended with 'a testamentary greeting to future explorers in the European desert'. The Europeans, Vergin prophesied, would have gone to their foolish graves as they resisted understanding their own contradictions.¹³⁷ In further chapters we will see that this pathologising function of psychohistory was used in a similar way in the 1960s and 70s by authors with different political agendas. The idea that nations have an unconscious would be revisited by the controversial psychohistorian Lloyd deMause in his last book, *The Emotional Life of Nations* (2002).

Frank Manuel: Psychohistory for Historians

Frank Manuel was Professor of History at New York University and Brandeis. He was part of the early Wellfleet psychohistory gatherings, and became known as a scholar of utopian thought. In 1971, the same year that Mack published his article advocating psychohistory for psychoanalysts, Manuel published an article entitled 'The Use and Abuse of Psychology in History'. It focused on the last hundred years of the intersection between psychology and history, no less: 'when both disciplines have become mammoth academic enterprises, whose cohabitation, some might say, is doomed to sterility from the outset, like the improbable mating of a whale and an elephant.'¹³⁸ He hoped that 'perhaps at the end I may find a place for myself, and, who knows, others might be willing to join me even if it means standing midstream in rather shallow waters.'¹³⁹

Confusing metaphors aside, Manuel's paper was a crucial contribution to psychohistory's legendary beginnings. It was aimed at historians, not psychoanalysts. In his sweeping account, he summarised the more prominent interactions between psychology and history from a historical perspective. 'More and more,' he began, 'I see Giambattista Vico, that lone Italian who lived in Naples from 1668 to 1744, as the bold conceptualizer of this new historical consciousness.'¹⁴⁰ By this new consciousness Manuel meant, 'a specific attunement in history to psychological problems'.¹⁴¹ An attunement that Manuel was undoubtedly hoping to reawaken in his colleagues. He went on to trace the intersections of history and psychology from Vico to Herder, to Hegel, whose contribution to the development of a psychological history lay less in his characterisation of the stages in the development of spirit; more in his description of the master-slave dialectic, and his use of the term *Entfremdung* - alienation, which had a profound influence on both Kierkegaard and Marx, and which had been 'inflated as the central psychological distinction of modern consciousness'.¹⁴²

¹³⁵ Vergin, Fedor, tr. Raglan Somerset. *Subconscious Europe*. London: J. Cape, 1932.

¹³⁶ Quoted in Passerini, Luisa. *Europe in Love, Love in Europe: Imagination and Politics between the Wars*. Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1999. 90.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Manuel, Frank. 'The Use and Abuse of Psychology in History'. Reprinted in: *Daedalus*, Volume 117. No. 3, 1988. 199.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 201.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 203.

In Manuel's mind, the nineteenth century had meant a breakthrough for psychological history. At the time, he felt, psychology 'began to achieve a measure of recognition as an autonomous science in the German academic world'.¹⁴³ And with this recognition came an interest in what the budding field had to offer to scholars of other stripes. In time, Manuel stressed, historians Wilhelm Dilthey and Lucien Febvre, unaware of each other's works, both became committed to a fusion of psychology and history (although, Manuel notes, they meant something very different when they spoke about psychology) and both were more influential for the movements they inspired than their own work in psychological history ever was (In Dilthey's case: Troeltsch, Meinecke and Heidegger; for Febvre the *Annales*-school). And while the Germans tended to be 'impressionistic' in their use of psychology, the French had insisted on positivistic rigor. 'Both, of course, were totally untouched by such outrageous novelties as the doctrines of their contemporary, Sigmund Freud. As for the historical forays of Freud himself and his immediate disciples, they rarely came within the purview of the academic historians of any country at this period'.¹⁴⁴ Febvre had touched upon Freud and Luther: 'Let us frankly abandon the effort to reconstruct Luther's early surroundings [...] A Freudian Luther is so easy to imagine that one feels not the least curiosity or wish to prosecute the acquaintance when an investigator undertakes to delineate him.'¹⁴⁵ And so Manuel's paper neatly ended with Erik Erikson, his successful application of psychoanalytic thought to Martin Luther in *Young Man Luther*, and the promise of psychohistory. By 'joining forces with Freudian ego psychologists,' Erikson had 'struck off in a truly new direction of psychological history and in the sixties popularized the term *psychohistory*.'¹⁴⁶ And with Erikson, Manuel felt 'the analytic method applied to history has received its most subtle exemplification.'¹⁴⁷ But there was work to be done. 'The austere and rigorous criteria for 'psychohistorical evidence' that Erikson had proposed, 'are not always observed in practice.'¹⁴⁸

Interdisciplinary Boundaries

In both Mack's and Manuel's accounts, Erikson's work was perceived as the beginning of something new. And in both accounts, ego psychology was packaged as a novel and somehow more acceptable form of psychoanalysis than Freud's original drive theories. Yet, Manuel constructed his account in such a way that Erikson's work was viewed as the outgrowth of historical authors concerned with psychological problems, while Mack situated him in relation to the tradition begun with what he thought of as psychoanalytic 'pathography'. In truth, Erikson used conventional historical techniques and appropriated parts of accepted psychoanalytic theory for his books on Gandhi and Luther; in the process he created a new genre of psychoanalytic literature.

Because he worked rigorously within both traditions, psychohistorians coming from both backgrounds were able to claim Erikson as an ancestor. But this also posed methodological problems for his followers: were they historians primarily, or psychologists? Manuel was concerned about the state of psychohistory after Erikson. Too many examples of psychohistory were irresponsible applications of psychological thought to historical characters and situations. Manuel's text was clearly an attempt to mine the historiographical past for better examples. By showing that even the great names in history had taken up positions vis-à-vis psychological problems in their field, he was hoping to find acceptance among his

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 203-204.

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.* 206.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 209.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

contemporary colleagues for the psychohistorical project, and to promote a more historically oriented psychohistory. But because Manuel painted in such broad strokes, it is hard to distinguish what earlier interactions were of actual importance to the development of psychohistory, and what were simply cases of historical authors thinking along vaguely psychological lines. What his account did make clear was that there was a long-standing tradition of engagement with psychological questions in history. And because of this, in his own way, Manuel was – like his predecessors of the New History movement – arguing against the departmentalisation of American history. He showed that historians had always engaged with problems on the intersections of different fields – in this case of history and psychology.

He was not preaching to deaf ears. In fact, American historiography at the time was becoming increasingly interdisciplinary. Horn and Ritter (1980) have shown that the growing interest in the use of behavioural and social sciences in the field of history in the USA was spurred in part by a series of reports prepared by social-scientifically oriented historians for the Social Science Research Council in 1946, 1954, and 1963. The interest in communication with other disciplines that the documents spurred, in turn helped feed the growth of so-called ‘area studies’ in the 1950s and 60s, in which scholars from different backgrounds came together to study particular regions of the world. The development of this trend was sponsored by the American government, who heavily promoted cross-disciplinary teamwork at the time. Although the original practitioners of psychohistory were inspired more by developments in psychoanalysis than in contemporary historiography – as we shall see in further chapters – the initial warm response to the psychohistorians’ cross-fertilisation of psychology and history can be traced to a wide-spread belief in the scientific validity of psychoanalytic theories, and a general curiosity about the possibilities of interdisciplinary history. And as we shall see, an important strand of psychohistory was influenced by similar interdisciplinary, government-led investigations during World War II.

This interdisciplinary emphasis coincided with a general shift of focus in the humanities at large during the 1960s and 70s. As Francois Cusset has argued, universities in the United States started adopting a more open stance towards ‘counter-cultural’ theory in order to neutralise student protests.¹⁴⁹ French theory and post-Marxist thought appeared in para-academic journals in the USA around this time, while post-political interpretations of Derrida and Deleuze were gradually incorporated in university curricula as a politically neutral alternative to Marxism. Journals of the intellectual Left such as the *Partisan Review* and *Telos* presented authors such as Baudrillard as heirs to the Frankfurt School. Sanitised versions of European critical thought were becoming increasingly popular in the United States. The receptivity to European thought and the emphasis on interdisciplinarity coincided in the American scholarly engagement with the *Annales* school. From the 1960s onwards, a large number of American scholars became enthralled by the interdisciplinarity of the *Annales* historians as they posed a challenge to the ‘great man’ paradigm in history, and confronted the positivism latent in American historiography. In 1966, Mazlish wrote of the *Annales*: ‘*Annales*, that wonderful periodical, is aware of the interconnectedness of psychological history with studies in demography, social history, and economic history.’¹⁵⁰ A number of questions and concerns raised by the work of the *Annales* historians were mirrored in the works of the psychohistorians, and they were frequently mentioned in the same breath. For example: on the 3rd of July 1971, *The New York Times* reported on a new development in historiography: ‘Armed with computers, statistics, psychoanalysis, sampling techniques, economic models and other tools of modern social science, younger historians have established a wide beachhead in

¹⁴⁹ Cusset, François. *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

¹⁵⁰ Mazlish, Bruce. ‘Inside the Whales’. *Times Literary Supplement*, July 28, 1966. 667.

the discipline.’¹⁵¹ The author, Robert Reinhold, traced this interdisciplinary tendency in history back to Marc Bloch and the *Annales* school.

There were striking similarities in approach between the psychohistorians and the *Annales* historians. The *Annales* school used concepts of ‘mentalities’, which the founder Marc Bloch defined as ‘both a cognitive and an emotional structure, a system of representations but also a receptacle for unconscious images that overwhelm the social actor more than they inform him’.¹⁵² This concept would resonate in the psychohistorians’ use of terms such as ‘social unconscious’, ‘racial unconscious’ and ‘symbolic structures’. Another important similarity was the emphasis on the problems and possibilities of historical presentism. As André Burguière who was a prominent member of the *Annales* school himself has argued, for the *Annales* historians, ‘the historian is taken into account not because of the psychological peculiarities of his personality and his sense of individuality but because he belongs to the present. It is that place within the present, through the culture and the preoccupations of his era, that guides the historian in apprehending and questioning the past.’¹⁵³

But some psychohistorians went even further. For many of them, it was exactly the acceptance of the role of the historian’s unconscious and his ‘transference’ to the subject – playing a role in the seeking out, presentation, and interpretation of the subject – which served as liberating ideas. These ideas led the psychohistorians towards an analysis of the personality of the historian, and also of his or her upbringing and context. Paradoxically, for many of the psychohistorians, this meant including a form of self-reflection in the process of writing up history in order to achieve a degree of objectivity. Erikson developed these ideas with his suggestions of cultivating a ‘disciplined subjectivity’ towards the historical subject and process, and Peter Loewenberg made them explicit in his papers on historical transference. In this they were closer to E.H. Carr, who said: ‘When we take up a work of history, our first concern should be not with the facts which it contains but with the historian who wrote it. [...] Study the historian before you begin to study the facts.’¹⁵⁴ By bringing up the inevitable subjectification of the past by the present, the psychohistorians entered a discussion that went back as far as the late nineteenth century, from Dilthey to R.G. Collingwood and Benedetto Croce, who wrote: ‘The practical requirements which underlie every historical judgment give to all history the character of “contemporary history”, because, however remote in time events there recounted may seem to be, the history in reality refers to present needs and present situations wherein those events vibrate.’¹⁵⁵

These psychohistorians contributed to the debate in historiography on the problem of objectivity. Most psychohistorians were not philosophers, however, and many of their assumptions about writing history were simply handed down from their particular education and traditions. Like most academic historians, the majority of the psychohistorians had no philosophical training, and were only indirectly interested in questions about objectivity and truth. This meant that they did not rigorously hold to the principles that they themselves advocated.

A discussion of the psychohistorians’ attitude towards the problem of objectivity is important because the anti-realist consequences of psychoanalytic thought made psychohistory unappealing to professional historians. Ranke’s age-old injunction that historiography involves

¹⁵¹ Reinholds, Robert. ‘Historians Find Fresh Answers with Tools of Social Science; Historians Finding Fresh Answers with New Tools’. *The New York Times*, July 3, 1971.

¹⁵² Burguière, André. *The Annales School: An Intellectual History*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009. 210.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* 23.

¹⁵⁴ Carr, Edward H. *What Is History? The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures Delivered in the University of Cambridge January-March 1961*. London: Macmillan, 1977. 23.

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Turner, Bryan S. *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2009. 406.

finding out about the past ‘as it was’ had led to a paradigm in American historiography that held that objectivity was an essential characteristic of historiography. Some presuppositions of psychoanalysis – that the observer is always in some way (consciously or not) involved in his or her subject – problematised this position, which was prevalent throughout American historiography throughout the twentieth century.¹⁵⁶ Some psychohistorians believed that by using the ‘scientific’ theories of psychoanalysis to understand one’s own unconscious relation to the subject and the psychology of the historical actor, one could achieve a greater degree of objectivity. Others believed that the anti-realist consequences of psychoanalytic history justified taking up a moral position.¹⁵⁷ Some psychohistorians, such as Peter Gay, proposed that psychohistorians should themselves undergo psychoanalysis.¹⁵⁸ Others proposed that only a full psychoanalytic training could prepare one to write decent psychohistory. Others again believed that psychoanalytic training would stand in the way of a proper historical perspective. For others still, the transference towards one’s subject problematised the notion of objectivity in history-writing altogether. From this perspective, a historical study was at best a form of imaginative literature; at worst a symptom, with historical facts serving as manifest content in a dream-like expression of the author’s unconscious. This brought some of the psychohistorians’ concepts of truth close to what historian Hayden White called ‘poetic truth’.¹⁵⁹

The Optative Mood – the 1960s and 1970s

The concept *Entfremdung*, whose origins Manuel located in Kierkegaard and Marx, was also to play an important role in the history of psychohistory. Along with shifting conceptions of health and illness in the 1960s and 70s came a growing emphasis on the influence of societal demands on the formation of neuroses; psychohistory increasingly became a vehicle for emancipatory movements that ‘diagnosed’ society as sick or alienated, and were at pains to remedy it.

This trend was an outgrowth of the influence and the growing popularity of the Frankfurt School, especially its best-known American representatives (Adorno and Horkheimer, Fromm, and Marcuse). Peter Loewenberg was inspired by Adorno, and attended a lecture by him on the future of psychoanalysis in Berlin as a student.¹⁶⁰ His *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), co-authored with Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford, was an influential study that broke new ground in the general application of psychology to political questions. In the introduction to his pioneering volume *Psychoanalysis and History* (1963), Bruce Mazlish approvingly quoted Herbert Marcuse, and hailed him as one of ‘a number of writers on Freud who have sought recently to go beyond the master himself and to hold out the hope of mankind freeing itself from the curse of repression.’¹⁶¹ Although his own interpretation and use of Freud was far more conventional than Marcuse’s, Mazlish was keen to include him in the pantheon of writers who had paved the way for psychohistory. Psychohistorian Robert Lifton, several years later, was not so inclined:

¹⁵⁶ Novick, Peter. *That Noble Dream: The "objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

¹⁵⁷ See Chapter Three.

¹⁵⁸ See Chapter Five.

¹⁵⁹ Muchowski, Jakub. ‘I am not interested in truth. I am interested in Reality. A conversation with Hayden White’. *Historyka. Studia Metodologiczne*, Special Issue, 2012.

¹⁶⁰ See Chapter Four.

¹⁶¹ Mazlish, Bruce. *Psychoanalysis and History*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963. 11.

To me, Marcuse has always been kind of an enigma in his psychological perspective, because he maintains a more or less instinctual, Freudian position in his large projection of society and his notion of repression and surplus repression. Then, in *One Dimensional Man*, he reverts to an almost nonpsychological method in order to make a very strong psychological statement. That is, a society of such rigidly fixed and functional institutions in advanced capitalism, our present society, creates men and women who are mirror images of their institutions. My impression of the way things are happening in this country is rather the reverse, in which not only is man much more Protean, but even those who are constricted, and who come closest to Marcuse's definition, are in a kind of despair and conflict.¹⁶²

This quote was taken from the minutes of an early Wellfleet meeting, where Norman Birnbaum led a discussion about the relationship between critical theory and psychohistory. For Birnbaum, a well-known sociologist, psychohistory represented the natural outgrowth of critical theory. To him, psychohistory was a form of Marxism without its prophetic aspect: stripped of its implicit view of an immaculate human nature corrupted by the division of labour. Psychohistory was not only a mode for the understanding of history, but a modern interpretation of the task of critical theory. He mused that psychoanalysis had 'an Old Testament-like, awful, moral lesson: that all humans must suffer, that life is hard and unremitting, and that health consists in the ability to comprehend and understand that these blows are inevitable.'¹⁶³ Stanley Edgar Hyman, a literary critic for the *Partisan Review*, expressed a similar view several years before: 'Insofar as [psychoanalysis] is a philosophic view of man and body that can be turned on any area of culture (that is what Freud called 'applied psychoanalysis'), it is gloomy, stoic, and essentially tragic.'¹⁶⁴ With all attempts at the concretisation of Marxist utopia defeated, Birnbaum wrote: 'The failure of Marxist prophecy, the verification of the Freudian one, are the elements of a dreadful secular eschatology. We are parts of a humanity caught in an unending cycle of exploitation, domination, repression and pain.'¹⁶⁵ Under this banner, psychoanalysis promised a more intricate, yet pessimistic, psychology that could be applied to other fields such as the social sciences and history. But Birnbaum also found that Freud's hopes for psychoanalysis contained 'an idea of liberating therapy – not just for individual patients, but for a reeducated humanity.' Similarly, Hyman wrote:

If Freud produced a climate of opinion in which tragedy could again flourish, an important group of followers in this country, the 'neo-Freudians' or 'revisionists', have done their best to dispel it as quickly as possible. In half a century of existence, psychoanalysis has raced through the whole religious cycle from revolutionary prophetic truth to smug Sunday sermon, and almost as soon as Freud's philosophy began to have an effect on our culture it was hushed up and denied in his name. The revisionists, principally the late Karen Horney, Erich Fromm, and the late Harry Stack Sullivan, along with a number of others of similar views, have put Freudian psychoanalysis into what Emerson called the 'optative mood'.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Lifton, Robert J. *Explorations in Psychohistory: The Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974. 203.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* 183.

¹⁶⁴ Hyman, Stanley E. 'Freud and the Climate of Tragedy'. *Partisan Review*, Spring 1956. 201.

¹⁶⁵ Lifton, Robert J. *Explorations in Psychohistory: The Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974. 194.

¹⁶⁶ Hyman, Stanley E. 'Freud and the Climate of Tragedy'. *Partisan Review*, Spring 1956. 203.

And indeed, this paradox was visible in much of the work produced under the label psychohistory – especially the work that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s; this shows the plasticity of the theories of psychoanalysis and psychohistory. Birnbaum and Hyman were not impressed with the New Left and popular political engagement. Birnbaum wrote: ‘It seems to me that the theory of the counterculture is a curious parody of a fused and undigested Freudo-Marxism.’¹⁶⁷ Instead, he explained the rise of psychohistory out of the failure of Marxism’s view of man. Undeterred by Birnbaum’s pessimism, psychohistory developed into a vehicle for the emancipation of excluded peoples in the 1970s. At the same time, the best-known representative of Freudo-Marxism in the United States, Erich Fromm, bitterly claimed that he was in fact the true founder of psychohistory.¹⁶⁸ Historians of psychohistory Pietikainen and Ihanus have suggested that Erikson was inspired to write his analysis of Hitler on the basis of Fromm’s *Escape from Freedom* (1941), which included a chapter on Hitler’s character. Erikson had certainly read the book, and admitted that he had learned much from it, but he nowhere commented on this connection, nor did he acknowledge any influence. Erikson had visited Fromm several times with his wife Joan during the period when he was working on *Young Man Luther*, but from all accounts it seems that there was little discussion of ideas.¹⁶⁹ When Fromm received a copy of the *Wellfleet Papers*, a collection of essays presented at the early Wellfleet Psychohistory Gatherings in 1975, he wrote to his friend David Riesman:

I was surprised to find that in Lifton’s presentation the impression is given that he and Erikson discovered psycho-history in the 50s or 60s, I forget at the moment when, and that the fact is not mentioned that I started psycho-historical research back in the early thirties with ‘The Dogma of Christ’, and continued it in *Escape from Freedom*, in both instances trying to use psychoanalytic viewpoints to understand a historical process. They must know my work and it is difficult for me to imagine that they should be so possessed by the ambition to appear as the originators of a thought, that they would consciously and intentionally refuse to mention my work for such personal purposes.¹⁷⁰

In his reply, Riesman speculated that Lifton was ‘closer to Marcuse than to you in his politics, and this might also be an element in his seeking a patent on the term and concept of psychohistory vis-à-vis yourself.’¹⁷¹ The Dogma of Christ appeared in German in *Imago* in 1930, and was not the first attempt at applying psychoanalytic knowledge to history, and it was published in English in 1963, some years preceding the formation of the Wellfleet Psychohistory Group. In the piece, Fromm developed a psychoanalytic social psychology: he traced the historical evolution of the dogma of Christ from Christianity’s early days up to the fourth century, and gave a social-psychoanalytic interpretation of the development and the functions of religion. In the article, Fromm did not use the term psychohistory.¹⁷²

William M. Runyan: A Final Synthesis

¹⁶⁷ Lifton, Robert J. *Explorations in Psychohistory: The Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974. 197.

¹⁶⁸ See Pietikainen, Petteri, and Juhani Ihanus. ‘On the Origins of Psychoanalytic Psychohistory.’ *History of Psychology*, Volume 6, No. 2, 2003. 171-94.

¹⁶⁹ Friedman, Lawrence J. *Identity’s Architect: A Biography of Erik H. Erikson*. London: Free Association Books, 1999. 274-275.

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in Pietikainen, Petteri, and Juhani Ihanus. ‘On the Origins of Psychoanalytic Psychohistory.’ *History of Psychology*, Volume 6, No. 2, 2003. 171-94.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Fromm, Erich. *The Dogma of Christ, and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology, and Culture*. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1973.

Psychohistorian David R. Beisel described the 1970s as the ‘Golden Age for psychological history’.¹⁷³ Mack and Manuel’s prehistories, written in the early years of that decade, clearly served to inspire fellow psychoanalysts, psychologists and historians; to entice them to see the possibilities – even the necessity – of psychohistory as an interdiscipline. For the purpose of disseminating psychohistorical ways of thinking and working, at this point, psychohistory had to be sold to a variety of audiences.

By the late 1980s, the situation was very different. The field of psychohistory was now being heavily criticised from within and without.¹⁷⁴ It is useful, in fact necessary, to recognise a fundamental distinction between practitioners of psychohistory who were academics and those who were not. Especially the group of practitioners who gathered around psychohistorian Lloyd deMause, who was himself not affiliated to any academic institution (in fact outwardly critical of academic history), were heavily criticised by academic historians, psychologists and psychoanalysts. Historian David Stannard wrote: ‘Clearly, Mr. de Mause [sic] works well beyond the fringe of even the most generous definition of scholarship.’¹⁷⁵ Even Bruce Mazlish called deMause ‘a jig man,’ and ‘a good businessman, not much else.’¹⁷⁶ It is safe to say that deMause’s wild interpretation of psychohistory was pushing the boundaries of legitimate scholarship. His insistence to anchor a stable meaning to the term, to make hyperbolic and provocative statements, and his attempt to institutionalise psychohistory’s practice in an *Institute of Psychohistory*, made him extremely unpopular with more moderate users of the term.

DeMause’s imaginative – but wildly speculative – theories made psychohistory vulnerable to criticism from academics.¹⁷⁷ From the academic psychohistorians’ point of view, then, the field had to be saved from a host of critics, as well as from the more speculative internal elements. William McKinley (‘Mac’) Runyan, a sociologist and psychologist at Berkeley, attempted to formulate a new prehistory of psychohistory against this background. His contribution to the field was the book *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* (1982). A reviewer in psychohistorical journal *The Psychohistory Review* judged it the best study of lives ‘since Erik Erikson’s *Young Man Luther*.’¹⁷⁸ In the book, Runyan responded to criticisms of psychobiography and psychohistory, and suggested rigorous criteria for evaluating studies of individual lives.¹⁷⁹ Several years later, he edited a volume of essays: *Psychology and Historical Interpretation* (1988). The introduction to that volume was an overview of the field of psychohistory: ‘A Historical and Conceptual Background to Psychohistory’.¹⁸⁰

Runyan received his PhD in clinical psychology and public practice from Harvard University in 1975, and has been a professor at the University of California, Berkeley since 1979. Throughout his career, his main interests have been the methodological and theoretical issues concerning the study of lives. He was influenced most by his teachers Henry Murray and Robert W. White. ‘At first,’ he said, ‘I did not have a sympathetic exposure to psychodynamic theory. In graduate school I got more exposure to humanistic psychology, through those influenced by Carl Rogers, and also to behavioral critiques of psychoanalytic

¹⁷³ Beisel, David. ‘The Nazi Youth Cohort’. *Clio’s Psyche*, Volume 19, No. 1, June 2012. 108.

¹⁷⁴ See Chapter Five.

¹⁷⁵ Stannard, David. *Shrinking History: On Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980. xii.

¹⁷⁶ Personal communication with Mazlish, January 15, 2014.

¹⁷⁷ See Chapter Four.

¹⁷⁸ Runyan, William McKinley. *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Runyan, William McKinley. *Psychology and Historical Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

theory.¹⁸¹ Although he was formally retired, Murray became Runyan's mentor at Harvard: 'I think Henry Murray was important in advocating personality psychology and 'personology' or the study of lives starting in the 1930s,' Runyan has said, 'with his publication of *Explorations in Personality* (1938). As director of the Harvard Psychological Clinic from 1928, he also inspired many workers in the field, including the distinguished co-authors of *Explorations in Personality*, such as Robert W. White, Erik Erikson, Jerome Frank, Donald MacKinnon, Nevitt Sanford, and others.'¹⁸²

From Murray, Runyan inherited a deep conviction that the study of individual lives could be useful to a variety of academic disciplines. In psychohistory, he found a conceptual home to express this conviction. To this day, he is an advocate of psychologically informed history and historically informed psychology. He has been critical of psychology and philosophy's tendencies for hasty abstraction and generalisation. He has found that life histories and biography have the capacity to serve as an antidote to such tendencies, in so far as they show how lives and personalities are far more complex – far more 'overdetermined' – than many theoretical approaches would account for. Although he has grown wary of the term psychohistory over the years, he is still committed to the many possibilities of psychobiography – a word he has always preferred to psychohistory – and the historical study of individual lives within the wider field of psychology. He has defined psychobiography as 'the explicit use of formal psychological theory or research in the interpretation of individual lives.'¹⁸³ But in contrast to psychobiography, he feels psychohistory has become a problematic term. He believes that this is because there has been a lot of irresponsible work published under that name. 'Poisoned would be a good metaphor,' he has said, to describe what happened to the field. But according to Runyan, psychohistory never died. It simply needs reimagining.¹⁸⁴

In 1988, when Runyan published his 'A Historical and Conceptual Background to Psychohistory', psychohistory was also in need of some imaginative reconstruction. Like many psychohistorians, Runyan freely applied the term psychohistory to work that was published long before Erikson started using the term. He wrote: 'The history of psychohistory is traditionally defined as beginning with Freud's study 'Leonardo DaVinci and a Memory of his Childhood'.' And Runyan traced psychohistory even further back:

Perhaps the most detailed discussion of pre-Freudian psychohistory is that of Harry Elmer Barnes in *Psychology and History* (1925); he reviews the contributions of a number of workers who left no direct legacy and are little cited now, such as Wilhelm Wundt's folk psychology (which has been overshadowed by his pioneering work in experimental psychology) and that of his colleague at Leipzig, the historian Karl Lamprecht, who argued that history should define itself as collective psychology and who provided a schematic and controversial conception of stages in the sociopsychological evolution of Western civilization.¹⁸⁵

Unsurprisingly, Runyan's definition of psychohistory was broad. He basically considered all psychologically informed history psychohistory. Like many psychohistorians, he considered the publication of *Young Man Luther* by Erik Erikson and William Langer's 'Next Assignment' address – both in 1958 – a significant turning point for the psychohistorical movement.

¹⁸¹ Schultz, William T. 'Psychobiography and the Study of Lives: William McKinley Runyan', *Clio's Psyche*, Volume 8, No. 3, December 2001. 107.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* 106

¹⁸⁴ Personal communication with Runyan, July 11, 2016.

¹⁸⁵ Runyan, William McKinley. *Psychology and Historical Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. 13.

Crucially, he argued that the field of psychohistory did not develop within one unified and coherent stream, but evolved from several partially independent traditions and lines of influence.

In his overview Runyan drew upon the work of William Gilmore, who wrote a *Psychohistorical Inquiry: A Comprehensive Research Bibliography* (1984). This document, containing more than 4,000 items, was intended to give a comprehensive list of English-language publications in psychohistory through 1981, as well as a selection of studies written in foreign languages. The bibliography included a section on ‘The Life Cycle’, and included works that bear on childhood, adulthood, old age, and death. Gilmore’s sources included earlier bibliographies in psychohistory; items he encountered as co-editor of *The Psychohistory Review*; a systematic search of citations in *Psychological Abstracts*, *Sociological Abstracts*, *Abstracts in Anthropology*, *Dissertation Abstracts*, *America: History and Life*, and *Historical Abstracts*; and a search of the *History of Childhood Quarterly*, *The Journal of Psychohistory*, *The Psychohistory Review*, the *I.P.A. Bulletin*, the *GUPH Newsletter*, and the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. As in most other reflections on psychohistorical publications carried out from within the psychohistorical movement, works by authors who would not have labelled their own work as psychohistory are included. Runyan, analysing a self-selected portion of the materials included in the bibliography, came up with the following graph (Fig.2):

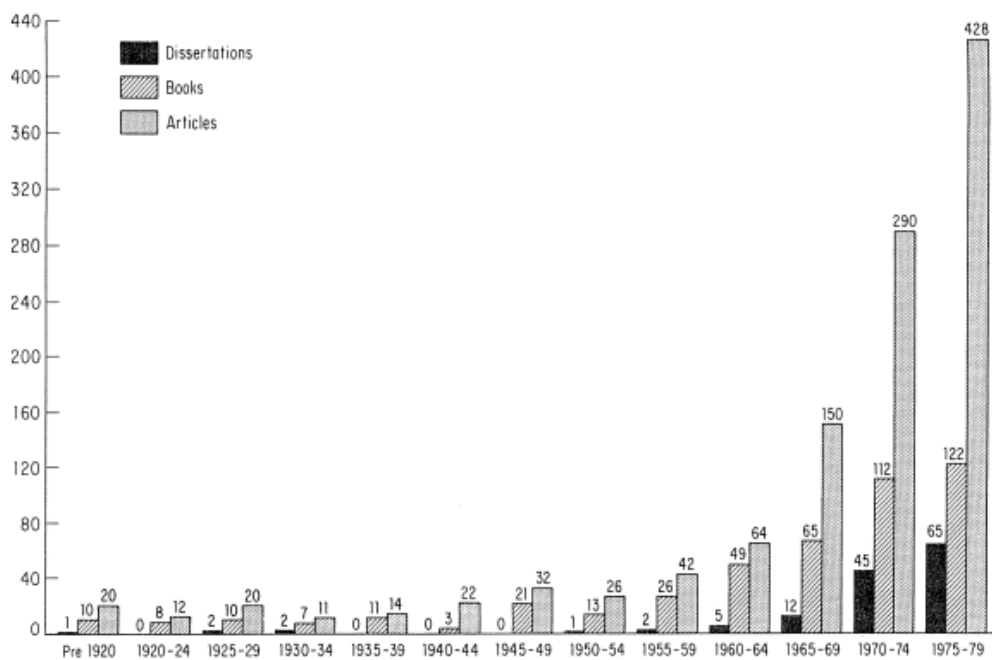


FIGURE 1.1. The growth of literature in psychohistory.

Fig. 2. Runyan’s ‘The growth of literature in psychohistory’.

By showing how the number of dissertations, books and articles on psychohistory had grown, Runyan conveyed a sense of urgency; by carving up psychohistory into various strands, ‘semi-autonomous subtraditions’ as he referred to them, Runyan acknowledged that the field had grown problematically complex. His paper can be read as an attempt at organising the field. He wrote: ‘Current work in psychohistory is dispersed across a diverse range of disciplines, and the structure of the field may be better represented as a set of partially autonomous streams

of work rather than as a single tightly organized tradition.’¹⁸⁶ Concerned that the variety of different projects might be confused with one particular stream of work, he identified five main strands of psychohistory and its practitioners, sorted in accordance with the academic tradition that they grew out of. These subtraditions consisted of: 1) psychoanalysts, organised loosely around Erik Erikson, Robert Lifton and the Wellfleet Psychohistory Group, 2) political scientists, based predominantly at Yale, 3) academic psychologists, among whom Runyan ranked himself; with roots in the Harvard Psychology Department and the tradition of personality psychology, or ‘personology’, begun by Henry Murray, 4) academic historians, interested in supplementing history with knowledge from the social sciences, such as the *Annales* historians and their American counterparts, 5) the deMause group.¹⁸⁷ Later he would add two extra subtraditions: journalists, such as Nancy Gager Clinch, and philosophers, such as Ray Monk.¹⁸⁸

In an attempt to make clear that many of psychohistory’s practitioners had roots in a variety of academic disciplines, Runyan was reclaiming the term psychohistory for an academic audience. He showed that it had firm roots in academia, where he believed the movement belonged. About the deMause group, Runyan wrote: ‘While many academics are extremely critical of the logic and reasoning of at least some of the work done by this group, it has received a good deal of public attention and is, to the regret of many other psychohistorians, often seen as representative of the field as a whole.’¹⁸⁹ By his identification of the semi-autonomous subtraditions within the field, he hoped psychohistorians could determine what branch of psychohistory they identified with. Runyan’s paper was designed as a compass to help reorientate the confused academic practitioner. ‘The deMause group was not happy with the book,’ Runyan later stated.¹⁹⁰ But his efforts came too late. As we shall see, by 1988 the term psychohistory had been discarded by many of its most authoritative practitioners and interest in psychohistory was on the wane.

Runyan tried to disassociate the term psychohistory from particular strands of the movement. In further chapters, we shall see that the history of psychohistory can be read as a game of tug-of-war between practitioners who were set to anchor a fixed meaning to the term, and those for whom psychohistory was better left undefined – so as to remain malleable and open to interpretation. But all of them came to the topic with particular ideological agendas, and their reconstructions of the past served political needs in the present. John Mack, in an attempt to win over psychoanalysts, sought to convince his readers that psychohistory could have significance in clinical practice; Frank Manuel showed the wide-ranging interactions between psychology and history that preceded, even led up to, psychohistory, in order to make it acceptable to academic historians; Mac Runyan tried to save psychohistory from its critics and the wild speculations of the deMause group, by showing its roots in a variety of academic traditions.

By writing histories and prehistories of their movement, the psychohistorians were intervening in the past to promote their personal interpretations of psychohistory in the present. And in the process, they appropriated certain pre-psychohistorical works and authors, and distanced themselves from others, which in that way became fodder for their ideological canons. In the next chapter we shall see that the prehistories of psychohistory can be viewed as part of an over-arching narrative, an open-ended story, told and retold by practitioners about the history of their movement – a legend of psychohistory.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 14.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Personal communication with Runyan, July 11, 2016.

¹⁸⁹ Runyan, William McKinley. *Psychology and Historical Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. 17.

¹⁹⁰ Personal Communication with Runyan, July 11, 2016.

Chapter 3 What Do You Make of Adolf Hitler?

On the 29th of December 1957, William L. Langer delivered his presidential address at the annual dinner of the American Historical Association in the Statler Hilton Hotel on 7th Avenue, New York City. Bruce Mazlish, a 34-year old historian of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), was present that evening and later recalled that ‘many eminent historians’ left that night ‘muttering that “old Bill Langer has gone off his rocker”’.¹⁹¹ The diplomatic historian and professor at Harvard had apparently baffled his audience by giving a talk entitled ‘The Next Assignment’, in which he urged strongly for a ‘deepening of historical understanding through exploitation of the concepts and findings of modern psychology’.¹⁹² He meant specifically: Freudian psychoanalysis.¹⁹³

William Langer was chairman of the history department at Harvard and an expert on nineteenth century diplomacy. He earned his reputation as a scholar of European and Middle Eastern history and was known as an expert on military intelligence.¹⁹⁴ During World War II he was on leave from his post at Harvard to serve as head of the Research and Analysis Branch of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). In 1945, President Truman awarded him the Medal for Merit for his work in the service during the war. Over his thirty-seven years on the history faculty at Harvard, he published papers on a wide variety of imaginative topics, including a comparative essay on Nuclear War and the Black Death, and a paper on the role of the potato in the eighteenth century population explosion in Europe. Mazlish called him ‘a historian’s historian, so to speak.’¹⁹⁵ He later recalled: ‘Nobody saw his psychoanalytic turn coming.’¹⁹⁶

In the telling and re-telling of the legend of psychohistory, by both its friends and foes, Langer’s speech has become one of the two events that mark the beginning of the movement.¹⁹⁷ William McKinley Runyan, who worked on several overviews of the field, has mentioned it as such.¹⁹⁸ Peter Gay referred to it as such in his book *Freud for Historians*, in which, as we shall see, he increasingly distanced himself from the psychohistorical project.¹⁹⁹ David E. Stannard in his collection of rabidly anti-psychohistorical essays *Shrinking History* also mentions Langer’s speech.²⁰⁰ But even authors with far more critical distance, reflected in space and time, towards the project of psychohistory such as Pietikainen and Ihanus (2003), have pointed to William Langer’s ‘Next Assignment’ as a starting point of psychohistory.²⁰¹ Langer’s address very nearly coincided with the other formative event: the publication of *Young Man*

¹⁹¹ Quoted in Pietikainen, Petteri, and Juhani Ihanus. ‘On the Origins of Psychoanalytic Psychohistory’. *History of Psychology*, Volume 6, No. 2, 2003. 171-94.

¹⁹² ‘Presidential address delivered at the annual dinner of the American Historical Association the Statler Hotel, New York City, December 29, 1957’. *American Historical Review* 63, No. 2, January 1958. 283-304.

Redproduced on: <https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/presidential-addresses/william-l-langer>

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ Kann, Peter R. ‘Historian Langer Enters Retirement After 37 Years on Harvard Faculty’. *The Harvard Crimson*, June 9, 1964.

¹⁹⁵ Mazlish, Bruce. ‘Inside the Whales’. *Times Literary Supplement*, July 28, 1966. 667.

¹⁹⁶ Personal communication with Mazlish, January 15, 2014.

¹⁹⁷ I use the term ‘legend’ loosely, but have found inspiration in the description of the ‘legend of psychoanalysis’ by Sonu Shamdasani and Mikkel-Borch Jacobsen in their book *The Freud Files* (2012). See Introduction.

¹⁹⁸ Runyan, William McKinley. *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

¹⁹⁹ Gay, Peter. *Freud for Historians*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

²⁰⁰ Stannard, David E. *Shrinking History: On Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

²⁰¹ Pietikainen, Petteri, and Juhani Ihanus. ‘On the Origins of Psychoanalytic Psychohistory’. *History of Psychology*, Volume 6, No. 2, 2003. 171-94.

Luther by Erik Erikson in 1958. In constructing a *beginning* for psychohistory, scholars in and of the field have, without any notable exception, mentioned these two events in one breath.

In the previous chapter we discussed how the psychohistorians had conflicting ideas about the roots of psychohistory. Here we will look at what they could all agree on: two seminal events that came to signal the starting point of the psychohistorical movement. The psychohistorians had differing ideas about the roots of psychohistory, but they all looked back over these two events. The contradictions inherent in the standpoints of the canonisers were somehow embedded in these two events – William Langer, a historian propagating the use of psychoanalysis; Erik Erikson, a psychoanalyst doing historical work. If the last chapter was about the psychohistorians trying to establish a canon of psychohistorical works, this chapter is about the story that they told themselves about their own origins. It is our aim to look critically at those two seminal events and seek out the empirical and theoretical links between them.

The Next Assignment

Langer ended his speech on a rather grand note. ‘We may, for all we know, be on the threshold of a new era when the historian will have to think in even larger, perhaps even in cosmic, terms.’²⁰² Langer envisioned an integrative task for historians, who, he thought, like ‘the scientists’, should entertain high hopes of ‘enlarging through cooperation their understanding as well as their knowledge of the universe.’²⁰³ Langer was hoping that American historians would integrate the findings of other disciplines into their historiographical method. By contrast, his own proposed expansion of the historian’s explanatory scope was strikingly un-cosmic in its scale. In fact, Langer suggested that historians turn their attention inwards: he reminded his listeners that ‘for many years young scholars in anthropology, sociology, religion, literature, education and other fields have gone to psychoanalytic institutes for special training’.²⁰⁴ Now the veteran of World War I and former OSS-officer suggested ‘that some of our own younger men might do the same’.²⁰⁵

Langer felt that for a movement that ‘strikes so close to the heart of our own discipline’, Freudian psychology had for too long been unjustly ignored by professional historians.²⁰⁶ He gave several reasons. After Freud, the application of psychoanalysis to historical subjects had been limited to what he regarded as ‘ill-informed, sensational, scandalizing [...] pseudo-psychoanalytical biographical writing in the 1920s’, which had made it unattractive for serious scholars to work with psychoanalytic ideas.²⁰⁷ Only recently had there, in his view, emerged a truly ‘systematic personality and character study on a psychoanalytic basis’.²⁰⁸ The ‘scientisation’ of psychoanalysis, led by psychoanalyst Franz Alexander some twenty years earlier, had produced a particular version of psychoanalysis that could serve as a credible, authoritative partner to other disciplines.²⁰⁹

‘The field of medicine is feeling its impact not only in the area of psychosomatic illness,’ Langer stated, ‘but in the understanding of the doctor-patient relationship. Our whole

²⁰² ‘Presidential address delivered at the annual dinner of the American Historical Association the Statler Hotel’, New York City, December 29, 1957. *American Historical Review* 63, No. 2 (January 1958): 283-304.

<https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/presidential-addresses/william-l-langer>

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Alexander, Franz. ‘Psychoanalysis Comes of Age’. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 7, 1938. 299-306.

educational system and the methods of child-training have been modified in the light of its findings. [...] Its influence has been felt in penology, in political science, and even in economics, while in the arts almost every major figure of the past generation has been in some measure affected by it.²¹⁰ It is interesting to note that Langer also mentioned the revisionist ‘neo-Freudians’, a term associated with Erich Fromm and Karen Horney, as an example of a strand of psychoanalysis attempting such a systematic study. Langer found that historians had rejected findings of psychoanalysis precisely because they had ‘thought of themselves as psychologists in their own right’, and had perceived psychoanalysis as threatening to their own approach, which, he held, restricted historians to ‘recorded fact and to strictly rational motivation’.²¹¹ Psychoanalysis, Langer thought, allowed the historian to expand his scope so as to include speculation on scientific grounds about what went on in the minds of individuals and collectives, thereby surpassing a strictly rational view of man. What history needed was a ‘penetration in depth’ of ‘modern psychology’.²¹²

It is important to note that Langer’s particular interest in psychoanalysis lay less with the application of psychoanalysis in biography and life histories, and more with its possible use to explain the behaviour of crowds. In contrast to the later canonisers of psychohistory, William Langer was proposing a fresh beginning – allowing psychology to invade and take over history. He cited Everett D. Martin, a crowd psychologist of the 1920s, who conceived of the crowd as ‘a device for indulging ourselves in a kind of temporary insanity by all going crazy together’, and he mentioned how Carl Jung had characterized political mass movements as ‘psychic epidemics, i.e. mass psychoses.’²¹³ It appears that Langer was broadly interested in the irrational forces in the individual and collectives and the interactions between the two. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Langer said, Freud had ‘tried to determine the effect of group experience on the formation of a collective group mind.’ More specifically, Langer wanted to know the ‘long-range psychological repercussions’ of collective traumatic experiences, such as disease or famine. He expressed the hope that psychoanalysis might help elucidate ‘the underlying psychological forces’ of such experiences.²¹⁴

One example stood out. ‘Most striking,’ Langer judged, was ‘the case of the greatest of the reformers, Martin Luther.’ In Langer’s opinion, the Church Reformer illustrated the response to such traumatic collective experience best. The experience in this case was the Bubonic plague. From the immense number of papers and table talks produced by Luther, Langer got the impression of an ‘unusually self-analytical and self-critical personality’, who was also ‘tortured by the temptations of the flesh’, and in conflict with personalised demons. Luther, Langer held, had been profoundly shaped by his times, and identified with symbols of death and decay. Langer cited a psychoanalytic interpretation of Luther by Professor Preserved Smith, from 1913. Smith considered Luther ‘highly neurotic’ – driven to the monastery by the hope of finding a refuge from temptation and an escape from damnation. Smith’s study was important because it influenced Dr Paul J. Reiter, who later published ‘a huge and greatly detailed study of Luther’s personality’.²¹⁵ Reiter reached the conclusion that Luther had suffered from ‘manic-depressive psychosis’, which was, Langer held, ‘frequently associated with genius’. ‘The point of mentioning all this,’ Langer reminded himself and his listeners, ‘is

²¹⁰ ‘Presidential address delivered at the annual dinner of the American Historical Association the Statler Hotel’, New York City, December 29, 1957. *American Historical Review* 63, No. 2 (January 1958): 283-304. Redproduced on: <https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/presidential-addresses/william-l-langer>

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

to suggest that Luther's trials were typical of his time'.²¹⁶ Langer saw Luther's struggles as the result of a collective preoccupation with death and sickness, and he interpreted Luther's vocation as an attempt to deal with this traumatic climate. He concluded: 'It is inconceivable that he should have evoked so great a popular response unless he had succeeded in expressing the underlying, unconscious sentiments of large numbers of people'.²¹⁷

In his 'Next Assignment', Langer assumed a far more unified psychoanalytic corpus than actually existed at the time.²¹⁸ Alexander's scientisation of psychoanalysis may have created the outward semblance of a unified, scientific field; in fact, psychoanalysis in the United States, as elsewhere, consisted of a myriad of schools, doctrines and idiosyncratic theoreticians and their followers. One such idiosyncratic character, not a scientist originally but an artist-turned-psychoanalyst, was Erik Erikson, whose next assignment at the time was finishing his psychoanalytic study of Martin Luther.

The Luther-Book

'You remember,' Erik Erikson wrote in 1957, in a letter to his friend and colleague David Rapaport, 'how you used to think that my historical-ideological references were the weakest parts of my work? This is certainly so for psychoanalysis in general.'²¹⁹ Less than a year later, Erikson published *Young Man Luther* (1958). It is considered one of his finest and most influential books, and consists of a historical-ideological study of the early life and developing thought of the Church Reformer. By 1958, Erikson was one of the most renowned psychoanalysts in the United States.²²⁰ He had gained notoriety for his popular book *Childhood and Society* (1950), in which he linked psychoanalytic thought about childhood with other disciplines such as anthropology. Erikson was of Danish origin, was trained by Anna Freud in Vienna, married an American dancer, and fled Europe from the Nazis with his family in 1938.²²¹ In *Young Man Luther*, he pursued his multidisciplinary approach to psychoanalysis, showing how he thought psychoanalytic concepts might be usefully applied in, and informed by, historical analysis.²²² For the history of psychohistory it is an exceptionally important work, because in it Erikson transcended the standard application of psychoanalytic theory to a historical character.

It is tempting to read some sort of significance into the coincidence of Langer and Erikson both choosing Martin Luther as an example of their bold, new vision for the intersections of psychoanalysis and history. Following Langer's own logic, one might suggest that the American 'collective mind' was looking for an explanation of Hitler's rise to power and, too traumatised to deal with Hitler directly, found in Luther a benevolent substitute to explain the mechanisms of ideological attraction and the leader-led dynamic. Biographer Robert G. L. Waite summarised a widely-held sentiment when he claimed that: '[Hitler] was Nazism. Since he was the sole source of final authority, he alone could legitimize Party decisions and determine public policy. [...] Seldom in the history of Western civilization since

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ This is one of the points of criticism launched at the psychohistorical movement by historian David Stannard in his book *Shrinking History* (1980), see Chapter Five.

²¹⁹ Letter from Erik H. Erikson to David A. Rapaport, ca. 1957, Container 467, Erik H. and Joan M. Erikson papers, 1925-1985, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University.

²²⁰ Wallerstein, Robert S., and Leo Goldberger. 'Ideas and Identities: The Life Work of Erik Erikson'. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, Volume 17, No. 2, 2000. 437-42.

²²¹ For an overview of Erikson's life and his fleeing of Europe, see: Friedman, Lawrence J. *Identity's Architect: A Biography of Erik H. Erikson*. New York: Scribner, 1999.

²²² Erikson, Erik H. *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1962.

Jesus has so much depended on one man's personality.'²²³ But the paths by which Erikson and Langer came to choose Martin Luther as their prime illustration of new ideas about psychoanalytic historiography are more complex and warrant closer investigation. In fact, it seems more likely that the coincidence of Erikson and Langer's interest in Luther has retroactively contributed to the two events becoming associated and considered formative in the legendary 'beginning' of psychohistory. It is more than likely that Langer did not know Erikson was working on a book about Luther when he gave his speech in December 1957. On the 4th of September of the following year, he wrote a thank-you note to Erikson for the proofs of his new book. He judged it to be 'full of interesting insights and shrewd observations which should prove stimulating to all historical students'.²²⁴ 'Really,' Langer wrote, 'my only criticism is that at times you embark upon lengthy psychological or clinical discussions which from the very nature of things are difficult for the layman to follow and the exact relevance of which is not always obvious.'²²⁵

The general public disagreed. Erikson's Luther-book, as he himself referred to it, was not an immediate bestseller, but it would go on to become one. By 1964, the paperback edition had sold 9,900 copies, as opposed to 28,000 for *Childhood and Society*.²²⁶ In a review of the book, Harold G. McGurdy, professor of psychology at the University of North Carolina, found that Erikson 'gently, sweetly, suavely' cut out Luther's guts. 'Despite its medical aspects,' McGurdy wrote, 'Erikson's book is more of a tract than a case history'. McGurdy's main criticism lay in his view that Erikson supposedly translated Luther's religious experience into formulaic psychoanalytic jargon: the historical Luther, he held, was reduced to a patient.²²⁷ Clyde Kluckhohn, professor of Anthropology at Harvard University and a colleague of Erikson's, thought otherwise and noted: '[Erikson] studied Kierkegaard in Danish and covered much other pertinent philosophy and theology. The result is a remarkable historical study that has a constant background in clinical experience.' The 'patient' Luther, Kluckhohn found, was successfully situated in a historical context.²²⁸

These two reviews, taken both from Erikson's own scrapbook collection, reflect two general attitudes found in the literature on *Young Man Luther*. The first takes the work to be a psychoanalytic study of Luther in the tradition that Freud began with his books on Leonardo DaVinci and Dostoevsky – psychoanalytical texts on historical figures; the second takes it to be in essence a historical work, albeit informed by Erikson's experience as a psychoanalyst. Similar attitudes can be found in more recent literature. Lyndal Roper, in her survey of psychoanalytic and historical approaches to Luther, stated that the work 'exemplifies the vogue for psychobiography in the 1950s. In studies of this kind,' she wrote, 'Freudian ideas relating to instincts – the sexual instincts in particular – were applied to historical characters'.²²⁹ But psychiatrist and psychohistorian Robert J. Lifton called it '[Erikson's] greatest book', exactly because it was more than just an application of psychoanalytic thought to a historical figure: 'Erikson evoked Luther as himself a creation of the history of his time, who could in turn alter that history by means of his own extraordinary impact.'²³⁰ The author himself saw no need for

²²³ Langer, Walter C. *The Mind of Adolf Hitler; the Secret Wartime Report*. New York: Basic Books, 1972. 220.

²²⁴ Letter from William L. Langer to Erik H. Erikson, Container 329, Erik H. and Joan M. Erikson papers, 1925-1985, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Friedman, Lawrence J. *Identity's Architect: A Biography of Erik H. Erikson*. New York: Scribner, 1999. 325.

²²⁷ McGurdy, Harold Grier. 'Luther: Psychoanalyst'. *PsycCRITIQUES*, Volume 4, No. 7, July 1959. 201-202.

²²⁸ Review by Kluckhohn, in Clippings and Reviews of *Young Man Luther*, ca. 1959. Container 1488, Erik H. and Joan M. Erikson Papers, 1925-1985, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University.

²²⁹ Roper, Lyndal. 'The Seven-Headed Monster: Luther and Psychology'. *History and Psyche: Culture, Psychoanalysis, and the past*. London: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2012.

²³⁰ Lifton, Robert J. 'Entering History: Erik Erikson's New Psychological Landscape', in: *Ideas and Identities: The Life and Work of Erik Erikson*. Madison: International Universities Press. 105.

the book to be either one or the other, as is clear from the book's subtitle: 'A Study in Psychoanalysis and History'.

In the first chapter, Erikson confided to his readers that such a study 'will re-evaluate a segment of history (here the youth of a great reformer) by using psychoanalysis as a historical tool; but it will also, here and there, throw light on psychoanalysis as a tool of history.'²³¹ To describe this curious blend of two disciplines, Erikson invented the adjective 'psycho-historical'.²³² The hyphen was of particular importance to him, as it showed that psychohistory was still a work in progress: thrown on a 'compost heap of today's interdisciplinary efforts, which may help to fertilize new fields, and to produce future flowers of new methodological clarity'.²³³ Later, Erikson would characterise the psychohistorical marriage of psychoanalysis and history as 'an in-between field': 'an area in which nobody as yet is methodologically quite at home, but which someday will be settled and incorporated without a trace of border disputes and double names.'²³⁴ Lifton has claimed that the noun-form 'psycho-history' was first applied to his own book *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* (1961) by a Yale undergraduate, Daniel Yergin.²³⁵ As Pietikainen and Ihanus have shown, both the noun psychohistory and psycho-historical appeared in art historian Walter Abell's book *The Collective Dream in Art*. Abell's work, in which he proposed to merge insights from the arts, psychoanalysis and history into a new 'psycho-historical theory of culture' was published by Harvard University Press and may well have been known to Erikson. He did not, however, refer to the work when he used the hyphenated adjective in *Young Man Luther* for the first time.²³⁶

Young Man Luther's explanatory framework was present-centred, and the ease with which Erikson navigated between historical facts, interpretations and analogies was made possible exactly by the fact that he labelled his work a study in both 'psychoanalysis and history'. By creating a hitherto non-existing 'in-between' field – an interdiscipline – out of two existing disciplines, Erikson relieved himself of the responsibility of conforming to the conventions of either genre.

Erikson sets the stage for his discussion of Luther by introducing his readers to four earlier interpreters of the young reformer's life: A Protestant professor of theology (Erikson calls him 'the professor'), a Catholic priest ('the priest'), a Danish psychiatrist ('the psychiatrist'), and even a psychoanalyst of sorts ('professor Smith', the same one that Langer referred to in his speech). The book opens with a crucial event: 'the fit in the choir'. During his early twenties, Luther was reported to have had a breakdown, suddenly falling to the floor in his monastery in Erfurt, calling out: 'Ich bin's nicht! Ich bin's nicht!' or 'Non sum! Non sum!'²³⁷ One by one, Erikson calls upon the earlier interpreters to give their views of the event (in short: 'meaningful', 'Satanic', 'diseased', and 'hysterical', respectively). Erikson then shows their limitations, and proposes his own view. Rendering the event in his own terms, Erikson interprets the experience as an 'epileptoid paroxysm of ego-loss, the rage of denial of

²³¹ Erikson, Erik H. *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1962. 16.

²³² As we have seen in the introduction, Erikson was not the first to use the word 'psychohistory' and 'psychohistorical' when referring to psychoanalytic history, but it is very well possible that he did not know of these earlier uses.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ Lifton, Robert J. *On the Nature of Psychohistorical Evidence*, In: *Explorations in Psychohistory; the Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975. 43.

²³⁵ Personal communication with Lifton, May 22, 2015.

²³⁶ Pietikainen, Petteri, and Juhani Ihanus. 'On the Origins of Psychoanalytic Psychohistory'. *History of Psychology*, Volume 6, No. 2, 2003.

²³⁷ Erikson, Erik H. *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1962. 23.

identity which was to be discarded'.²³⁸ The other interpreters and their views re-appeared throughout the book, mostly used to contrast, sometimes to complement, Erikson's own interpretations. Especially 'professor Smith', who, as Erikson saw it, used Freudian ideas rather reductively, suffers the fate of the straw man repeatedly.

Throughout the work, Erikson adopted the voice of a benevolent therapist: friendly, sometimes tongue-in-cheek, insistently non-dogmatic. Interpretations were presented as possible and partial explanations of Luther's behaviour, never as definitive or strictly causal. On a formal level the Luther-book resembled a collage. Within a single paragraph, Erikson allows himself to narrate historical facts, freely associate to the materials (it is often unclear exactly what the status of these associations is, if they are supposed to have occurred to Luther, or if they are Erikson's own, intended merely to illustrate), and to draw comparisons between Luther's situation and contemporaneous situations, topics and people. As we have seen, an important chapter was dedicated to showing the similarities between Luther and Hitler's upbringing and youth. But other known characters from Erikson's earlier writings re-appear as analogous cases: George Bernard Shaw, Charles Darwin, and Sigmund Freud.²³⁹

Erikson's loyalty to Freud's theories goes unquestioned throughout the work. But it is a particularly open-ended interpretation of Freud's theories that Erikson committed to. There is a general emphasis on Luther's relationship to his mother and father, and Erikson showed how certain features of his Oedipal situation: his father's harshness and his mother's superstition permeated Luther's later beliefs. The innovative aspect of the book, however, is Erikson's suggestion that Luther's particular upbringing, characterised by his father's strictness and his mother's submissiveness, reflected a broader trend in parenting, and that this accounted in part for his later appeal as an ideological leader. Erikson proposed that Luther's childhood situation could be seen as a reflection of changing property relations, due to the increasing relevance of Roman concepts of law, so that fatherhood took on the connotation of an *ownership* of wife and children. Luther's struggle with the Catholic Church, in part a displacement of the struggle with his father, questioning the property and ownership of the Church, resonated with as many followers as it did, exactly because of this shared background. It was a book about the dialectic between leaders and followers.²⁴⁰ At the same time, it served Erikson as an illustration of his ideas about adolescence and identity and their role in psychoanalysis.

The Veterans at Mt. Zion

During the mid-1940s, Erikson worked as a consultant psychologist at the Mt. Zion Veterans Rehabilitation Clinic in San Francisco. The clinic, run by psychoanalysts Jascha Kasanin and Emanuel Windholz, provided short-term treatment for young men suffering from 'nervous instability', 'psychoneurosis'²⁴¹ and 'readjustment problems'²⁴².

World War II had challenged the widely-held belief among psychiatrists in the United States that the origin of psychopathology was organic and based on hereditary predisposition. The influx of traumatised soldiers seemed to show that 'environmental stress' was a much more significant factor than predisposition in the cause of mental disorder.²⁴³ Erikson did not contest

²³⁸ *Ibid.* 42.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Erikson, Erik H. *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1962.

²⁴¹ Friedman, Lawrence J. *Identity's Architect: A Biography of Erik H. Erikson*. New York: Scribner, 1999. 160.

²⁴² Kasanin, J. S., Charl Rhode, and Ernestine Wertheimer. 'Observations from a Veterans' Clinic on Childhood Factors in Military Adjustment'. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. 640-59.

²⁴³ Hale, Nathan G. *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. 187.

this. Yet he disagreed with most of the diagnoses given to these men by his more orthodox Freudian colleagues. He believed that the veterans were not ‘shell-shocked’ or ‘psychoneurotic’, but that they were simply normal young men who, at a crucial stage in their psychic development, had been subjected to dramatic, historical changes. ‘Conditions of modern warfare,’ he wrote in 1945, ‘cause a considerable number of soldiers (...) to develop more or less transient symptoms of nervous instability of varying degrees.’²⁴⁴

According to Erikson these men were damaged, but they were not ill. They had simply been lifted out of their particular contexts, separated from their families and loved ones, and subjected to military discipline and the atrocities of war. In Erikson’s words, they had ‘been impaired in that central control over themselves for which, in the psychoanalytic scheme, only the inner agency of the ego could be held responsible’.²⁴⁵ Erikson believed the young men were going through what he called an ‘identity crisis’.

In ‘A Combat Crisis in a Marine’, a clinical vignette published in *Childhood and Society*, Erikson described the case of a medical officer who developed acute symptoms (paralysis; incapacitating headaches – they continued into the period following service) after having been handed a gun in the heat of battle. The marine had joined the medical corps specially to avoid having to carry a weapon. As a child, this man had left his home after his mother had pointed a gun at him during a drunken rage. After having secured the help of a school principle, he had sworn never to drink, swear, indulge himself sexually, and – importantly – never to carry a gun for the rest of his life. Now he could no longer keep the promise made to this internalised father-figure. He needed the weapon to save himself and his comrades. Erikson speculated that this was why the man broke down.²⁴⁶

This example shows the importance of symbols in Erikson’s theory of identity crisis. For the marine, the gun was a personal symbol of moral decline and the breach of intimate trust; a symbol that in a very different context of war, gained a completely different meaning. In this particular context, a gun meant protection for the young marine himself and for others.

The young men treated by Erikson at the Mt. Zion Clinic, men such as the marine, were no longer able to rely on what he called ‘ego synthesis’, by which he meant – the capacity to sift through and organise stimuli into meaningful patterns of symbols. By being lifted from one context into a completely different one, the veterans’ lives ‘no longer hung together’ and lacked ‘continuity and sameness’.²⁴⁷ The marine’s story is an example of how Erikson saw that a symbol (the gun) can exist on a personal (the story of the mother) level, as well as on the level of collective experience (in wartime, as a necessary defence), and how the two attached meanings can come to conflict with one another. The problem of identity, Erikson later wrote, is a problem located in ‘the core of the individual’ as well as in ‘the core of his communal culture’.²⁴⁸

Erikson regretted the amount of publicity given to neurotic instability in returning veterans.²⁴⁹ Because he did not judge these returning soldiers to be particularly ill, his suggestion of treatment was straightforward and involved encouraging the men to re-establish careers and families after the war. As circumstances changed, Erikson speculated, the synthetic capacities of the ego would be restored. He also urged that other clinicians drop diagnostic terms like ‘psychoneurotic’ altogether in such cases, to avoid reinforcing feelings of self-doubt

²⁴⁴ Erikson, Erik H., and Stephen Schlein. *A Way of Looking at Things: Selected Papers from 1930 to 1980*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1987.

²⁴⁵ Erikson, Erik H. *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1968. 17.

²⁴⁶ Erikson, Erik H. *Childhood and Society*. 2d ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 1964. 32 – 36.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 36.

²⁴⁸ Erikson, Erik H. *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1968. 22.

²⁴⁹ Erikson, Erik H., and Stephen Schlein. *A Way of Looking at Things: Selected Papers from 1930 to 1980*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1987.

and inferiority in the men.²⁵⁰ His colleagues at Mt. Zion agreed with this, presumably because of the great numbers of requests for mental help.²⁵¹

‘I’ for Identity

Before his untimely death in 1960, David Rapaport took it upon himself to ‘translate’ many of Erikson’s intuitive notions into a more formal ego-psychological framework and jargon. He wrote introductions to his works to that end, and read and extensively commented on his friend’s drafts. But in 1979, when Erikson revised a version of his book *Identity and the Life Cycle* (which was originally published as a theoretical companion volume to *Young Man Luther* in 1959) he no longer added the original introduction by Rapaport. It appears that Erikson no longer felt he needed to justify himself to a psychoanalytic audience. He wrote: the ‘psychosocial orientation [...] has become part of a historical one, which would force us eventually to view the ego’s functioning (as well as our attempts to grasp the nature of what we have been calling the “ego”) as processes underlying a historical relativity.’²⁵² Erikson was re-branding his work for (psycho-)historically minded readers.

Despite the early efforts made by Erikson and others to streamline his work to the then-current ego-psychological metapsychology, his books became increasingly marginalised in the psychoanalytic world.²⁵³ It was not until recently that his legacy underwent a positive re-evaluation within psychoanalytic circles in the United States. In his own time, Erikson was consigned to what psychoanalyst Robert Wallerstein has called ‘a persisting psychoanalytic limbo’.²⁵⁴

By 1968, Erikson’s concepts of ‘identity’ and ‘identity crisis’ had fallen into common usage. In the introduction to a collection of essays, he wrote that they had become ‘terms which alternately describe something so large and seemingly self-evident that to demand a definition would almost seem petty’, while at other times ‘they designate something so narrow for purposes of measurement that the over-all meaning is lost.’²⁵⁵ He gave some examples: newspapers at the time ran headlines such as ‘The Identity Crisis of Africa’; the outgoing president of the American Psychoanalytic Association titled his farewell address ‘The Identity Crisis of Psychoanalysis’, and students at Harvard University held what they called an ‘Identity Crisis’ on a Thursday night at eight o’clock sharp.²⁵⁶ Rather mischievously, he added: ‘Everybody has heard of ‘identity crisis’, and it arouses a mixture of curiosity, mirth and discomfort which yet promises [...] not to turn out to be something quite as fatal as it sounds.’²⁵⁷

Fatal or not, the definition of ‘identity’ changed throughout Erikson’s career. In fact, it was important to him that his central concept remained elusive and malleable: in the same introduction, he described his concept as ‘a suggestive term’ that had just ‘begun to lend itself to ritualized usage.’²⁵⁸ By this time, Erikson was writing and thinking more as a historian and less as a psychoanalyst and had started scrutinising psychoanalytic concepts through a historical lens. It was exactly his place in ‘psychoanalytic limbo’ – working at once inside and outside the psychoanalytic field – that allowed him to do so. Erikson’s work is still hard to categorise because it is located on the intersection of, or the space between, many fields and

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ Friedman, Lawrence J. *Identity's Architect: A Biography of Erik H. Erikson*. New York: Scribner, 1999. 162.

²⁵² Erikson, Erik H. *Identity and the Life Cycle* (1959). New York: W.W. Norton, 1980. 12.

²⁵³ Wallerstein, R. S. ‘The Growth and Transformation of American Ego Psychology’. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. 135-68.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 230.

²⁵⁵ Erikson, Erik H. *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1968. 15.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

genres – psychoanalysis, history, anthropology and sociology. He cultivated this position by leaving some of his central concepts open or undefined, so that scholars working in different fields could appropriate them. Still there are some guiding themes derived from his background in ego psychology that must be pointed out here, as they contributed to Erikson's view that even central concepts are sometimes best left undefined.

In 1946, Erikson published an important paper entitled 'Ego Development and Historical Change'. The paper foreshadowed parts of his famous book *Childhood and Society*, and it linked his thoughts at the time with his ego-psychology background. In the paper, Erikson argued that the ego draws much of its strength from culture. In contrast to Freud, who had stressed how society issues its demands on a person through internalised superego injunctions, Erikson showed how society gives purpose and meaning to a person's life, and how it 'seduces him to its particular lifestyle', or, in some cases, doesn't. This was already a controversial position to take in psychoanalytic circles, but to add to the controversy, Erikson announced in the paper that he was in favour of exploring how family patterns were socially determined - thereby opening up questions about the 'Oedipus trinity as an irreducible schema for man's irrational conducts'.²⁵⁹

Erikson's psychoanalytic thought was heavily influenced by his analysis and training with Anna Freud. In his controversial paper, he approvingly quoted from her book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1936). At a glance, it is obvious that he agreed with her reconceptualisation of psychoanalysis – regarding the ego, the 'Ich', as at once instrument (as the 'seat of observation') and object of psychoanalytic inquiry. Like his analyst and mentor, Erikson's psychoanalytic model of the mind is clearly the structural model, proposed by Sigmund Freud in 'The Ego and the Id' in 1923. Like her father, Anna Freud effectively rendered the content of the unconscious a 'noumenon'. She held that psychoanalysis should focus its attention on the derivatives of unconscious processes in consciousness, if it was to remain an empirical science. Her interest, however, was still very much concentrated upon describing the various 'defence mechanisms' that the ego employs in its confrontation with id-impulses and the demands issued by the outside world. In his paper, Erikson implicitly challenged Anna Freud's problematic status of the 'outside world' as something issuing demands to be reckoned with, and set out to fill 'the methodological gap' that 'has perpetuated in psychoanalytic thought an artificial differentiation between the individual within his family (or seemingly surrounded by projections of his family constellation on the 'outer world')' and 'social organization'.²⁶⁰ The outside world, Erikson contended, had a lot to offer to the developing individual.

The most significant things on offer were a 'vitalizing sense of reality', 'cultural meaning', 'functional pleasure' and 'social recognition': all in service of a sense of 'realistic self-esteem'.²⁶¹ Erikson was responding here to another major figure from the ego-psychology establishment, Heinz Hartmann, who would formulate the reality principle a year later as the 'tendency to take into account in an adaptive way [...] whatever we consider the *real features* of an object or situation'.²⁶²

In a tribute to Hartmann, Anna Freud once wrote that 'I came into [the field of ego-psychology] more conventionally, from the side of the ego's defensive activities against the

²⁵⁹ Erikson, Erik H. 'Ego development and historical change', in *Identity and the Life Cycle* (1959). New York: W.W. Norton, 1980. 19.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 18.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² Hartmann, Heinz. 'On Rational and Irrational Actions'. In: *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences*, 1947. 33.

drives; Hartmann, in a more revolutionary manner, from the new angle of ego autonomy.²⁶³ From the concepts of autonomy and adaptation, Hartmann developed the fundamental structures of ego psychology, most notably: an emphasis on mechanisms of control, and ‘ego strength’. Hartmann developed his concept of a ‘conflict-free’ sphere of ego development, which was geared towards adaptation of reality, instead of organising defences against internal drives. At this point, the goal of psychoanalytic therapy became to help achieve ‘a better functioning synthesis and relation to the environment’.²⁶⁴ This involved a change in conceptualisation of what the ego was and how it developed. Contrary to Freud’s model, the ego did not develop from the id, but rather emerged from an undifferentiated phase determined by inborn givens. Inspired in part by the works of figures such as Jean Piaget, Hartmann argued that defences, as described by Sigmund and Anna Freud, could serve as ways of successfully mastering the environment.²⁶⁵

Erikson criticised Hartmann’s conceptualisation of the ego and its relation to the environment, as it remained caught within what he called the ‘Cartesian straight-jacket that we have imposed on our model of man’.²⁶⁶ If Anna Freud remained interested most in the ego’s intra-psychic activity, Hartmann focused on the ego’s autonomous functioning, while Erikson tried to show the ego’s dependence on social, symbolic structures. But Erikson did follow Hartmann in saying that a distinction should be made between ego, ‘I’ and Self. In contrast to Sigmund Freud, whose German ‘Ich’ was translated into ‘ego’ by James Strachey, Hartmann and Erikson reserved a role for the ‘I’ as consciousness – seeing and contemplating ‘the body, the personality, and the roles to which it is attached for life.’²⁶⁷ These roles were then thought to be made up out of multiple selves that together form a cohesive Self. The ego, on the other hand, was understood as a central and partially unconscious organising agency. Ego identity tests, selects and integrates self-images ‘on one of the ego’s frontiers, namely that of ‘environment’ which is social reality.’²⁶⁸ In identity diffusion or crisis ‘a split of self-images is suggested, a loss of center and dispersion.’²⁶⁹

In a paper from 1961, Erikson separated from the concept of reality one of its implications, *actuality*, by which he meant: ‘the world verified in immediate immersion and interaction.’²⁷⁰ Here he made a distinction between phenomenal reality, the ‘outer world’ that has to be dealt with, responded to by an inner agency, with a ‘minimum of distortion and with a maximum of customary validation agreed upon in a given state of technology and culture’²⁷¹, and actuality: which is the space where ‘outer’ conditions and ‘inner’ states meet. Erikson proposed that one can speak of actuality as co-determined by an individual’s stage of development, his personal circumstances and by historical and political processes.

Already in 1946, Erikson was less interested in the psychoanalytic interpretation of reality as something to be adapted to, phenomenal reality, than reality as *actuality*, meaning: an embeddedness in a symbolic, ‘historical’ context. Personal identity, according to Erikson, is based on two simultaneous observations. First, a perception of one’s self-sameness and

²⁶³ Quoted in: Wallerstein, Robert S. ‘The Growth and Transformation of American Ego Psychology’. *Journal of American Psychoanalytic Association*, Volume 50, 2002. 137.

²⁶⁴ Hartmann, Heinz, and David Rapaport. *Ego psychology and the problem of adaptation*. Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1958. 81.

²⁶⁵ Wallerstein, Robert S. ‘The Growth and Transformation of American Ego Psychology’. *Journal of American Psychoanalytic Association*, Volume 50, 2002.

²⁶⁶ Erikson, Erik H. *Insight and Responsibility*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1964. 163.

²⁶⁷ Erikson, Erik H. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1968. 217

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 218.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 212.

²⁷⁰ Erikson, Erik H. ‘Psychological Reality and Historical Actuality’. *Insight and Responsibility; Lectures on the Ethical Implications of Psychoanalytic Insight*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1964. 164.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.* 165.

continuity in time, and second, the perception that others recognise this continuity.²⁷² What is assumed here is that the two – the internal world and the outer world, are somehow shared in a symbolic space. If, at any point, one of these two elements is called into question, or when the two start to conflict with one another, one may speak of an identity crisis. Erikson called the inner sense of being collectively integrated ‘ego identity’, and it was exactly this sense of symbolic integration, he held, that was lost for the veterans at Mt. Zion, when they made the transition from high school, college and the work-place to the battlefields of Normandy and Guam.

The Medusa Dream

Erikson started work on a book that he provisionally entitled *Varieties of Identity Diffusion* in the early 1950s. He had recently moved to Massachusetts and began working at the Austen Riggs Centre: a small psychiatric hospital in Stockbridge. There were no closed wards, patients were encouraged to engage in community affairs, and they were free to roam around town.²⁷³ Erikson attended three staff meetings a week, conducted training analyses, and saw a small number of patients. The book was planned as a discussion of five of his Riggs patients, all young men and women who had been admitted because of severe emotional disturbances. As he had done in *Childhood and Society*, Erikson planned to complement the clinical cases with illustrative historical examples.²⁷⁴

One of the five cases stood out. A young seminarian – the man was in his early twenties – had been admitted to the hospital in the early 1950s. The man was part of a small group of patients at the Riggs that came from theological seminaries. He had developed his symptoms whilst attending a Protestant seminary, where he had been training for missionary work in Asia. As a rule, patients admitted to the Austen Riggs Centre were subjected to a preliminary screening, a set of interviews that served to provide the therapist with a picture, painted in broad strokes, of the person’s over-all character and ‘expectable mental states’. In the case of the young seminarian, these tests had indicated that the patient displayed so-called border-line psychotic features.²⁷⁵ Remarking on this procedure, as well as this particular preliminary diagnosis, Erikson later said that ‘even the best preparation cannot predict what depths and heights may be reached once the therapeutic process gets underway.’²⁷⁶

In a lecture given at MIT in 1957, Erikson used this young man’s case as an example of how dreams might serve as clinical evidence in psychotherapeutic treatment. He reports how the patient’s father was a successful physician, but a distant character, and that it was his mother and her father, the patient’s grandfather, to whom the young man felt closest. The grandfather was a benevolent man, a country doctor, and the mother was a domineering presence in the patient’s life. Halfway through the first year of his treatment, the young seminarian reported a dream of ‘a big face sitting in a buggy of the horse-and-buggy days. The face was completely empty, and there was horrible, slimy, snaky hair all around it.’ He added: ‘I am not sure it wasn’t my mother.’²⁷⁷

Erikson referred to this dream as the ‘Medusa Dream’. The dream became central to the seminarian’s treatment, and in his lecture, Erikson went to great lengths to show the

²⁷² Erikson, Erik H. ‘Ego development and historical change’. *Identity and the Life Cycle*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1980. 22.

²⁷³ Friedman, Lawrence J. *Identity's Architect: A Biography of Erik H. Erikson*. New York: Scribner, 1999. 160.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ Erikson, Erik H. *Insight and Responsibility; Lectures on the Ethical Implications of Psychoanalytic Insight*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1964. 60.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 57.

multiple layers of meaning that the dream contained. He reminded his audience that Freud had held that Medusa, with her angry face and snakes for hair, symbolised male fear of femininity and castration. But Erikson was less concerned with the underlying sexual themes, which he took for granted, and more with the manifest particulars of the dream, especially the theme of ‘facelessness’, which he interpreted as pointing to a lack of identity. The emptiness of the face represented the ‘diffusion’ of the seminarian’s identity, and Erikson speculated that the patient was trying, unsuccessfully, to differentiate his own face from his mother’s. The facelessness also pointed to the patient’s religious scruples that coincided with the appearance of psychiatric symptoms.²⁷⁸

The man’s case served as an illustration of Erikson’s syndrome called ‘identity diffusion’ - a term which described the inability of young people to establish a ‘station and vocation’ in life, and ‘the tendency of some to develop apparently malignant symptoms of regression.’ Again, Erikson translated a then-standard clinical diagnosis (‘border-line psychotic features’ and ‘obsessive compulsive character’) into the development-related, more benign, term – ‘identity diffusion’. By this time, Erikson was convinced that identity ‘crises’ in particular, and identity ‘diffusion’ more generally, were universal phenomena (aggravations or undue prolongations of, or regressions to normative crises belonging to stages of development, rather than common dynamic patterns of groups of severe disturbances).

There are certain stages in life, Erikson wrote, when even ‘seemingly malignant disturbances are more profitably treated as aggravated life crises rather than as diseases subject to routine psychiatric diagnoses’, and further, that ‘the therapeutic need in one patient is identical with the need of young people anywhere for ideological affirmations’.²⁷⁹ Out of this insight grew *Young Man Luther* – a reconstruction of the life of another young seminarian. Erikson’s discussion of Martin Luther was supposed to serve as the illustration to the clinical material of the young seminarian. Instead, Luther became the main focus of an entirely new project. In a letter to Rapaport, Erikson confided that the ‘Luther business really has got me chained to the kind of material and the kind of writing procedure which, once you have started it, you have to finish it, even though there are many moments when you really don’t know whether you should have chosen the subject.’²⁸⁰ Yet it was worth it, he concludes, because: ‘Here I come across a man who fits my specifications for a first class identity crisis within a first class ideological crisis’.²⁸¹ Erikson was not consciously encouraging the invasion of history by psychology. In fact, he was using history to test out new ideas that were drawn from clinical experience. Unbound by the restrictions involved in writing up clinical case material, Erikson found in Luther an illustration of his ideas.²⁸²

Young Man Hitler

Luther was more than just a convenient stand-in for Erikson’s young patient. In the early 1940s, Erikson was one of many academics approached by the US government to assess the situation in Europe. Besides the applied knowledge used for code-breaking and the development of weapons such as nuclear bomb technology, scholars in the humanities and social sciences were employed by the government to further understanding of phenomena such as the cultural and psychological impact of Nazism. The organisation that issued the request was the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), a special United States Intelligence Agency founded in 1941.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 57-58.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 65.

²⁸⁰ Letter from Erik H. Erikson to David A. Rapaport, ca. 1957, Container 467, Erik H. and Joan M. Erikson papers, 1925-1985, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² *Ibid.*

Psychohistorian Louise Hoffman has documented Erikson's involvement with the OSS in her papers 'American Psychologists and Wartime Research on Germany, 1941-1945' and 'Erikson on Hitler: The Origins of "Hitler's Imagery and German Youth"'.²⁸³

The Service was set up to do several things: coordinate espionage activities, collect intelligence, employ propaganda, plan post-war activities, and conduct what it called 'psychological warfare'.²⁸³ On July 1941, William 'Wild Bill' Donovan was appointed Coordinator of Information (COI) for the OSS. Like its successor, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), set up in 1947, the OSS made use of the knowledge of university professors and other experts in their respective fields. These scholars were employed by the so-called Research and Analysis branch of the service, led by historian William Langer. This branch assembled roughly 900 scholars of various disciplines: historians, economists, political scientists, geographers, psychologists, anthropologists, and diplomats were especially favoured. Erik Erikson was among those consulted, as were Arthur M. Schlesinger, H. Stuart Hughes, and Herbert Marcuse, to name a few. One of the OSS' tasks was to decipher the states of mind of foreign leaders, and to estimate the morale of foreign peoples.²⁸⁴

As early as 1939, a so-called Committee for National Morale was set up, uniting academics dedicated to investigating the psychological dimensions of warfare and propaganda within the United States in anticipation of war. This group included prominent scholars such as Margaret Mead, her husband Gregory Bateson, Ruth Benedict, Kurt Lewin and Harvard psychologist Henry Murray.²⁸⁵ These were all people closely associated with Erikson. Later, the Psychological Division of the OSS, led by psychologist Robert Tryon, sought to enhance understanding of American and foreign national characters, and also aided with the selection of American intelligence agents in the first psychological assessment centre set up in the United States.²⁸⁶ Erikson was part of this team. In early 1941, higher officials within the OSS pressed for psychological research on Germany. A report to 'Wild Bill' on 18 February requested a 'comprehensive critique of psychological factors which were found to be of defining importance in modern wars'.²⁸⁷ Some months later, Donovan was asked to set up a 'psychological offense directed against Hitler, based on an analysis of his personality disorder to "adversely affect Hitler's already precarious emotional stability"'.²⁸⁸

One of the tasks set for the psychologists associated with the OSS was to evaluate and try to explain the rise of Hitler. Before psychoanalysts became actively engaged with the Intelligence Agencies, there had been sporadic earlier psychoanalytic studies of Hitler's rise to power. Most of these works stressed the father-role that Hitler had played to his followers – in this they followed Freud's analysis of the attraction of leaders in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*.²⁸⁹ Some other psychoanalysts, more inclined to study social factors after a Marxist fashion, such as Erich Fromm, included analyses of socio-economic factors.²⁹⁰

Three of Erikson's contributions to the OSS survive: a 31-page paper entitled 'On Nazi Mentality' submitted in April 1942; a 28-page typescript entitled 'Hitler's Imagery and German Youth: A Contribution to the Study of German Character Structure' submitted in the summer

²⁸³ Banks, Louie M. *The Office of Strategic Services Psychological Selection Program*, PhD-thesis, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1995.

²⁸⁴ Pick, Daniel. *The Pursuit of the Nazi Mind: Hitler, Hess, and the Analysts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 152.

²⁸⁵ Friedman, Lawrence J. *Identity's Architect: A Biography of Erik H. Erikson*. New York: Scribner, 1999. 164.

²⁸⁶ Banks, Louie M. *The Office of Strategic Services Psychological Selection Program*, PhD-thesis, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1995.

²⁸⁷ Friedman, Lawrence J. *Identity's Architect: A Biography of Erik H. Erikson*. New York: Scribner, 1999. 167.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ Pick, Daniel. *The Pursuit of the Nazi Mind: Hitler, Hess, and the Analysts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 274.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 196.

of 1942; and the published version of 'Hitler's Imagery'. As Hoffman has shown, together they form an important chapter in Erikson's first book, *Childhood and Society* (1950): 'The Legend of Hitler's Childhood'.²⁹¹

In that chapter, Erikson set out to explain Hitler's appeal to his German following. He was particularly impressed by Hitler's myth-making capacities. He wrote: 'I shall not now review the psychiatric literature which has described Hitler as a "psychopathic paranoid", an "amoral sadistic infant", an "overcompensatory sissy", or a "neurotic laboring under the compulsion to murder".'²⁹² Hitler, according to Erikson, 'was first of all an adventurer, on a grandiose scale.'²⁹³ This approach, which did not focus on Hitler's pathology and its origins in his childhood but rather on his capacities to convince his followers, set Erikson's analysis of Hitler apart from other psychoanalysts' work. It went beyond an analysis of Hitler's pathology, and it also went beyond stating mere facts, such as economic determinants. Erikson was interested in the fabric of Hitler's appeal, the 'psychic facts' – the stories and mythology that he created, and how they linked up with Germany's collective fantasies, fears and ideals. 'The personality of the adventurer is akin to that of an actor,' Erikson wrote, 'because he must always be ready to personify, as if he had chosen them, the changing roles suggested by the whim of fate. Hitler shares with many an actor the fact that he is said to have been queer and unbearable behind the scenes, to say nothing of in his bedroom. He undoubtedly had hazardous borderline traits. But he knew how to approach the borderline, to appear as if he were going too far, and then to turn back on his breathless audience.'²⁹⁴ Again, Erikson was interested in the dialectic between leaders and followers.

Whether or not Erikson's approach was of much use to the OSS officials remains unknown. Louise Hoffman reported that for Erikson himself the work was more expensive than it was rewarding. His consultant fees and expenses made for the OSS remained unpaid for more than two years; in the meantime, he sold his car to make ends meet.²⁹⁵ But the work on Hitler undoubtedly prepared him theoretically for his book on Luther. Erikson himself made the comparison in *Young Man Luther*, when he wrote that centuries after Luther 'there appeared in Germany another young man who radically underbid Martin in his choice of temporary nothingness; a young man who likewise re-emerged from his moratorium as a leader of the German nation, matching Luther little in constructiveness, and outdoing him in systematic political destructiveness. This man, of course, was Adolf Hitler.'²⁹⁶ In the Luther-book, Erikson returned to the question what psychological trends in Hitler prepared the nation for the acceptance of the 'Brown Piper's most persuasive tune,' to show how similar processes had been at work in the choice of Martin Luther as a spiritual leader, centuries before.²⁹⁷ Erikson's study of Hitler for the OSS indirectly paved the way for his 'psycho-historical' study of Luther.

William and Walter

William Langer, author of 'The Next Assignment', suffered from crippling attacks of stagefright. 'Lecturing,' he wrote, 'became a chronic ordeal, and I found myself becoming

²⁹¹ Hoffman, Louise E. 'Erikson on Hitler: The Origins of "Hitler's Imagery and German Youth"'. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 22, No. 1, Fall 1993. 70.

²⁹² Erikson, Erik H. *Childhood and Society*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1950. 287.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 288

²⁹⁵ Hoffman, Louise E. 'Erikson on Hitler: The Origins of "Hitler's Imagery and German Youth"'. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 22, No. 1, Fall 1993. 82.

²⁹⁶ Erikson, Erik H. *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1962. 105.

²⁹⁷ Erikson, Erik H. *Childhood and Society*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1950. 288.

panicky even before entering the classroom.’²⁹⁸ For this reason, he went to see the psychoanalyst Hanns Sachs, the first training analyst at the Berlin Institute, who later moved to Boston. Langer later entered into analysis with Dr. Jenny Waelder. About his analysis, Langer later wrote that it was ‘highly instructive’, but that his affliction proved ‘absolutely recalcitrant.’²⁹⁹ Nonetheless, Langer became convinced that psychoanalysis was an important tool for assessing personalities.³⁰⁰ By 1942, William Langer was head of the OSS Research and Analysis branch. In that capacity he wrote to ‘Wild Bill’ Donovan, head of the OSS, that he was ‘personally convinced that psychological warfare operations can be strengthened by bringing in people in the psychoanalytic field.’³⁰¹ Erikson’s reports were commissioned as a result.³⁰² But in the spring of 1943, Donovan commissioned a full-scale analysis of Hitler’s personality. The person he turned to for a ‘psychoanalysis’ of Hitler was psychoanalyst Walter C. Langer, William’s younger brother.

In a letter from 1975 to Sanford Gifford, chief librarian of the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute, Walter Langer described how he entered analysis with Martin Peck in 1923, and after graduating Langer moved to New Mexico, where he set up a school for ‘neurotic adolescent boys’, which was later moved to Massachusetts.³⁰³ After the school burned down, Langer decided to go back to Harvard to work on a PhD. There he befriended Erik Erikson in 1934, ‘who had just come from Europe where he had been analyzed by Anna Freud and trained at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute.’³⁰⁴ Inspired by his meeting with Erikson, Langer wrote to Anna Freud in 1935 and was accepted as a candidate by the Vienna Institute. Langer arrived in Vienna in the summer of 1936.

Langer recalled that whilst training in Vienna and being in analysis with Anna Freud, ‘the political clouds were gathering and becoming more ominous’.³⁰⁵ In the letter, Langer described how Anna Freud was called in for questioning by the Gestapo during one of his sessions, and ‘after a time she did appear as unruffled as ever and the “analysis” continued.’³⁰⁶ Little is said in the long autobiographical letter about the actual analysis that Langer had with Anna Freud, but he openly discussed the political circumstances in Vienna at the time. Langer was involved in smuggling Jewish refugees across the border, and made a visit to Berlin ‘to see what life was like under the Hitler regime.’³⁰⁷ It was these travels, which led him past the Nuremberg Rallies, that would make him particularly appealing to the United States authorities as an expert on the situation in Germany and, in his own words, ‘the person best qualified to write a psychological analysis of Hitler and his relationship to the German people for the OSS during the war’.³⁰⁸

²⁹⁸ Quoted in: Loewenberg, Peter. *Decoding the Past, The Psychohistorical Approach*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002. 241. 88-89.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ In a psychobiographical portrait of William Langer, psychohistorian Peter Loewenberg offered his own explanation of Langer’s interest in psychoanalysis. See: Loewenberg, Peter. *Decoding the Past, The Psychohistorical Approach*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002. 241. 88-89.

³⁰¹ Quoted in Pick, Daniel. *The Pursuit of the Nazi Mind: Hitler, Hess, and the Analysts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 112.

³⁰² Hoffman, Louise E. ‘Erikson on Hitler: The Origins of “Hitler’s Imagery and German Youth”’. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 22, No. 1, Fall 1993.

³⁰³ Walter C. Langer to Sanford Gifford, 11 November, 1975. Box 2f.11. Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute Archive. 3.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 5.

³⁰⁵ Walter C. Langer to Sanford Gifford, 29 June, 1975. Box 2f.11. Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute Archive. 2.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 3.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 7.

Langer was involved in arranging the Freud family's move to London, and continued his analysis with Anna Freud in Britain. In 1938, he moved back to New York City, where the New York Psychoanalytical Institute declined him membership because he was not a medical doctor. After a few unsatisfying years of working on various projects, Langer returned to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he was allowed to attend the meetings of the Boston Psychoanalytical Society in 1940.

While recuperating from back problems in hospital in August 1941, Langer contacted Wild Bill Donovan, informing him of the possibilities of the use of psychoanalysis for the OSS. After returning home, he received a call from Washington informing him that 'Colonel Donovan was very much interested' in his views and invited him 'to have breakfast with him a week hence.'³⁰⁹ Over breakfast, Donovan made known his worries about a growing anti-war sentiment mostly among 'college students', and asked Langer: 'What light could psychoanalysis shed on these pressing problems?'³¹⁰ Langer had noticed such attitudes among his patients, and proposed that he would set up study groups around the country that could pool their clinical experience, discuss implications and try to arrive at 'a common denominator concerning the psychological factors underlying these attitudes. [...] The findings could then be compared to each other in order to determine the degree of agreement across the country.'³¹¹ After the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, however, 'the response of young men across the country was such that there was little room for doubt concerning their probable reaction to a draft', and the project lost its immediate relevance.³¹²

Spurred on by William Langer, Donovan remained interested in the various uses that psychoanalysis might have for the OSS. He requested that Langer set up a psychoanalytic 'field unit' in Cambridge that would draw on 'the talents of many experienced psychoanalysts' working in the area.³¹³ This plan was thwarted because the Bureau of Budget was not willing to finance an independent psychological unit. Langer stayed on as a freelance psychoanalytic consultant. 'It was sometime in the spring of 1943,' Langer wrote, that General Donovan – promoted in the meantime – had 'seemingly out of nowhere', asked him: 'What do you make of Hitler?'³¹⁴ This question led to a report of more than a thousand pages consisting of notes, interviews, and analyses of the personality of Adolf Hitler. Langer's account of what Donovan precisely asked of him is worth quoting in its entirety:

What we need is a realistic appraisal of the German situation. If Hitler is running the show, what kind of a person is he? What are his ambitions? How does he appear to the German people? What is he like with his associates? What is his background? And most of all, we want to know as much as possible about his psychological make-up – the things that make him tick. In addition, we ought to know what he might do if things begin to go against him.³¹⁵

Langer was aware of the difficulties involved in 'psychoanalysing' Hitler. In the introduction to the published version of the report, he explained that as a psychoanalyst he was accustomed to dealing with first-hand information; in a proper psychoanalysis, he wrote, 'the information may be fragmented and incomprehensible at any given time, but at least [the psychoanalyst] can be sure it is reliable and pertinent to the problem since it originated in the mind of his

³⁰⁹ Langer, Walter C. *The Mind of Adolf Hitler; the Secret Wartime Report*. New York: Basic Books, 1972. 5.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ *Ibid.* 6.

³¹² *Ibid.* 7.

³¹³ *Ibid.* 8.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.* 9.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.* 10.

patient.³¹⁶ The obstacles at the outset seemed so great that Langer questioned if such a psychoanalysis-by-proxy was even possible. He pointed out to Donovan that ‘neither psychological nor psychoanalytic techniques were designed or readily adoptable to such an enterprise.’ Wild Bill was undeterred. He replied: ‘Give it a try and see what you can come up with. Hire whatever help you need and get it done as soon as possible. Keep it brief and make it readable to the layman.’³¹⁷

In the opening sentences of the document delivered to Donovan in 1943: ‘A Psychological Analysis of Adolf Hitler: his Life and Legend’, Langer stated clearly that the file ‘represents an attempt to screen the wealth of contradictory, conflicting and unreliable material concerning Hitler into strata which will be helpful to the policy-makers and those who wish to frame counter-propaganda.’³¹⁸ He warned that ‘the material available for such an analysis is extremely scant and spotty’.³¹⁹ The materials consisted of literature and press holdings that Langer and his associates collected at the New York Public Library, as well as interviews with captured informants and refugees conducted by Langer himself. ‘I scoured the United States and Canada in search of persons who had had more than a passing contact with Hitler at some period of his life.’ Among the people Langer interviewed were: Hermann Rauschning, a German conservative politician who wrote a book *Gespräche mit Hitler* (which Langer also quoted from); Friedelinde Wagner, daughter of composer Siegfried Wagner; Ernst Haefstaengl, a businessman and former friend of Hitler’s; Princess Stephanie von Hohenlohe, a former Nazi-spy. To minimise the informant’s personal prejudice, Langer invented an interview technique whereby he urged the individuals to recall specific incidents rather than letting them dwell on generalities and personal conclusions. When incidents were recalled that held special promise, he would urge the informants to supply additional details. Langer and his team produced more than a thousand pages of material that became known as the *The Hitler Source-Book*.

Langer produced a picture of Hitler’s personality based on these interviews that served him as a map to guide him towards his own conclusions about Hitler’s personality structure. He wrote: ‘A survey of the raw material, in conjunction with our knowledge of Hitler’s actions as reported in the news, was sufficient to convince us that he was, in all probability, a neurotic psychopath.’ These conclusions were an attempt to ‘understand Hitler as a person and the motivations underlying his actions.’³²⁰ On the basis of these conclusions, Langer and his team wrote up several scenarios about the end of the war, and Hitler’s possible reactions to them. ‘Psychoanalysing’ Hitler was not only done to find out ‘what makes him tick’, but also ‘what he might do if things begin to go against him’. In the legend constructed around the wartime report, this is often the most focused upon because in it Langer accurately predicted that Hitler would commit suicide when faced with defeat.³²¹

In his letters, Langer more than once refers to himself as a part of a group of ‘dyed-in-the-wool disciples of Freud’ and one of ‘the more orthodox Freudians’³²². In the discussion of Hitler’s childhood in the report, young Adolf emerges from the ‘scant and spotty evidence’ as a little Oedipus. The picture painted is a grim one – of an abusive father and an overly protective mother who improperly sexualised the relationship with her son. Langer conceded that ‘there

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ Murray, Henry. *Analysis of the Personality of Adolph Hitler*. Accessed through: archive.org. 1.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

³²⁰ Murray, Henry. *Analysis of the Personality of Adolph Hitler*. Accessed through: archive.org. 1

³²¹ A notable instance of such a ‘legendary’ approach to the document is the documentary film made about the wartime report for the BBC: *Inside the Mind of Adolf Hitler*.

³²² Walter C. Langer to Sandford Gifford, 11 November, 1975. Box 2f.11. Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute Archive. 3.

is nothing abnormal in this'³²³ – at least not enough to account for any of Hitler's future actions. But in contrast to Erikson, Langer made much of Hitler's early childhood. What was exceptional in Hitler's case was 'the intensity of the emotions involved.'³²⁴ Like Freud in his study of Leonardo DaVinci, Langer used his reconstruction of Hitler's childhood to explain how the Führer had acted as an adult. Central to Langer's argument was the hypothesis that as a child, young Adolf must have witnessed his parents having sex. In later life, he argued, there must have been 'a symbolic reliving' of this primal scene 'that played an important part in shaping his future destinies'. Langer posited that 'unconsciously, all the emotions he had once felt for his mother became transferred to Germany' and 'just as Germany was ideally suited to symbolise his mother, so Austria was ideally suited to symbolize his father.'³²⁵ Langer held that the alliance of Austria and Germany served to symbolize the marriage of Hitler's father and mother. Similar to Fedor Vergin, Langer concluded that Hitler was 'not dealing with nations composed of millions of individuals but is trying to solve his personal conflicts and rectify the injustices of childhood.'³²⁶ In the original report he added: 'his microcosm had been inflated into a macrocosm.'³²⁷

According to Langer, Hitler's 'intensity of emotions' was strengthened by 'the fact that as a child he must have discovered his parents having sex. An examination of the data makes this conclusion almost inescapable and from our knowledge of his father's character and past history it is not at all improbable.'³²⁸ The passage from *Mein Kampf* that served as the principle piece of evidence on which this hypothesis rested is ambiguous, to say the least.³²⁹ In the passage, Hitler gave a description of a child's life in a lower-class family. Langer assumed that in the passage Hitler is, at least in part, describing his own childhood:³³⁰

Among the five children there is a boy, let us say, of three [...] When the parents fight almost daily their brutality leaves nothing to the imagination; then the results of such visual education must slowly but inevitably become apparent to the little one. Those who are not familiar with such conditions can hardly imagine the results, especially when the mutual differences express themselves in the form of brutal attacks on the part of the father toward the mother or to assaults due to drunkenness.³³¹

Henry Murray, who was listed as a co-author of the original report (but who, like the two other psychoanalysts that worked on the file, Bertram D. Lewin and Ernst Kris, was omitted from the title page in the 1972 edition), and who wrote a second, 'shadow' report on Hitler, came to surprisingly similar conclusions. Murray was a highly influential academic psychologist at Harvard, who trained as a psychoanalyst in 1933, and had been in a brief analysis with Carl Jung in Zürich. His standardised tests, questionnaires, ability gauges, ethical standard indices and thematic apperception tests became well-known and widely used in academic psychology. His narrative approach to individual lives and the study of personality – which he called

³²³ Langer, Walter C. *The Mind of Adolf Hitler; the Secret Wartime Report*. New York: Basic Books, 1972. 151.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ *Ibid.* 154.

³²⁶ *Ibid.* 155.

³²⁷ Murray, Henry. *Analysis of the Personality of Adolph Hitler*. Accessed through: archive.org. 161.

³²⁸ Langer, Walter C. *The Mind of Adolf Hitler; the Secret Wartime Report*. New York: Basic Books, 1972. 151.

³²⁹ Gatzke points out that the keywords that led Langer to interpret this passage as expressing Hitler's witnessing a primal scene in the German original text do not support Langer's hypothesis.

³³⁰ A book on Hitler's childhood that paints a very different, much less oblique picture of Hitler's early years is by Smith, Bradley F. *Adolf Hitler; His Family, Childhood, and Youth*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, 1967.

³³¹ Langer, Walter C. *The Mind of Adolf Hitler; the Secret Wartime Report*. New York: Basic Books, 1972. 143.

‘personology’ – influenced a generation of psychologists interested in psychobiography and psychohistory. Walter Langer had been Murray’s junior colleague at Harvard.

When they started working together, Langer was under the impression that Murray was part of the team he was coordinating. In truth, Murray was writing his own account under separate instruction. As historian Daniel Pick has shown, Murray dropped out of meetings and failed to send Langer his promised contributions to the project. Years later, Langer was dismayed to find that Murray had written his own analysis of Hitler, presumably based on the materials that Langer had collected. In the introduction to *The Mind of Adolf Hitler*, Langer wrote: ‘After reading the raw material, one of the collaborators discovered that he was too pressed for time to make the trips to New York to participate in our evaluative meetings. He promised, however, to write down his views and conclusions and submit them for our consideration. Unfortunately, not a word was ever received from him.’³³² Murray later denied having used Langer’s OSS material in his own report. Langer and Murray came to a very similar conclusion on the basis of the same material in the shadow report. It is unclear if Murray and Langer independently arrived at the idea of Hitler’s witnessing a primal scene, or if he based his interpretation on Langer’s, or vice versa.

Both Murray and Langer employed elementary Freudian terminology and concepts; they focused on Hitler’s childhood and how his environment may have led to the intensification of pre-existing tendencies towards destruction. They were also both concerned with the status of Hitler as leader of the German people, and up to a certain extent with the problems in trying to explain Hitler’s appeal to a large number of people. After all, if Hitler was a ‘hysteric’ and displayed symptoms of ‘paranoid schizophrenia’, why then was he so popular to such a large part of the German population? Murray’s answer to this question was rather bold: ‘[Hitler] and his ideology have exactly met the needs, longings and sentiments of the majority of Germans.’³³³ Langer’s answer to the question was more complex: ‘Those who are delegated to conduct the war against Germany’, Langer wrote, ‘cannot content themselves with simply regarding Hitler as a personal devil and condemning him to an Eternal Hell in order that the remainder of the world may live in peace and quiet.’³³⁴ He continued:

They will realize that these are not wholly the actions of a single individual but that a reciprocal relationship exists between the Fuehrer and the people and that the madness of the one stimulates and flows into the other and vice versa. [...] From a scientific point of view, therefore, we are forced to consider Hitler, the Fuehrer, not as a personal devil, wicked as his actions and philosophy may be, but as the expression of a state of mind existing in millions of people.³³⁵

Further on, Langer wrote: ‘if the individual being studied happens to be the leader of a group, we can expect to find the pertinent factors in an exaggerated form that would tend to make them stand out in sharper relief than would be the case if we studied an average member of the group.’³³⁶ Langer thought that Hitler’s popularity lay in the fact that he was able to appeal directly to repressed parts of his audience’s psyches. By invoking a language rooted in a ‘repressed feminine-masochist’ part of the personalities of his followers, he confronted his audience with this repressed side of their personalities, which, according to Langer, led them to an extreme form of guilt, and allowed Hitler to move his male audience to commit brutal and ruthless crimes. This form of denial had served Hitler in the overcoming of his own

³³² Langer, Walter C. *The Mind of Adolf Hitler; the Secret Wartime Report*. New York: Basic Books, 1972. 18.

³³³ Murray, Henry. *Analysis of the Personality of Adolph Hitler*. Accessed through: archive.org. 1.

³³⁴ Langer, Walter C. *The Mind of Adolf Hitler; the Secret Wartime Report*. New York: Basic Books, 1972. 138.

³³⁵ *Ibid.* 138.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

conflicts, and now, by first making his audiences aware of their feminine-masochist personalities, he was offering them his own solution. 'It is as though,' Langer mused, 'Hitler had paralyzed the critical functions of the individual Germans and had assumed the role for himself.'³³⁷

The Mind of Adolf Hitler

Although it is unknown if the OSS actually used the study, Langer was very proud of his work and believed deeply in its significance. In the introduction to the published version of the report, he stated: 'I have also been asked: "Do you honestly believe that analyses of this kind are worth making?" My answer is a definite yes. The world has become more and more complex with our ever-advancing technology, and revolutions and dictators are becoming numerous and more dangerous.'³³⁸ The report remained classified until 1968. It was published in 1972, with an introduction by Langer and an afterword by historian Robert G. L. Waite. Bruce Mazlish was involved in getting the manuscript published at Basic Books. At the height of interest in psychohistory, Langer's study, now entitled *The Mind of Adolf Hitler* became a bestseller nearly thirty years after the manuscript was completed. In the introduction to the published version, Langer wrote: 'I like to believe that if such a study of Hitler had been made years earlier, under less tension, and with more opportunity to gather first-hand information, there might not have been a Munich; a similar study of Stalin might have produced a different Yalta; one of Castro might have prevented the Cuban situation; and one of President Diem might have avoided our deep involvement in Vietnam.'³³⁹ The report circulated among the higher echelons of the OSS, but it is not clear if President Roosevelt read the report.

Reception of the publication was mixed. A. James Gregor, a political scientist at University of California, Berkeley found the book was 'incredibly silly'.³⁴⁰ He felt Langer's extensive interviews amounted to a collection of 'hearsay from the most peccable sources – third-party recitations, political opponents, refugees from Hitler's many disgruntled relatives, venal informers and self-seeking opportunists among others.'³⁴¹ He also felt that Langer was 'so wedded to Freudian simplicities that this book can only, and most charitably, be characterized as bizarre.'³⁴² Boston University historian Dietrich Orlow, in the *Journal for Interdisciplinary History*, was slightly more charitable, and saw that *The Mind of Adolf Hitler* illustrated 'with particular clarity both the many advantages and some possible pitfalls of the psychohistorical approach.'³⁴³ He was critical about Langer and the psychohistorians' ahistorical methodology, but welcomed psychoanalysts' abilities to 'ask new questions and thereby unleash, as it were, hitherto undiscovered facts and information in the available data.'³⁴⁴ In 1972, psychohistorian Robert Lifton wrote a review of Langer's book for the *New York Times*. He called the study 'adventurous, intelligent and risky.'³⁴⁵ But he was not uncritical. 'Given what Hitler represented,' Lifton reasoned, 'Langer's ethical position as a psychohistorian had an enviable clarity. But I wish his retrospective introduction had supplied

³³⁷ *Ibid.* 139.

³³⁸ Langer, Walter C. *The Mind of Adolf Hitler; the Secret Wartime Report*. New York: Basic Books, 1972. 22.

³³⁹ Quoted in Waggoner, Walter H. 'Walter Langer is Dead at 82; Wrote Secret Study of Hitler'. *The New York Times*, July 10, 1981.

³⁴⁰ James Gregor, A. Review: The Mind of Adolf Hitler. *The American Political Science Review*, Volume 68, No.1, March 1974. 317.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ Orlow, Dietrich. Review: The Mind of Adolf Hitler. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Volume 5, No.1, Summer 1974. 132.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 133.

³⁴⁵ Lifton, Robert J. 'The Man Who Wanted to Live Forever'. *The New York Times*, December 31, 1972.

us with more information about his personal motivation in taking what was, prior to Pearl Harbor, an unusual step.’³⁴⁶ Lifton was concerned that the ‘location and advocacy of the investigator have great bearing on the “disciplined subjectivity” of psychohistorical work.’³⁴⁷ He wrote: ‘I do not know whether Walter Langer has ever thought of himself as a psychohistorian, but he is one nonetheless.’³⁴⁸

In ‘The Next Assignment’, William Langer tried to show that Luther must have been unconsciously influenced by the trauma of the Black Death in a way that rang true with, and was appealing for, his large following. Erikson had tried to show that both Hitler and Luther, by being products of their specific time and place, were able to resolve conflict that extended beyond their own personal situation, and in doing so became attractive as leaders to groups of followers suffering from similar pathologies. Both projects shared a concern for the interaction between group and leader.

William allegedly had no part in the preparation of his brother’s report on Hitler. When he did read it, he was ‘particularly intrigued’ by his brother’s approach, and as a result he ‘more and more came to realize that we historians often indulged in very superficial estimates of men and their motives’.³⁴⁹ It is unknown exactly when and under what circumstances William Langer read Walter’s analysis of Hitler. It is probable that in his function as head of the OSS Research and Analysis Unit and prime instigator of a psychoanalytic approach in the OSS, William had access to the report. In any case, Walter received generous acknowledgement in the first note of William’s ‘The Next Assignment.’ In an introduction to the 1972 publication of the report in book-form, William Langer stated that the report ‘reflected many discussions I had had with [Walter], especially those after his return from Vienna in 1938.’³⁵⁰ Those discussions had led William to become ‘a veritable apostle of the doctrine [of psychoanalysis]’, and ‘completely converted to the notion that historians should explore and exploit the findings of modern psychology’³⁵¹, which would ultimately bring him, in 1957, to the conclusions set forth in his *Next Assignment*. In looking back over the prehistory of their movement, and in their attempt to shape a narrative about it, the psychohistorians put special weight on William Langer’s address, and the publication of *Young Man Luther*.

We have seen how Langer, a well-known and respected historian, lent credence to the idea of the fusion of psychoanalysis and history, in the process inspiring a generation of younger historians. We have looked at how Erik Erikson’s particular interpretation of ego psychology made a highly specific marriage of psychoanalysis and history possible. Those two ‘events’ – Langer’s address and the publication of *Young Man Luther* – paved the way for the psychohistorians’ movement. They are the ‘legendary’ starting points of psychohistory. In the next chapter we will look at the *actual* beginnings of the psychohistorical movement. The moment when, for the first time, historians and psychologists convened under the banner of ‘psychohistory’, and called themselves psychohistorians. This happened in a rather remarkable place: a little town on the East Coast of the United States – Wellfleet, Massachusetts.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁹ Langer, Walter C. *The Mind of Adolf Hitler; the Secret Wartime Report*. New York: Basic Books, 1972. vi.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Section II
The Psychohistorians

Chapter 4 Wellfleet

The town of Wellfleet, Massachusetts is located on the outer rim of Cape Cod, some forty-five miles out into the Atlantic Ocean. It has an upland area of approximately 13,100 acres, 8,000 acres of which lie within seashore boundaries. Over the summer, between Memorial Day and Labor Day, the small population waxes into roughly 17,000. The area is known for its fresh water ponds, beaches and ‘Wellfleet oysters’.³⁵² Henry David Thoreau called it ‘a kind of Promised Land.’³⁵³

In the 1940s, psychoanalyst Clara Thompson (co-founder of the neo-Freudian William Alanson White Foundation) first brought her pupils to Wellfleet for the holidays. Ever since, a remarkable number of people working in the mental health professions have been gathering in Wellfleet every year. At present, there are two rival psychotherapy training centres in town; since the 1980s, the Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis has been holding its annual summer conference there.³⁵⁴ But it was during the late 1950s when psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton was struck by what he called the ‘oceanic feeling’ of the place: ‘Freud (quoting the writer Romain Rolland) used the metaphor ‘oceanic feeling’ to describe much-desired psychic states (such as those involving transcendence); in Wellfleet we have the real thing’.³⁵⁵

In psychoanalytic circles, Wellfleet is chiefly known for the group established there by Lifton: the Wellfleet Psychohistory Group. That group has become known as the birthplace of psychohistory as both a discipline and a movement.³⁵⁶ At the time of writing, Lifton still considers himself a psychohistorian, but has in recent years increasingly distanced himself from the term ‘psychohistory’ as he feels it has gained ‘nasty’ connotations.³⁵⁷ A group of scholars still meets every year in Lifton’s ‘renovated hut’ to discuss the various intersections between psychology and history. For as long as it has existed, it has consisted of intellectuals of a variety of backgrounds: historians, psychologists, sociologists and philosophers. The list of core members – known by Lifton as ‘Wellfleetians’ – and fellow travellers has, however, changed considerably over time.³⁵⁸ Prominent attendants over the years have included psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, who attended every meeting until his deteriorating health prohibited him from coming in the mid-1980s, historian Bruce Mazlish, political scientist Doris Kearns Goodwin, psychiatrist Robert Coles, sociologist Kai Erikson, philosopher Stuart Hampshire, historian H. Stuart Hughes – who referred to Wellfleet as ‘la plage des intellectuels’ – and writer and critic Norman Mailer.³⁵⁹

In Lifton’s recollection the group was established principally around himself and Erikson, and specifically around their evolving approach to each other’s work. ‘Erikson and I,’ he wrote, ‘were seeking ways to further a relationship between a mentor [...] and a close student struggling to break sufficiently free of mentorship’.³⁶⁰ In his version of the story, the Group provided the two men with an ‘informal’ yet ‘institutional’ structure for their developing

³⁵² ‘Experienced tasters know that they are plump and clean with a distinctively good balance of creamy sweetness and brine,’ claims the Wellfleet Oysterfest website.

³⁵³ Thoreau, Henry David, Horace Elisha Scudder, H. G. O. Blake, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and F. B. Sanborn. *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and, 1894. 62.

³⁵⁴ Swidey, Neil. ‘Why do shrinks flock to Cape Cod’s Wellfleet?’ *The Boston Globe*, July 23, 2014.

³⁵⁵ Lifton, Robert J. *Witness to an Extreme Century: A Memoir*. New York: Free Press, 2011. 337.

³⁵⁶ Pietikainen and Ihanus have dealt with this topic in their paper: ‘On the Origins of Psychoanalytic Psychohistory’. *History of Psychology* 6, No. 2 (2003): 171-94.

³⁵⁷ Personal communication with Lifton, May 22, 2015.

³⁵⁸ Lifton, Robert J. *Witness to an Extreme Century: A Memoir*. New York: Free Press, 2011.

³⁵⁹ Lustig, Jessica. ‘The Wellfleet Ten’. *The New York Times*, 13 May, 2011.

³⁶⁰ Lifton, Robert J. *Witness to an Extreme Century: A Memoir*. New York: Free Press, 2011. 337.

intellectual exchange.³⁶¹ Historian Bruce Mazlish, who procured funding for the earliest Wellfleet meetings, remembers the beginning of Wellfleet very differently. The initial aim of the group according to Mazlish was to formally ‘conceptualize the basis of psychohistory’.³⁶² In fact, when the Group first met in late August 1966, it was still named the ‘Group for the Study of Psychohistorical Process’, a name proposed by Lifton.³⁶³ At that time it received large grants from the American Society of Arts and Sciences. In return, the Academy expected the Group to compile a volume of papers, publish in their journal *Daedalus* and set up a training programme in psychohistory.³⁶⁴ The idea that psychohistory might some day be an independent discipline was conceived at Wellfleet. It was also buried there, as we shall see, only to be revived by others later. In this chapter we will examine the hopes and aims of the founding Wellfleetians and show why they failed at reaching those aims.

Living History

As several authors have shown, most notably among them Nathan Hale and Lawrence Samuel, the growing interest in applying psychoanalytic theory to history and the social sciences in the 1950s and 60s corresponded with a broad cultural acceptance of psychoanalytic ideas by an educated public in the United States. As early as 1920, the American magazine *Current Opinion* judged that: ‘One can hardly pick up a newspaper or magazine without finding psychoanalytic terms.’³⁶⁵ As late as 1988, historian Peter Gay found: ‘Freud’s ideas pervade our culture to such an extent that we often use Freudian language – narcissism, sibling rivalry, ambivalence, neurosis – without even realizing it.’³⁶⁶ In the decades in between, the language of psychoanalysis percolated into the discussion of American politics. To understand the rise of psychohistory, it is worth looking more closely at what has been called the ‘transnationalisation’ or ‘Americanisation’ of Freud.³⁶⁷

In the United States, membership in the American Psychological Association grew from 2,739 in 1940, to 30,839 in 1970, while membership in the American Psychiatric Association rose from 2,423 to 18,407 between 1940 and 1970.³⁶⁸ While psychoanalysis took hold in psychiatry after World War II, it came to be portrayed more and more favorably in journalism - from sympathetic (sometimes deliberately caricatured) portrayals in mass magazines such as *Life*, *Time* and *The New Yorker*, to more rigorous exegeses in *Scientific American*.³⁶⁹ Titles of magazine articles such as ‘What’s it Like to Be Psychoanalyzed?’ and ‘Psychoanalysis Broke up my Marriage’ point towards the discipline’s broad appeal at the time – it was as ‘hip’ as it was ‘square’ – and were to be found in a wide range of publications, from

³⁶¹ Lifton, Robert J., and Eric Olson. *Explorations in Psychohistory; the Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975. 12.

³⁶² Pawelec, Tomasz. ‘Bruce Mazlish: Pioneer Psychohistorian’. *Clio’s Psyche*, December, 1996, Volume 3, No. 3. 77.

³⁶³ Lifton, Robert J., and Eric Olson. *Explorations in Psychohistory; the Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975. 13.

³⁶⁴ See Mazlish, Bruce. *Records of the Academy (Academy of Arts and Sciences)*, No. 1966/1967 (1966-1967). 31-32.

³⁶⁵ Samuel, Lawrence R. *Shrink: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in America*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013. 7.

³⁶⁶ Levin, Eric. ‘Putting Freud on the Couch, Historian Peter Gay Finds a Genius Whose Stature Time Cannot Shrink’, *People Magazine*, June 6, 1988.

³⁶⁷ Matthews, F. H. ‘The Americanization of Sigmund Freud: Adaptations of Psychoanalysis before 1917’. *Journal of American Studies*, Volume 1, Issue 1, April 1967. 39-62.

³⁶⁸ Eghigian, Greg. *From Madness to Mental Health: Psychiatric Disorder and Its Treatment in Western Civilization*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010. 369.

³⁶⁹ For an in-depth discussion, see Hale, Nathan G. *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

the *Washington Post* to *Cosmopolitan*.³⁷⁰ Economic prosperity delivered access to psychoanalysis to an increasing number of Americans, including journalists. As a result, psychoanalysis indirectly contributed to a shift in journalistic perspective, influencing authors associated with the New Journalism movement (such as Norman Mailer, Gay Talese, Joan Didion, Tom Wolfe). The movement became known for re-inserting ‘the first-person singular point of view into journalism’ and apply narrative techniques associated with fiction to non-fiction.³⁷¹

Under the influence of books such as *Freud: The Mind of a Moralizer* by Philip Rieff (another one-time Wellfleetian), critics had for a long time viewed psychoanalysis as a principally conservative discipline, and portrayed Freud as a thinker who urged mankind to make the best of an inevitably unhappy fate.³⁷² In the latter part of the twentieth century, this view was gradually challenged, especially by the growing influence and public visibility of thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School. Erich Fromm used a blend of early-Marxist theory and psychoanalysis to locate the origin of neuroses in a historically determined warping of a presumed essential nature of man.³⁷³ He discussed ‘the problems of survival and freedom in America’ on national television; Herbert Marcuse rallied students with his message that mankind was sick with the burdens of sexual repression in his book *Eros and Civilization* (1955); Norman O. Brown, in his book *Life Against Death* (1959), used Freud’s notion of the death drive to argue that ‘man’s cultural situation’, which he perceived as dire, was an expression of his own desires: ‘hostile to life and unconsciously bent on self-destruction’.³⁷⁴ By the late 1960s, psychoanalytic terminology had permeated American culture to such an extent that there was now a large potential readership for books that ‘psychoanalysed’ political situations and figures. After World War II, with a heightened awareness of the possible destructiveness of a single individual such as Hitler, historians were susceptible to the argument that where a man occupied a position that allowed him to shape history in a certain direction, an understanding of his life-history could be of great significance.³⁷⁵

As psychoanalytic terminology and thought permeated American culture at large, they entered into the country’s political debate. Shortly before the 1964 presidential election (Johnson vs. Goldwater), newly founded *Fact Magazine* polled members of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), asking them whether conservative candidate Barry Goldwater was mentally stable enough to become president of the country. The cover of the November-December issue gave the answer: ‘1,189 psychiatrists say Goldwater is psychologically unfit to be president!’³⁷⁶ The issue’s title in full was: ‘The Unconscious of a Conservative: A Special Issue on the Mind of Barry Goldwater’. The thrust of the two main articles was that Goldwater had ‘a severely paranoid personality and was psychologically unfit’ to become president.³⁷⁷ According to the official jury report, the articles tried to support the thesis that Senator Goldwater was mentally unstable ‘by citing allegedly factual incidents from his public and

³⁷⁰ Samuel, Lawrence R. *Shrink: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in America*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013.

³⁷¹ For a discussion of this, see Terence E. Holt’s essay, Holt, Terence E. ‘Narrative Medicine and Negative Capability.’ *Literature and Medicine* 23, No. 2, 2004. 318-33.

³⁷² Rieff, Philip. *Freud, the Mind of the Moralizer*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

³⁷³ See for example Fromm, Erich. *Marx’s Concept of Man*. New York: F. Ungar, 1966.

³⁷⁴ Brown, Norman O. *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (1959). London: Sphere Books, 1960. 1.

³⁷⁵ Mazlish, Bruce. ‘What is Psycho-History?’ *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society Conference* (22 September 1970). Volume 21, 1971. 79-99.

³⁷⁶ ‘The Unconscious of a Conservative: A Special Issue on the Mind of Barry Goldwater’. *Fact Magazine*, 5, Sep-Oct. 1964.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

private life and by reporting the results of a “poll” of 12,356 psychiatrists’, together with a sampling of comments ‘by the 2,417 psychiatrists who responded to the poll questionnaire.’³⁷⁸

It was not the first instance of the pathologising of political preference in the US media. Around the same time, *Harper’s* published a piece entitled ‘The Paranoid Style in American Politics’, written by Columbia historian Richard Hofstadter.³⁷⁹ He argued that conservatism could and should be regarded as a mental illness.³⁸⁰ A court-case followed the publication of the article in *Fact Magazine*: ‘Goldwater vs Ginzburg’ (Ralph Ginzburg was editor-in-chief and publisher of the magazine). A federal jury awarded Barry Goldwater \$1 in compensatory damages; \$25,000 in punitive damages were claimed from Ginzburg.³⁸¹ *Fact* ceased to exist, and the incident led to an amendment of the APA’s ethics principles several years later. The amendment became known as ‘section 7.3’, or: the ‘Goldwater rule’, and stated that it was forbidden for members of the APA to comment on the mental states of individuals without having examined them personally.³⁸² No such rule, however, was put in place for historians.

Great Promise

The development of a Freudian ‘climate of opinion’ in the United States, to borrow W.H. Auden’s well-worn phrase, prepared the ground for psychohistory. Despite the small number of classically trained psychoanalysts among the first attendants of the Wellfleet Psychohistory Group, the initial approach to the use of psychoanalysis in history adopted by most of the early psychohistorians was closer to the classical Freudian tradition of the application of psychoanalytic thought to historical subjects than to any approach of affiliates of the so-called Frankfurt School. Lifton was influenced by his personal analysis with Beata Rank and his interactions with Erikson. Mazlish was influenced by William Langer, whose interpretation of psychoanalysis was heavily influenced by his brother, psychoanalyst Walter Langer.³⁸³

In April 1966, Bruce Mazlish and Robert Lifton co-authored and sent out an invitation to thirteen scholars for the first Wellfleet meeting. They wrote: ‘Approaches from psychoanalysis have all too often focused so one-sidedly upon individual psychopathology [...] and those from history have either neglected or dealt inadequately with the individual psychological dimension. Recently, however, a number of scholars from various disciplines have been converging on the general area of psychohistorical inquiry in a way that, we believe, holds great promise.’³⁸⁴

The first attendants of the Wellfleet gatherings were an academically diverse group of well-educated white males, all with some organic connection to one another, and all with strong feelings and opinions about the relationship between psychology and history. Among them were: Frank Manuel, historian at New York University; Frederick Wyatt of the University of Michigan’s Psychological Clinic; William B. Willcox of Michigan University’s History

³⁷⁸ http://www.supremecourtopinions.wustl.edu/files/opinion_pdfs/1969/69-687.pdf (Accessed on September 13, 2016).

³⁷⁹ Hofstadter, Richard. ‘The Paranoid Style in American Politics’. *Harper’s Magazine*, November 1964.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁸¹ http://www.supremecourtopinions.wustl.edu/files/opinion_pdfs/1969/69-687.pdf (Accessed on September 13, 2016).

³⁸² Questions surrounding this issue have come under scrutiny again at the time of writing, see Carey, Benedict. ‘The Psychiatric Question: Is It Fair to Analyze Donald Trump From Afar?’ *The New York Times*, 15 August, 2016.

³⁸³ Interestingly, both Walter Langer and Erikson were analyzed by Anna Freud, whose antipathy towards psychobiography has been well-documented.

³⁸⁴ Invitation letter Group for the Study of Psychohistorical Process, April 9, 1966. Container 11, Erik H. and Joan M. Erikson papers, 1925-1985, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University.

Department; and Erik Erikson, who was to be the ‘unofficial guest of honor’.³⁸⁵ Under the influence of Mazlish, the aim of the Group at this point was ‘a systematic exploration of problems and methods in studying psychohistorical process’.³⁸⁶ Papers and manuscript drafts were circulated beforehand and the proceedings recorded stenographically. ‘We envision this seminar as part of a continuing program, and we would welcome an association with the Academy [of Arts and Sciences] both in relation to future intellectual exchanges and to resulting publications.’³⁸⁷ The Academy of Arts and Sciences released a bulletin that summarised the first Wellfleet meeting.

Later, John Voss (representative of the Academy of Arts and Sciences) and Mazlish would agree that the first meeting had been underfunded. For the following two meetings (1967, 1968) the Group received 13,400 dollars from the Academy. ‘If the group generates plans in the next two years for a formal program,’ Voss promised, ‘the scale of activities and expenses will increase, particularly in the area of supporting services, such as editing, reproduction, etc.’³⁸⁸

Psychohistory held great promise for many of Wellfleet’s first attendants. Lifton was inspired foremost by the work and personality of Erikson. As we have seen, he was hoping to use his Wellfleet gatherings – and perhaps psychohistory – as a vehicle to transcend the mentor-pupil dynamic that he perceived was operative between them. But he was not the only one who was impressed by Erikson’s work, and interested in building on it further. Keniston came to Erikson’s theories of identity and life-stages from the perspective of a sociologist, and his concerns with adolescent behaviour, i.e. student rebellion, in the 1960s. Robert Coles was inspired by Erikson’s unconventional interpretation of psychoanalysis and his life-histories, that linked cultural symbols and individual personality (he would later write a short intellectual biography of Erikson).³⁸⁹

Mazlish, on the other hand, also held Erikson in high regard but had been primarily influenced by William Langer and his own study of Freud as a philosopher – or ‘great speculator’ – of history.³⁹⁰ In an extensive article in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 28 July 1966, Mazlish set the stakes high. He wrote: ‘while as a therapy [psychoanalysis] might allow historians to diagnose the pathological behavior of a few past individuals or groups, as a comprehensive theory of the development of human personality it presumes to offer historians a key to all human behavior.’³⁹¹ Mazlish was in contact with Langer at the time; he had served under him in the OSS during World War II, and would later be involved in publishing the OSS Hitler-document written by Langer’s brother, psychoanalyst Walter Langer.³⁹²

The Wellfleet invitation stated: ‘William Langer [...] claimed [...] “the next assignment” for historians working on the edge of their profession would be to investigate the possible use

³⁸⁵ Personal communication with Mazlish, January 15, 2014.

³⁸⁶ Invitation letter Group for the Study of Psychohistorical Process, April 9, 1966. Container 11, Erik H. and Joan M. Erikson papers, 1925-1985, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁸ Letter from John Voss to Erik Erikson, February 3, 1967. Container 11, Erik H. and Joan M. Erikson papers, 1925-1985, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University.

³⁸⁹ Coles, Robert. *Erik H. Erikson; the Growth of His Work*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1970.

³⁹⁰ Mazlish, Bruce. *The Riddle of History; the Great Speculators from Vico to Freud*. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.

³⁹¹ Mazlish, Bruce. ‘Inside the Whales’. *Times Literary Supplement*, July 28, 1966. 667.

³⁹² Personal communication with Mazlish, January 15, 2014. On December 29, 1970, William Langer and Bruce Mazlish co-signed a letter asking Erik Erikson if he wanted to be part of a study group in psychohistory, organised by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The letter stated that ‘the American Academy has for some time been interested in psychohistorical studies. [...] The group’s long-range purpose will be to explore the possibilities of institutionalizing training in this field.’ It is unknown whether or not Erikson replied to the letter and what became of the study group. The letter can be found in Container 11, Erik H. and Joan M. Erikson papers, 1925-1985, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University.

of psychological approaches to history. It is only now, eight years later, that a serious attempt to map the boundary conditions of this new area of history is being completed.³⁹³ The differences between Mazlish's and Lifton's hopes and aims for psychohistory at Wellfleet can be traced to their differences in intellectual background.

Mazlish

The Wellfleetian most heavily invested in the idea of psychohistory as a semi-independent discipline was Bruce Mazlish. Mazlish received his doctoral degree in intellectual history from Columbia University in 1955. At the time, he worked under Professors Shepherd Clough and Jacques Barzun, and for a few years taught at Columbia and the University of Maine, before settling at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) where he remained until the autumn of 2003 when he assumed emeritus status. At MIT he served as the chairman of the History Section (1965-1970) and as head of the Humanities Department (1974-1979).

Throughout his career, the nature of Mazlish's work has been consistently interdisciplinary. His first book, *The Western intellectual Tradition: from Leonardo to Hegel* was co-authored by Jacob Bronowski. It was 'an intellectual history in the largest sense', covering 'an interplay of ideas from different fields' during the four centuries in which the world was 'transformed from medieval into modern'.³⁹⁴ It was also a bestseller and paid for the house that Mazlish still lives in at the time of writing.³⁹⁵ In recent years, Mazlish has stated that psychoanalysis was merely one among other 'lenses' that he has used to approach history with.³⁹⁶ And it is true that he has worked in and on the intersections of various fields: his current interests lie in global history, and the changing interactions between humans and technology. But in the 1960s psychohistory still held out special promise to him: 'psychohistory is not *merely* the application of psychoanalysis to history,' he wrote, 'but a true fusion of the two, creating a new vision.'³⁹⁷

This particular vision was influenced by historian William Langer. During World War II, Mazlish had worked under Langer in the OSS, and he was one of the young historians inspired by Langer's presidential 'Next Assignment' address in 1958.³⁹⁸ In the early 1970s, Mazlish was involved in publishing Walter C. Langer's Hitler-report. He was a consultant at publishing house Basic Books and played tennis with Langer's stepson, Duncan Nelson. Mazlish recalls having been inspired by Langer's words in his speech: '[I]f I were a young man, starting all over again, I would have worked on the frontiers between psychology and history.'³⁹⁹ In line with his theorising, Mazlish also identified an important *personal* reason for his interest in psychohistory: he had entered into therapy shortly after the breakup of his first marriage.⁴⁰⁰

In 1958, Mazlish read *Young Man Luther*. He contacted Erikson, who invited him to come to Harvard for a talk. Mazlish became 'exposed to [Erikson's] extraordinary clinical

³⁹³ Invitation letter Group for the Study of Psychohistorical Process, April 9, 1966. Container 11, Erik H. and Joan M. Erikson papers, 1925-1985, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University.

³⁹⁴ Bronowski, Jacob, and Bruce Mazlish. *The Western Intellectual Tradition, from Leonardo to Hegel*. New York: Harper, 1960.

³⁹⁵ Personal communication with Mazlish, January 15, 2014.

³⁹⁶ Mazlish, Bruce. 'The Past and Future of Psychohistory', in: *The Annual of Psychoanalysis*, Volume 31, Psychoanalysis and History. 256.

³⁹⁷ Mazlish, Bruce. *In Search of Nixon: A Psychohistorical Inquiry* (1972). Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1974. 152.

³⁹⁸ Personal correspondence with Mazlish, January 15, 2014.

³⁹⁹ Pawelec, Tomasz. 'Bruce Mazlish: Pioneer Psychohistorian'. *Clio's Psyche*, Volume 3, No. 3, December, 1996.

⁴⁰⁰ Personal correspondence with Mazlish, January 15, 2014.

sense', 'fell under his spell' and then proceeded to help him evaluate the historical work of some of his students.⁴⁰¹ Coincidentally, Mazlish was asked to write a book about the intersections between psychoanalysis and history. He felt unequipped to write an entire book about the topic himself, but agreed to compile an anthology: half of which consisted of essays on the philosophy of history, and half on the actual application of psychoanalysis to history. The book, entitled *Psychoanalysis and History*, was published in 1963. It appeared at a 'lucky moment when the field was beginning to form'.⁴⁰² With its publication, Mazlish became a pioneer at one bound. 'Pioneers,' he jokingly recalled, 'have to keep ahead of the wagons in back of them.'⁴⁰³ So he decided to teach a course on the application of psychoanalysis to history at MIT. It was the first such course taught by a historian, as he recalled, 'probably in the world'.⁴⁰⁴ Erikson, a psychoanalyst, was teaching a similar course at Harvard.

In 1965, Mazlish co-founded the Group for Applied Psychoanalysis (GAP) in the Boston area, together with Norman Holland, professor of English literature, and Joseph Michaels, a psychiatrist. Similar GAPs were founded later, most notably in New York City. The group in Boston met once a month for fifteen years. This group, in which a paper was discussed every session, taught him how 'clinicians approach materials'.⁴⁰⁵ According to Mazlish, these groups brought together 'analysts, psychiatrists, small-group psychologists, clinical workers, literary critics, sociologists and historians.'⁴⁰⁶ But it was the 'Wellfleet project' – 'I was the historian among the founding members' – where Mazlish says he learned psychohistory's 'trade and its principles'.⁴⁰⁷ Mazlish underwent psychoanalysis after the break-up of his first marriage, but he never formally trained as a psychoanalyst. With psychoanalytic training, he said, 'there is a danger along with the gain: you may stop thinking like a historian and start thinking like an analyst'.⁴⁰⁸

In 1966, the year of the first Wellfleet meeting, Mazlish published his book *The Riddle of History*. In it he discussed the work of ten philosophers of history – 'great speculators', he called them – that influenced him and his own studies. The book, in a sense, is pre-psychohistorical, but it gives an impression of how Mazlish envisioned an interdisciplinary approach to history. 'Philosophy of history,' Mazlish wrote in the introduction, 'assumes a willingness to use epistemological and metaphysical assumptions of philosophy in an attempt to understand and give meaning to the empirical data of history. On occasion, history [is presumed to] reveal the correct nature of philosophy.'⁴⁰⁹

Freud was discussed in the last chapter. In *The Riddle of History*, Mazlish told his readers what he thought was Freud's major contribution to historiography. He quoted Freud from *Studies in Hysteria*: '[T]he case histories I describe read like short stories and lack, so to

⁴⁰¹ Mazlish, Bruce. *James and John Stuart Mill: Father and Son in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Basic Books, 1975. xix.

⁴⁰² Mazlish, Bruce. *James and John Stuart Mill: Father and Son in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Basic Books, 1975. xix.

⁴⁰³ Pawelec, Tomasz. 'Bruce Mazlish: Pioneer Psychohistorian'. *Clio's Psyche*, Volume 3, No. 3, December, 1996. 77.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ Mazlish, Bruce. 'Inside the Whales'. *Times Literary Supplement*, July 28, 1966. 667.

⁴⁰⁷ Mazlish, Bruce. *James and John Stuart Mill: Father and Son in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Basic Books, 1975. xix.

⁴⁰⁸ Pawelec, Tomasz. 'Bruce Mazlish: Pioneer Psychohistorian'. *Clio's Psyche*, Volume 3, No. 3, December, 1996. 77.

⁴⁰⁹ Mazlish, Bruce. *The Riddle of History; the Great Speculators from Vico to Freud*. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.

speak, the serious imprint of science.’⁴¹⁰ And further on: ‘it is obviously the nature of the material itself that is responsible for this [the short story aspect] rather than my own choice.’⁴¹¹ In his historical-anthropological texts, such as *Totem and Taboo* and *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud was, according to Mazlish, finding psychological meaning in events of the past.⁴¹² And it was exactly the *nature of the material* that caught Mazlish’s attention. Freud found meaning not only in *actual* events, but also in psychical ones - unconscious fantasies that he attributed to groups (or ‘hordes’) in the past - based on a mix of observed (reported) behaviour and hypotheses derived from his individual case studies. Mazlish saw that in his historical-anthropological speculations Freud had extended the field of scientific observation; not only for the clinician, but also for the historian.

Freud’s contribution to history, in Mazlish’s view, was that he had shown that *psychical* facts could have *actual* historical implications, for both groups and individuals. *Wie es gewesen war*, was no longer enough: *wie es gedacht und erfahren war* now became crucial. Mazlish would later claim that he could not imagine ‘looking at or listening to texts and arguments without [psychoanalysis]’ insights,’ because that would be like ‘going back to mono after hearing music on stereo.’⁴¹³ If psychical facts are facts, Mazlish argued, then why should a historian not attempt to uncover, and explain, them too? To an extent, he argued, historians had in the past also dealt with psychical realities. After all, any historian or biographer speculates about the motivation of his or her subject or subjects. Before psychohistory, Mazlish argued in the Wellfleet invitation, historians had borrowed explanatory frameworks from other social sciences; often basing their interpretations on general rules such as: ‘men follow their economic self-interest’, or: ‘men are determined by economic modes of production’, or simply basing their interpretations of behaviour on their own ‘seat-of-the-pants’ psychological understanding.⁴¹⁴

Mazlish looked upon psychoanalysis as a science that dealt with these specific kinds of facts. In his view psychoanalysis attempted to show how actual events were translated into psychical material, and vice versa. He immediately saw the value of Freud’s contribution, but only came to see the practical use of psychoanalysis for his own work when he was working on his study of John Stuart Mill. As he was studying Mill’s account of his formation at the beginning of his *Autobiography*, Mazlish noticed that Mill nowhere made any mention of his mother. Further research showed that, in an early draft, Mill had devoted a few, highly critical, pages to her, and had then discarded them. ‘What did this signify, if anything, for Mill’s views on women?’ Mazlish now wondered.⁴¹⁵ By attempting to formulate an answer to that question, Mazlish felt he had become ‘a real psychohistorian’.⁴¹⁶ In Mazlish’s hands, William Langer’s ‘Next Assignment’ gained a clear objective: substituting, or more realistically supplementing, the historian’s intuition with theory: Freudian theory.

⁴¹⁰ Breuer, Josef, Sigmund Freud, James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: *Studies on Hysteria*. Volume 2, 1893-1895. London: Vintage, 2001. 160-161.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴¹² Mazlish, Bruce. *The Riddle of History; the Great Speculators from Vico to Freud*. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.

⁴¹³ Mazlish, Bruce. *James and John Stuart Mill: Father and Son in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Basic Books, 1975. xix.

⁴¹⁴ Invitation letter Group for the Study of Psychohistorical Process, April 9, 1966. Container 11, Erik H. and Joan M. Erikson papers, 1925-1985, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University.

⁴¹⁵ Mazlish, Bruce. *James and John Stuart Mill: Father and Son in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Basic Books, 1975. xix.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*



Fig. 3. Bruce Mazlish

‘I was a prophet!’

Mazlish went ‘in search of Nixon’ in 1968. In fact, he didn’t so much start off in search of Nixon, as he did in pursuit of what he thought were the predictive qualities of psychohistory. Through his connection with William Langer, Mazlish was aware of the OSS Hitler-study written by Walter Langer during the war.⁴¹⁷ He had been impressed by the fact that Langer and his team had predicted Hitler’s suicide, and was now bent on proving (or disproving) that psychohistory, in his understanding of the term, had limited predictive qualities.⁴¹⁸

At this point, in 1968, Mazlish co-ordinated a secret group of academics with the aim of analysing thoroughly the personality of the presidential candidate for the next election: Richard Nixon or Hubert Humphrey. For the project, Mazlish sounded out ‘five or six outstanding scholars – other historians, political scientists, and psychoanalysts’ on their willingness to participate in a team inquiry into the psychodynamics of the prospective president.⁴¹⁹ Each of the members, using his or her own set of theories, was asked to write an analysis of the candidate; afterwards, a group portrait would be assembled. In addition, alternative ‘scenarios’ of the ‘major problems and events that might confront the President’ would have been written up, and predictions about his behavior in such stressful situations added.⁴²⁰ In order to prevent possible misuse of their work, Mazlish decided that the document would not be published until *after* the president’s term of office. By that time the analyses and predictions would be compared with how ‘things had turned out’, thereby shedding light on the success or failure of psychohistory.⁴²¹ The estimated funding for the project was 15,000 to

⁴¹⁷ Personal communication with Mazlish, January 15, 2014.

⁴¹⁸ Mazlish, Bruce. *In Search of Nixon: A Psychohistorical Inquiry*. Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books. vi.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*

20,000 dollars. Mazlish started on his own research, approached a number of organisations, but none agreed to participate. For lack of finance the project was finally aborted.⁴²²

The preliminary studies did not go to waste. On 19 January 1970, Mazlish presented a paper on Nixon to the Boston GAP, based on the initial research he had done for the aborted Nixon project.⁴²³ The paper was later published in slightly altered form by *The Journal for Interdisciplinary History* at MIT. The published paper, in turn, formed the basis of the book: *In Search of Nixon: A Psychohistorical Inquiry*, which was published in early 1972, before the Watergate scandal was properly uncovered. In a revised edition of the book in 1973, written while many of the facts about Nixon's involvement in the scandal were still unknown or yet to be verified, Mazlish cautiously remarked that '[Nixon's] predilection for denial, as we have described it, has been greatly in evidence throughout the unfolding of Watergate. [...] These and other characteristics that we have tried to analyze reappear compulsively.'⁴²⁴ In an interview, several decades later, Mazlish put it more directly: 'I was a prophet!'⁴²⁵

In truth, Mazlish did not predict anything even close to the Watergate scandal, and in fact he never claimed to have. The book was a portrait of Nixon based upon all available sources, including the ones about his childhood. Without access to any first-hand accounts of the President's personality, Mazlish had to make do with speeches, autobiographical writings and second-hand accounts of Nixon's life and behaviour. Mazlish was aware of the limitations of this approach, but throughout the book stressed that he believed an analysis of the available materials might still be fruitful.

He tried to answer the question what, in his view, makes a psychohistorical approach more, or less, than an application of psychoanalytic theory to a historical figure. 'For example,' he wrote, 'psychohistory allows us, indeed forces us, to take seriously Nixon's role as president. Many of his decisions will emerge from the demands or constraints of his role rather than his personality [...] Psychohistory tries to take that fact seriously.'⁴²⁶ Psychohistory, he went on to argue, also directs attention to the way in which the subject's personality has been shaped by the values and institutions of the society in which he grew up, and to the way in which he reflects, influences and confirms those values and institutions. It is this last emphasis that aligned Mazlish's approach with that of Erikson, and it was also exactly this part that was missing from the Nixon-book. In the preface he wrote: 'In fact, what I am offering is primarily a brief psychological sketch of Richard Nixon, informed by an awareness of psychohistorical theory and practice – and a good deal of humility.'⁴²⁷

The portrait of Nixon that Mazlish painted was of a man haunted by his mother's dislike of warfare and his father's competitiveness: a split and extremely ambivalent President who dealt with his ambivalence by projection of aggression onto others. 'He is a man,' Mazlish wrote, 'haunted by his father's failure and driven to avoid that failure for himself and to redeem it for his parent. He compensates for lack of native abilities, where this is the case, by enormous hard work and persistence. [...] He has had a serious problem with death wishes and anxiety in relation to his brothers, Eisenhower and himself.'⁴²⁸ Up to a certain extent, Mazlish argued, these character traits correspond to those of Americans in general. 'For [Nixon] and for us [...] dedication to peace has a corresponding element in powerful aggressive impulses and a tremendous competitive drive to win, and avoid any semblance of 'defeat'. The compassion

⁴²² *Ibid.* vii.

⁴²³ *Ibid.* vii.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.* xii.

⁴²⁵ Pawelec, Tomasz. 'Bruce Mazlish: Pioneer Psychohistorian'. *Clio's Psyche*, Volume 3, No. 3, December, 1996.

⁴²⁶ Mazlish, Bruce. *In Search of Nixon: A Psychohistorical Inquiry*. Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books. 11.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.* vii.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.* 142.

for the needy finds a companion in the desperate need to always to feel strong and to reject feelings of passivity and dependency.⁴²⁹ The book received reasonably good reviews: James T. Patterson, a historian at Brown, found the book 'agreeable'. But he did wonder: 'Does one learn much about Nixon's presidency by being advised that his relationship with his father enabled him to deal with Eisenhower many years later?'⁴³⁰ Arnold A. Rogow, a political scientist, regretted to say that *In Search of Nixon* came 'close to qualifying as 'wild' psychoanalysis in the political field.'⁴³¹ It is safe to say the book fared better outside academic circles. David Broder, a reviewer for *New York Magazine*, thought the book interesting, and persuasively argued.⁴³²

In Search of Nixon revealed an underlying belief that psychoanalysis was a scientific discipline, as well as a strong conviction that a psychohistorian could, given enough data, come to verifiable conclusions about a subject's personality. Earlier he had posed the question: 'Is psychoanalysis a science, or is the historian who uses it resting on a weak reed? The question is far too complicated and philosophical to be more than noted by the historian. His job is to see whether theories and techniques of depth psychology can illuminate his materials, point his attention to new data, and offer him useful hypotheses in explaining human action in the past.'⁴³³ From *In Search of Nixon* it would seem that Mazlish believed that psychoanalysis – even the psychoanalysis of a historical actor conducted at a distance in space and time – could produce a form of (relatively) certain knowledge. He did not shy away from applying psychoanalytic thought to living subjects, either. In the first chapter, 'The Nixon Problem', he wrote that 'the American President is so powerful that "analysis" of his "personality" is both necessary and justified.'⁴³⁴ With the belief that the President should be subjected to therapeutic analysis, what many scholars refer to as the 'psychologisation of America' reached a high point in the late 1960s.⁴³⁵ Nixon emerged from Mazlish's book as a botched American hero: incapable of dealing with his own weakness and therefore prone to falseness and trickery. It was not exactly a prediction of the Watergate scandal, but it was an evaluation of the President's character that would not be contradicted by the unfolding of events.

Lifton

Historian Philip Pomper judged that Robert Lifton was to psychohistory 'what the first anthropologists who went into the field were to their armchair colleagues.'⁴³⁶ He received his medical training at Cornell University and New York Medical College. He graduated in 1948 and was sent to Japan during the Korean War as an Air Force psychiatrist. During the 1950s and 60s he spent several years in Japan, Korea and Hong Kong. There he studied the victims, both Western and non-Western, of Chinese thought reform (or 'brainwashing'); rebellious Japanese university students during the early sixties; and Hiroshima survivors of the atomic bomb. In the process, Lifton devised a psychoanalytic interview technique that focused on 'themes, forms, and images that are in significant ways showed, rather than upon the life of a

⁴²⁹ Mazlish, Bruce. *In Search of Nixon: A Psychohistorical Inquiry*. Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books. 142.

⁴³⁰ Patterson, James T. *Reviews in American History*, Volume 1, No. 1, March 1973. 60.

⁴³¹ Rogow, Arnold A. Review: *In Search of Nixon*. *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 87, No. 4, December, 1972. 675.

⁴³² Broder, David. 'The President's Analysts'. *New York Magazine*, August 28, 1972. 54.

⁴³³ Mazlish, Bruce. 'Inside the Whales'. *Times Literary Supplement*, July 28, 1966. 667.

⁴³⁴ Mazlish, Bruce. *In Search of Nixon: A Psychohistorical Inquiry*. Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books. 3.

⁴³⁵ Burnham, John C. *After Freud Left: A Century of Psychoanalysis in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. 8.

⁴³⁶ Pomper, Philip. *The Structure of Mind in History: Five Major Figures in Psychohistory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985. 144.

single person as such'.⁴³⁷ The method, he recalled, 'remains probing, encouraging the widest range of associations, and includes detailed life histories and explorations of dreams. But it focuses upon the specific situation responsible for bringing us [Lifton and his subject] together'.⁴³⁸ As it was mostly Lifton himself who sought out his subjects, there was no real concept of therapeutic cure involved in the technique – the outcome of the conversation was simply a mutual exploration of a theme or subject.

After returning from Japan in 1962, Lifton broke off the psychoanalytic training he had started before he left. 'In a way,' Lifton mused in an interview, 'psychoanalysis had oversold itself in American society. It had emerged from World War II with considerable brilliance, because there weren't many, or any, other psychologies that did much for soldiers when they had combat difficulties. There was a wave of psychoanalytic triumph and triumphalism which certainly influenced young people like myself.'⁴³⁹

At the time, Lifton considered himself a 'particular kind of research psychiatrist who had no great need to become a psychoanalyst'.⁴⁴⁰ His approach was broadly psychoanalytic, and yet he found himself gradually moving away from the 'classic' Freudian model of the mind – renouncing the idea of instincts or drives and a quantitative concept of energy. He replaced them with a theory of images, forms and symbols, in part derived from Erikson's psychoanalytic emphasis on identity. He had been introduced to Erikson's work by reading the 'The Problem of Ego Identity' in the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*.⁴⁴¹ As Lifton reinvented psychohistory, he moved away from classical psychoanalysis. Yet through his interest in the historical present and the interviewing method he devised as a result of this interest, Lifton re-established psychohistory's link with therapeutic practice. And more specifically, he re-established psychohistory's connection with its early origins in the observation and treatment of traumatised soldiers.

Lifton himself was analysed by Beata Rank, Otto Rank's first wife. In his work, he drew inspiration from psychodynamic theorists (Freud, Jung, Rank) but also from phenomenology and existentialism, particularly the works of Albert Camus. Lifton shifted the focus of psychoanalysis away from sexuality and on to traumas, anxiety and guilt arising from an awareness of the polarities of life and death. Similar to Camus, there is an implicit mistrust of 'totalising' theories and concepts that can be observed throughout Lifton's work, as well as an articulated ideological mistrust of totalitarianism (or, as he calls the convergence of the two: 'ideological totalism').⁴⁴² Simultaneously, Lifton seems to favour the rebellious individual, and he emphasises history's concern with particularities, not with patterns and structures. At the same time, Lifton uses his individual case studies to gain access to a presumed, large symbolic repository. In Lifton's hands, the Freudian psyche 'becomes a fluid self, and the self can no longer be identified with a substructure of the psyche charged with assessing reality – the rational ego – or with something quite as stable as Erikson's ego identity.'⁴⁴³ As Pomper has correctly observed, this places Lifton in a group of thinkers who 'have committed themselves

⁴³⁷ Lifton, Robert J. 'On Psychohistory', in *Explorations in Psychohistory: The Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974. 31.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁹ 'History and Psychoanalysis During the Postwar Period'. Conversation between Daniel Pick and Robert J. Lifton. Heyman Center/Society of Fellows. Vimeo. Published 2014. <https://vimeo.com/92536012>. (Accessed on September 13, 2016)

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴¹ For a discussion of the importance of this article in Erikson's development of psychohistory see Chapter Three.

⁴⁴² Lifton, Robert J. *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism; a Study of "brainwashing" in China*. New York: Norton, 1961.

⁴⁴³ Pomper, Philip. *The Structure of Mind in History: Five Major Figures in Psychohistory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985. 145.

unreservedly to the neo-Kantian view that the human species is best known as *homo symbolicus*.⁴⁴⁴ Lifton's radical reconceptualisation of the Freudian self eventually culminated in his book: *The Protean Self*, published in 1994. That book was an expanded version of a paper 'Protean Man' published in the *Partisan Review* in 1968.

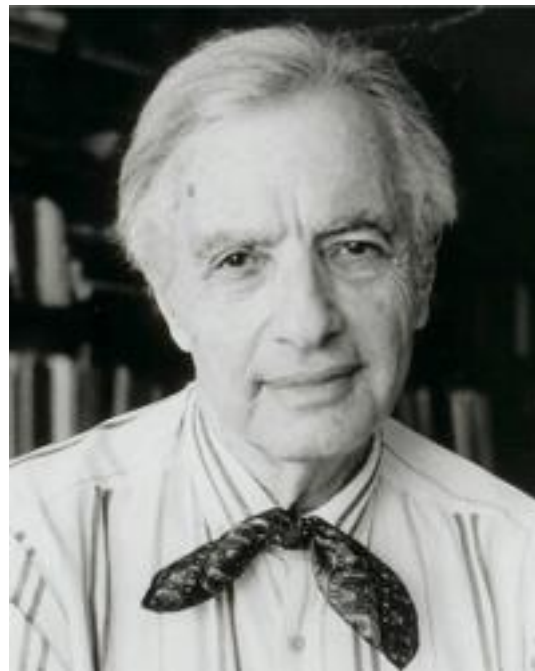


Fig. 4. Robert J. Lifton

Protean Man

Ego psychology – and especially Erikson's interpretation of it – had made possible a new emphasis in psychoanalysis on symbols and symbolisation; the metabolisation of the subject's environment. Ego psychologists moved away from analysis of internal processes such as condensation and displacement, and replaced them with an emphasis on symbolising processes: the ego's adaptive function and its capacity to make cognitive and emotional use of the environment. Erikson pointed out that Freud had in no satisfying way taken into account his subjects' historical contexts, and therefore had not come close enough to the richness or the texture of their experience – their phenomenology. And as his emphasis shifted, so did his conceptions on the aetiology of psychopathology. Erikson asserted that psychopathology could arise from a conflict between the subject's personal symbolic vocabulary and his or her context. His concept of identity, which served as the bridge between the subject's internal symbolic vocabulary and his surrounding symbolic context, was crucial.

Robert Lifton continued and expanded Erikson's line of thought in his essay 'Protean Man' (1968). The essay was not only a diagnosis of contemporary American culture and subjectivity; it was also an ideological programme. Because of his roots in classical psychoanalysis, with its heavy psychobiological emphasis, Erikson had prioritised the person's symbol of his own organism. In 'Protean Man', Lifton set out to 'examine a set of psychological patterns characteristic of contemporary life, which are creating a new kind of man – a "protean man"'.⁴⁴⁵ In so doing, he was moving away from Erikson. Lifton interpreted Erikson's concept of identity as 'an effort to get away from [the] principle of fixity; and I have

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁵ Lifton, Robert J. 'Protean Man'. *Partisan Review*, Volume 1, Winter 1968. 13.

been using the term self-process to convey still more specifically the idea of flow.⁴⁴⁶ Lifton was shifting away from Freudian remnants in Erikson's thought; implying that the life cycle and the psychosexual stages were obsolete. Lifton's concept of self-process referred to his idea that the Self continuously recreated itself. Because of Lifton's hesitance to fully distance himself from his mentor, the exact status of the Protean Man as Lifton describes him in the essay remains unclear. Was it a timeless and essential structure of the mind that had only recently been fully actualised? Was it a historically specific pathological structure? Was it a preferable ideology? There is evidence in the essay to support any of those positions. 'I do not mean to suggest that everybody is becoming the same, or that a totally new "world-self" is taking shape,' he wrote.⁴⁴⁷ 'But I am convinced that a new style of self-process is emerging everywhere.'⁴⁴⁸ The times, Lifton held, were changing.

Like much of his early work, Lifton's ideas about the new Protean Man were primarily based on his observations and interviews in Asia. His work with Chinese subjects was done in Hong Kong, in connection with his study of the processes of 'thought reform' (or: brainwashing) as conducted on the mainland. He found that 'Chinese intellectuals of varying ages, whatever their experience with thought reform itself, had gone through an extraordinary set of what I at the time called identity fragments – each of which they could readily abandon in favor of another.'⁴⁴⁹ Even more dramatic, he found, were the shifts in self-process of a young Japanese man that he interviewed in Tokyo and Kyoto in the early 1960s. Confused by his beliefs after Japan's surrender during World War II, this young person had apparently adopted many subsequent identities. He went from being a 'fiery young patriot', to an exponent of democracy, to a committed Marxist, to being 'an aimless dissipater, as he drifted into a pattern of heavy drinking, marathon mah-jongg games and affairs with bargirls.'⁴⁵⁰

This was a universal pattern. Lifton identified two historical developments that had importance for creating his Protean Man. The first was 'the world-wide sense of what I have called *historical* (or *psychohistorical*) *dislocation*, the break in the sense of connection which men have long felt with the vital and nourishing symbols in their cultural tradition – symbols revolving around family, idea systems, religions, and the life cycle in general.'⁴⁵¹ The second was 'the flooding of imagery produced by the extraordinary flow of post-modern cultural influences over mass communication networks.'⁴⁵² From Greek mythology, Lifton held, we know that Proteus easily shifted shape – 'from wild boar to lion to dragon to fire to flood'.⁴⁵³ What Proteus found difficult was committing to one, single form, so as to carry out his prophecy. Lifton recognised that a lot of young people's psychopathology originated in this sense of dislocation. But Lifton reassured his readers: 'we must keep in mind his possibilities as well as his difficulties.'⁴⁵⁴

The Protean style of self-process allegedly extended to all areas of human experience – 'to political as well as sexual behavior.'⁴⁵⁵ Lifton gave rich illustrations of Protean structure from various forms of literature and art. 'In contemporary American literature, Saul Bellow is notable for the protean men he has created.'⁴⁵⁶ In philosophy, Lifton found that a 'distinguished French literary spokesman for the protean style – in his life and work – is, of course, Jean Paul

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 14.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 15.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.* 16.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 17.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 18.

Sartre.⁴⁵⁷ Further, he found Protean elements ‘in the constant internal and external motion of ‘beat generation’ writings, such as Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*; in the novels of a gifted successor to that generation, J. P. Donleavy, particularly *The Ginger Man*; and of course in the work of European novelists such as Günter Grass’.⁴⁵⁸ Even film stars could be Protean: ‘[Marcello] Mastroianni accepts his destiny as protean man.’⁴⁵⁹ Lifton described his contemporary subjectivity as fleeting, collage-like, non-committal and fluid. He connected these tendencies to what he called ‘the end of ideology’, a phrase he borrowed from Daniel Bell, and he approvingly concluded that what Protean Man found most acceptable was ‘images of a more fragmentary nature than those of the ideologies of the past.’⁴⁶⁰ It is tempting to read Lifton’s own preoccupations and struggles into his description of the Protean Man.

History and psychology, Lifton later argued, ‘each has something of an impulse to eliminate the other.’⁴⁶¹ In classical psychoanalysis, he said, there is ‘an implicit assumption that the larger historical universe is *nothing but* a manifestation of the projections or emanations of the individual psyche’.⁴⁶² Historical writing, on the other hand, seems to ‘replace a psychological perspective with common-sense assumptions about human motivation, or else to drown psychological man – that is, the inner life of individual man – in a sea of collectivity. [...] The Faustian intellectual temptation is to dismiss the paradox and make things simple. We do better, I am certain, to embrace the paradox. For it can be energizing.’⁴⁶³

Lifton was a supporter of the student rebellions of the 1960s, and found resonance with the student movement’s broad, liberal aims. While at Yale he joined the ‘Concerned Yale Faculty’ that was made up of people sympathetic to the student uprisings. The Sixties, he recalled, ‘confronted me with a tandem of rebelliousness and totalism. I was hardly free from confusion, but tried to keep my bearings by embracing much of the rebellion while taking a critical stance towards the totalism.’⁴⁶⁴ Lifton saw psychohistory as closer to a literary enterprise than a scientific one. In his article entitled ‘On Psychohistory’ Lifton drew attention to the fact that Freud had initially chosen as a subtitle for his work *Moses and Monotheism*, ‘A Historical Novel’, and pointed out that this subtitle had found a recent echo – ‘History as a Novel, The Novel as History,’ chosen by what Lifton judged to be ‘a promising young existentialist psychohistorian named Norman Mailer for his much awarded book *Armies of the Night*’.⁴⁶⁵ He explained: ‘The self-irony in juxtaposing history and fiction does not necessarily suggest that either Freud or Mailer lacked belief in his own views, but rather that each felt he was dealing with a kind of truth that took him beyond conventional historical description.’⁴⁶⁶ As mentioned earlier, Mazlish had come to a similar conclusion in *The Riddle of History*, but for him it was no reason to start branding his work as anything other than scientific.

In Lifton’s hands, psychohistory became a critical instrument; a tool for radical critique, albeit from a radically individual perspective. Lifton’s psychohistory was ‘impelled by a sense of urgency about our present historical predicament, and by a strong desire to evolve psychohistorical theory adequate to the dangerous times in which we live’.⁴⁶⁷ He believed that

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 19.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 20.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 21.

⁴⁶¹ Lifton, Robert J. ‘On Psychohistory’, in *Explorations in Psychohistory: The Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974. 23.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.* 24.

⁴⁶⁴ Lifton, Robert J. *Witness to an Extreme Century: A Memoir*. New York: Free Press, 2011. 192.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 27.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 28.

⁴⁶⁷ Lifton, Robert J. ‘The Sense of Immortality: On Death and the Continuity of Life’. *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Volume 33, 1973. 4.

psychohistorians, aware of their own (unconscious) involvement with their subject, were compelled to articulate their own ideological positions and shape their theories around them. Not only were they allowed, but even obliged, to express their sentiments and ethical and political values in their work. Where Erikson had shown that the subject of a historical analysis, such as young Luther, was both product and transformer of his historical, symbolic context; now Lifton held that this was just as much the case for the observer. In Lifton's view, articulated self-knowledge of the historical and moral particularity of the observer opened up the possibility for psychohistorical critique.

Disciplined Thought vs. Far-Out Speculation

The difference between Lifton's and Mazlish's hopes for psychohistory can be traced to their differing interpretations of its two parent fields: psychoanalysis and history. Both of them believed that psychoanalysis could supplement history with an emphasis on the importance of 'psychic truth'. Lifton took this position to an extreme: inspired by Erikson, he conceived of history as an analysis of the interplay between symbolic structures, ideologies and individuals' symbolic interpretations and life histories. This position is at risk of losing a concept of factual truth to the more slippery notion of psychological truth. One of his key tools was his interview-method, which was loosely based on psychoanalytic practice. Trained as an academic historian, Mazlish was far more conservative in his interpretation of what history was and could do: he believed that psychoanalysis' emphasis on 'psychic truth' could supplement the historian's conventional search and presentation of facts. In turn, they stressed different aspects of psychoanalytic theory and practice. Lifton was openly critical of Freudian theory, Mazlish was not. Whereas Lifton stressed the particularity of historical actors' subjectivities, and the capacity to problematise the author-text relationship through the psychoanalytic concept of transference to one's subject, Mazlish was more interested in psychoanalysis as an authority-bearing discourse, a science. His aim was to substitute the historian's 'seat-of-the-pants' implicit psychological frameworks with coherent Freudian theory. Lifton stressed the 'protean' qualities of psychohistory – its capacity to analyse and lay bare the particularity of a given historical actor's beliefs and experience; Mazlish believed in the predictive qualities of psychohistory.

In 1967, Mazlish became the youngest member of the Academy of Arts and Sciences. Through his connections with John Voss, a representative of the Academy, he was able to procure the generous funding for the first Wellfleet meetings.⁴⁶⁸ Early on, Mazlish expressed a hope that psychohistory might become a semi-independent discipline with deep roots in academia: 'Will the time come,' he wondered in 1966, 'when history departments will list courses on "The Psychological History of Modern Europe" (to take one example) as a normal thing, in the same way they now have courses on "The Political History of Modern Europe" or "The Economic History of Modern Europe"?'⁴⁶⁹

About the earliest Wellfleet meetings, Lifton later recalled: 'Very roughly, they can be divided into two phases – a first period of about four years that could be called The Grand Illusion of Unity, and a subsequent phase of Work, Play and Struggle.'⁴⁷⁰ There appear to have been conflicting ideas on what the aim of the group should be from the outset. In a report of the first Wellfleet meeting for the record of the Academy, Mazlish wrote: 'In the following year, we should like to engage in discussion of the best way to institutionalize our work. Should

⁴⁶⁸ Letter from John Voss to Erik Erikson, February 3, 1967. Container 11, Erik H. and Joan M. Erikson papers, 1925-1985, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University.

⁴⁶⁹ Mazlish, Bruce. 'Inside the Whales'. *Times Literary Supplement*, July 28, 1966. 668.

⁴⁷⁰ Lifton, Robert J., and Eric Olson. *Explorations in Psychohistory; the Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975. 13.

we, for example, look forward to setting up a permanent institute? If so, what type of institute should it be? We believe that we are founding, or helping to found, a new discipline – psychohistorical inquiry.⁴⁷¹ Mazlish sought to ‘lay down the foundations of psychohistory’ and found a new academic discipline. Lifton, on the other hand, was skeptical about unification. He sought a more informal combination of what he called ‘disciplined thought and far-out speculation’.⁴⁷² In the Academy’s bulletin of October 1966, a short summary of the first Wellfleet meeting was given:

All the participants at Wellfleet agreed that the week had provided an unusually rewarding opportunity for free inquiry and intellectual exchange. The combination of presentations based on previously circulated papers and informal conversations before and after the formal meetings contributed to an atmosphere in which unusually direct discussion, controversy, and candor were possible. The Conference plans to meet again in a year, at which time working papers on more specific theoretical approaches will be presented.⁴⁷³

Looking back on the earliest Wellfleet meetings, Lifton mentioned that besides ‘direct discussion and controversy’ the group had to endure its share of ‘non-communication, posturing and soliloquy.’⁴⁷⁴ This tension was the result of the two conflicting tendencies within the group: first, to create a psychohistorical baseline by finding areas of conceptual agreement, roughly Mazlish’s position, and second, an individualistic tendency to utilise the group for a deepening (or promoting) of one’s own work. ‘Even at the height of our early enthusiasm,’ Lifton recalled, ‘none of us fully embraced the ever-present illusion of unification – inevitably based on a misleading application of a scientific model – that has long haunted sociological and psychological thought.’⁴⁷⁵ In his view, the sponsorship by the Academy of Arts and Sciences: ‘brought to bear on us a certain pressure toward a more organized and integrative effort and practical products: using a particular meeting to create an issue of *Daedalus*, the Academy’s journal, and a series of meetings to create an enduring institution that could coordinate, and train others in, psychohistorical work.’⁴⁷⁶ By the time of what Lifton called the second phase – of ‘Work, Play and Struggle’ – he and his fellow Wellfleetians ‘had resolved the matter in favor of a more limited [...] commitment to our own intellectual exploration.’⁴⁷⁷ Bruce Mazlish no longer attended the Wellfleet meetings.

The Wellfleet Papers

Simon and Schuster is pleased to present, in a simultaneous cloth and paperback edition, this important volume of papers in which the founding practitioners place the field of psychohistory in a balanced context by offering various approaches in methodology, theory and research. [...] *EXPLORATIONS IN PSYCHOHISTORY* is destined to become a classic reader for the student and scholar searching for an understanding of what the intriguing discipline of psychohistory is all about.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷¹ See Mazlish, Bruce. *Records of the Academy (Academy of Arts and Sciences)*, No. 1966/1967 (1966-1967). 31-32.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*

⁴⁷³ ‘Conference on Psychohistorical Process’. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Volume 20, No. 1, October 1966. 7.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁸ Advertisement in *The Journal of Modern History*, Volume 47, No. 2, June 1975.

Explorations in Psychohistory: The Wellfleet Papers collected thirteen papers delivered at Wellfleet meetings during the first eight years of the group's existence. The essays in *Explorations* were an eclectic mix, and this seems to have been Lifton's point. In fact, the book can be read as the triumph of the Protean style of psychohistory – flexible, amorphous – over and above any systematic application of psychology to historical subjects. As per Lifton's wishes, psychohistory remained an elusive, malleable concept; the Wellfleet meetings remained informal, without any further goal of institutionalisation. The papers in *Explorations* reflected this informal character of the gatherings, and differed considerably in style and content. Fred Weinstein wrote in a review:

A volume such as this must be uneven, including as it does the confiding style of Erikson and the brisk, no-nonsense intellectuality of Rieff, the 'traditional' language of Mazlish and the self-consciously novel language of Lifton, discussions of biography and of two different approaches to collective behavior. But the volume is also curiously incomplete, in the sense that important problems and issues are inconclusively raised without even the slightest editorial hint of what one might do or where one might go to pursue these issues, or what the implications are for the future of psychohistorical work.⁴⁷⁹

Some chapters consisted of transcriptions of the paper with the discussions added on. Unsurprisingly, Mazlish's contribution 'The Mills: Father and Son' – an early paper on his research into the relationship between John Stuart Mill and his father James – was the most classic example of psychobiography in the book. Three of the essays stand out in particular. They give a good overview of the 'Erikson-Lifton' interpretation of psychohistory: Lifton's 'On Psychohistory'; Erikson's 'On the Nature of Psychohistorical Evidence: In Search of Gandhi'; and Robert Coles' 'The Method'.

'On Psychohistory' was Robert Lifton's anti-manifesto for psychohistory. 'Psychohistory,' he began, 'is in one sense already old, and in another hardly born. None can deny the logic of a marriage between psychology and history. But a certain amount of scepticism about logical marriages (and their offspring) is always in order.'⁴⁸⁰ Lifton identified four 'models' or 'paradigms' of psychohistory. Two of them were strictly Freudian; the other two drew upon Freud but moved away from some core psychoanalytic assumptions. First was the model that Freud used in *Moses and Monotheism* and *Totem and Taboo*. In these texts, a supra-historical, or mythical, event (such as the murder of the primal father by the sons) became determinative of *actual* history. Like Mazlish, Lifton recognised that the most powerful insights in this paradigm were those centred 'upon the psychological significance of the perceived historical past' for the present and the future.⁴⁸¹ The second Freudian psychohistorical model was the most common, and straightforward: the application of psychoanalytic theory to biography. These works stood in the tradition of the Freud-Bullitt biography of Woodrow Wilson, and were apprehended, Lifton held, by Freud's treatment of men like Leonardo DaVinci and Fyodr Dostoevsky (as artists rather than historical actors). Both models, Lifton stressed, were based on what he called an 'individual-psychological' model. In these models, the return of the repressed became 'the basis of Freud's view of history as psychological recurrence.'⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁹ Book Review Section. *GUPH Newsletter*, Volume III, No.4, March 1975. 22.

⁴⁸⁰ Lifton, Robert J., and Eric Olson. *Explorations in Psychohistory; the Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975. 21.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸² *Ibid.* 25

For Lifton, these paradigms were frustrating. In his view, they interpreted history psychologically but avoided actually doing history itself. The first two models were superseded by Erikson's *Young Man Luther*, which provided the blueprint of the third model: 'the great man in history'-model. He showed how Erikson had moved away from Freud's instinctual idiom, and had started looking at the intersection of individual and collective histories.⁴⁸³ Here he quoted Erikson that Luther, Gandhi and Freud all had one thing in common: 'a grim willingness to do the dirty work of their ages.'⁴⁸⁴ That dirty work, Lifton remarked, was historically specific, although it was involved with psychological universals. It was exactly this turn to historical specificity that had drawn Lifton to Erikson's work.

The fourth paradigm was Lifton's own paradigm of 'shared historical themes'. He observed these themes in the lives of men and women exposed to particular forms of collective and individual experience. He described how he used his interview-method for work in this paradigm, and showed how it was partly empirical (in so far as it was based on interviews); in part phenomenological (in that it stressed the individual's and his own metabolisation of symbols, individual and collective); and partly speculative (in its positing of relationships between the individual and his history). In this framework, effect became virtually indistinguishable from cause. A group, such as the survivors of Hiroshima that Lifton interviewed, was at once *created* by a historical event and simultaneously *influenced* it, or fed back into it. For this reason, Lifton judged, his method dealt more with 'historical flow' than with historical cause and effect. A social theory that linked the individual processes with group processes, he concluded, could be borrowed from Marxism or invented anew. Psychohistory could then become a 'New History'. Concomitant with the development of this New History was the emergence of Lifton's Protean man: 'postmodern and in some ways post-Freudian'.⁴⁸⁵

Another important idea that Lifton put forward was the notion that the psychohistorian is implicated in his or her own research. Here Lifton was again indebted to Erikson. In an earlier paper, 'Evidence and Inference', delivered at a discussion sponsored by the American Psychoanalytic Association (APA) in 1957, Erikson had argued that out of all the other disciplines represented at the conference, he felt closest to the historian: 'for he, like the clinician, must serve the curious process by which selected portions of the past impose themselves on our renewed awareness and claim continued actuality in our contemporary commitments.'⁴⁸⁶ Historians, like clinicians, Erikson said, transform the fragmentations of the past and the peculiarities of those who make history into such wholeness of meaning as mankind in general, or a patient in particular, seeks. In his contribution to *Explorations*, Erikson went further: In 'On the Nature of Psychohistorical Evidence: In Search of Gandhi', Erikson picked up this theme again in an attempt to 'delineate' an in-between field': the psychohistorical approach. 'Such a compound name usually designates an area in which nobody is methodologically quite at home, but which someday will be settled and incorporated without a trace of border disputes and double names.'⁴⁸⁷

In the 1957 APA lecture, which was later expanded into an article, Erikson described the therapeutic process as he saw it and discussed the concept of countertransference. More than any other clinician, Erikson explained, the psychotherapist 'must include in his field of observation a *specific self-awareness*,' the core of what he called 'disciplined subjectivity'.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸³ For a detailed discussion of the exact theoretical underpinnings, see Chapter Three.

⁴⁸⁴ Lifton, Robert J., and Eric Olson. *Explorations in Psychohistory; the Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975. 28

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 39.

⁴⁸⁶ Erikson, Erik H. 'On the Nature of Psychohistorical Evidence'. In Lifton, Robert J., and Eric Olson. *Explorations in Psychohistory; the Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975. 42.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 43.

⁴⁸⁸ Erikson, Erik H. *Insight and Responsibility*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1964. 53

Scientists, he concluded, ‘may learn about the nature of things by finding out what they can do to them, but the clinician can learn of the true nature of man only in the attempt to do something *for* and *with* him.’⁴⁸⁹ In the paper, Erikson juxtaposed science and the knowledge produced in the therapeutic encounter. In his paper on psychohistory, he continued this line argument. Countertransference, he argued, is part of what the clinician must observe in himself. Like the patient, he too might transfer unconscious strivings that derive from his infantile past. ‘Relived and resolved in each case, they are a necessary part of the evidence; and their elucidation is the only way to a cure. But are they also applicable to some aspects of historical research?’⁴⁹⁰ The Academy of Arts and Sciences report on the first Wellfleet meeting suggests that this topic was on the Wellfleetians’ agenda from the very beginning. It reads: ‘Particularly important [in the discussions] was an awareness of the researcher’s own involvement in his work, an involvement that may be illuminated by a comparison with the psychoanalytic principle of countertransference, although the two are not identical.’⁴⁹¹

Erikson’s paper for *Explorations* consisted of a series of reflections on the process of writing his book *Gandhi’s Truth*. He argued that in the process of studying a figure such as Gandhi, whilst relying heavily on the subject’s autobiographical writings, it was of utmost importance to take into consideration not only the subject’s historical context but also his (unconscious) preoccupations. Using his theory of life stages, Erikson examined a part of Gandhi’s autobiography and showed that it was significant to wonder what the aim of this piece of autobiographical writing had in light of the author’s particular life-circumstances at the time. However, according to Erikson, it is similarly just as important to examine the historian’s own circumstances in researching a subject. In his autobiography, Erikson tells us, Gandhi describes a moment in which he is particularly cruel and petty towards his wife. Erikson paraphrases Gandhi: ‘What if all his professions of universal love, all his sacrifices of those closest to him by family ties for the sake of those furthest away (the masses, the poor, the Untouchables), were a ‘pretense’?’⁴⁹² Here, Erikson recalled, Gandhi makes the reader of his autobiography the externalisation of his own self-doubt. Erikson felt ‘so directly appealed to that I began to think of how I might have explained these matters to him in light of our clinical knowledge.’⁴⁹³

In *Gandhi’s Truth*, Erikson addressed Gandhi personally, explaining to his subject that, ‘as a student of another lover of truth, a contemporary of his on the other side of the world, I had a more charitable term than ‘pretense’ for the psychological aspect of his dilemma: namely, ‘ambivalence’.’⁴⁹⁴ And he continued: ‘Gandhi, I think, would have listened to me, but probably would have asked me teasingly why I had taken his outburst so personally. And, indeed, my impulsive need to answer him ‘in person’ before I could go on with my book revealed again that all manner of countertransference can accompany our attempts to analyze others, great or ordinary.’⁴⁹⁵ Working as a historian on the life of Gandhi, and coming from a psychoanalytic background, Erikson now suggested that the historian himself brought with him his own unconscious preoccupations in writing the history of his subject. ‘I believe,’ he wrote, ‘that any man projects [...] on to the men and the times he studies some un-lived portions and often the unrealized selves of his own life[.]’⁴⁹⁶ These portions and preoccupations had to be made manifest, Erikson would say, in order to write good history.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁰ Erikson, Erik H. ‘On the Nature of Psychohistorical Evidence’. In Lifton, Robert J., and Eric Olson. *Explorations in Psychohistory; the Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975. 42.

⁴⁹¹ Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Volume 20, No. 1, October, 1966. 7.

⁴⁹² Erikson, Erik H. ‘On the Nature of Psychohistorical Evidence’. In Lifton, Robert J., and Eric Olson. *Explorations in Psychohistory; the Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.* 56.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 56.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 60.

[A]s we demand that he who makes a profession of “psychoanalyzing” others must have learned a certain capacity for self-analysis,’ Erikson wrote, ‘so must we presuppose that the psychohistorian will have developed or acquired a certain self-analytic capacity[.]’⁴⁹⁷ What would such self-awareness consist of? According to Erikson, the historian must be aware of the following: (1) the stage and the conditions of the historian’s own life; (2) the place of the work in the *sequence* of the historian’s life history; (3) the present state of the historian’s communities; (4) the history of the historian’s communities. Under communities, Erikson subsumed all the ‘collective processes from which [the historian] derives identity’.⁴⁹⁸ The psychohistorian must, above all, know himself as part of the historical process. In other words, he or she has to be aware of his or her (unconscious) symbolic context.

This position automatically problematised the relationship of the historian with his subject, and the author with his text. And it certainly cast doubt on claims that history was a rule-based science as opposed to an art. If the choice of subject and materials, and the way one wrote up history, was a reflection of unconscious processes and preoccupations, history became at best an embodiment of personal vision, at worst a symptom; in any case far removed from the ideal of seeking truth in accordance with principles and rules that guarantee scientific validity. The particular way in which Erikson inserted psychoanalysis into the historiographical equation led to what can be considered an *idiographic* historiography, as opposed to the *nomothetic* position that William Langer and Bruce Mazlish adhered to at the time.⁴⁹⁹

The idiographic position was most fervently defended by Robert Coles, who also contributed a chapter to *Explorations*. In ‘The Method’, Robert Coles’ contribution to *Explorations in Psychohistory*, the child psychiatrist and admirer of Erikson (Coles wrote one of the first biographies of Erikson) described how he went about studying the lives of ‘migrants, sharecroppers and mountaineers’ and their children. In fact, the paper was the introduction to the second volume of Coles’ panoramic, five-volume social study of the lives of the American poor: *Children of Crisis*. It was an outright attack on method, at least in any strictly psychoanalytic or historical sense, and in it, Coles defended a literary approach to the lives of the subjects he studied. In his work, Coles used techniques of participant observation, such as tape recordings and field notes, as well as clinical interpretation and literary narrative. Due in part to his particular branch of history – writing the life-histories of people with whom he would spend a considerable amount of time – in his view an observer could not be disentangled from the observed at all.

‘Lives as opposed to problems,’ Coles wrote, ‘may puzzle the fixed notions of the theorist, while at the same time adding confirmation to what has been revealed by such keenly sensitive (if “methodologically untrained”) observers as Dostoevsky or Zola, Orwell or Agee, who have managed, regardless of time and place, to set down something both comprehensible and enduring about human beings.’⁵⁰⁰ Although Coles was an anti-theorist, in his stance he betrayed influences of psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott and Erikson. He acknowledged that in the recent past there had been a shift in outlook among psychiatrists and psychoanalysts: under the influence of psychohistory, he held, they ‘have learned to look upon people as citizens of a nation, as members of a given society, and *particular* members at that, not merely as members of an Oedipal family.’⁵⁰¹ For all his antipathy towards theory, Coles recognised at least one

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 56.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 57.

⁴⁹⁹ The terms idiographic and nomothetic were first used by philosopher Wilhelm Windelbandt, See Oakes, Guy. ‘Wilhelm Windelband on History and Natural Science.’ *History and Theory*, Vol.19, No. 2, February 1980. 165-168.

⁵⁰⁰ Coles, Robert. ‘The Method’. In Lifton, Robert J., and Eric Olson. *Explorations in Psychohistory; the Wellfleet Papers*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975. 165.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.* 167.

major contribution of psychoanalysis to his own work as a psychohistorian: ‘Long ago Freud urged all of us who would know how others think and feel to look at our own reactions and responses and styles of thought or feeling.’⁵⁰²

Repression

When *Explorations* was published in 1974, the term psychohistory had started to penetrate the American consciousness at large.⁵⁰³ It appeared regularly in the columns of the *New York Times*, which published reviews of books by all the major psychohistorians; works labeled ‘psychohistory’ appeared on the bookshelves of major bookstores in the United States. But the reception of psychohistorical works, by both professionals and the mainstream media, was mixed. Two *New Yorker* cartoons published in the 1970s are worth mentioning in this context. The first depicted an author at a cocktailparty, bragging: ‘I’ve done some soft-core, some as-told-to’s, and a few gothics. Now I’m into psychohistory’.⁵⁰⁴ The second cartoon pictured the bolted door of a psychiatric ward, with a small sign reading ‘psychohistorian’ nailed above a peephole.⁵⁰⁵

Besides such tongue-in-cheek criticisms there was also outright hostility towards the new discipline, coming, for example, from more traditional historians. Under the influence of the *Annales* school in France, a new generation of historians in the United States was calling for a more interdisciplinary form of history, with a focus on social class, mobility, geography, disease and economic determinants of human behaviour. The *Journal for Interdisciplinary History* reflected this movement. Psychohistory was often (sometimes by psychohistorians themselves) considered a part of this movement; and psychoanalysis, by extension, considered a scientific practice on par with the statistics and computer analyses used and performed by other interdisciplinary historians. Jacques Barzun, once the supervisor of Mazlish’s PhD-thesis, was now one of this new interdisciplinary history’s fiercest critics, and a staunch defender of narrative history.⁵⁰⁶

Barzun did not mention his former student’s name once in his highly critical book on psychohistory: *Clio and the Doctors* (1974). He did, at times, refer to and paraphrase from, ‘a psycho-historical study of President Nixon’ – Mazlish’s study. In Barzun’s book the author tackled ‘the doctors’: Erikson, Lifton and Coles; Bruce Mazlish is hauntingly absent from Barzun’s discussion of ‘Psycho-History, Quanto-History and History’. The short book was the result of an invitation to speak at City University, New York, in 1971, at a conference on interdisciplinary history, organised by leading historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.; Mazlish also attended that conference. The gathering was covered extensively by *The New York Times*, and a quote from the conference served as *The Times*’ ‘Quotation of the Day’.

Armed with computers, statistics, psychoanalysis, sampling techniques, economic models and other tools of modern social science, younger historians have established a wide beachhead in the discipline that Prof. C. Vann Woodward of Yale, former head of the American Historical Association calls a ‘living fossil from the pre-scientific age’.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰² *Ibid.* 168.

⁵⁰³ For a detailed account of the growth of psychohistory in the 1970s, see Chapter Four.

⁵⁰⁴ *The New Yorker*, December 17, 1973.

⁵⁰⁵ Strozier, Charles B., and Daniel Offer. *The Leader: Psychohistorical Essays*. New York: Plenum Press, 1985. 60.

⁵⁰⁶ Mit.edu. <https://history.mit.edu/people/bruce-mazlish> (Accessed on September 13, 2016)

⁵⁰⁷ Reinhold, Robert. ‘Historians Find Fresh Answers With Tools of Social Science’. *New York Times*, July 3, 1971

‘My chief aim,’ Barzun wrote in the Preface to his critical essay, ‘has been to lay the issues before the younger generation of students now ‘taking’ history. Their tendency, altogether understandable, is to embrace the new.’⁵⁰⁸ *Clio and the Doctors* was a fierce statement defending the old, ‘traditional’ or ‘literary’, history, against the tendency to ‘graft upon history such neighboring knowledge as wears the aspect of science’.⁵⁰⁹ Against psychohistory Barzun launched three major points of critique: first, the ‘attempt to rescue Clio from pitiable maidenhood by artificial insemination [...] is nothing new.’⁵¹⁰ Barzun looked upon psychohistory as a fad, an intellectual hype that would come and go. Second, psychohistory mixed genres: *Young Man Luther*, which Barzun took as exemplary for the field of psychohistory, according to Barzun was not history but biography (without expanding on the difference), and also dealt with ‘studies of mental types or social institutions’, therefore making it ‘difficult to distinguish from previous sociological, psychiatric, or anthropological reports’. Third, ‘how the method-user passes from individual psychology to the ‘mind’ of an age or a group is not clear’.⁵¹¹ Another important point of critique was the involvement of the author with his subject.

In a review of *Clio and the Doctors* in *The New York Times*, sociologist Richard Sennett called it ‘a sad book’ because in his view it represented an ‘aristocratic’ interpretation of history, whose proponents at first ‘inclined to snoot at both psycho-history and quanto-history as interesting oddities at best’, and now – taking note of the wide interest in interdisciplinary variants of history – responded to them patronisingly as menacing threats.⁵¹² Presumably without any knowledge of Barzun’s background as one of the most prominent psychohistorian’s former mentors, Sennett also noted how the author’s position resembled that of a father laying down the law for a group of rebellious sons, noting further, however, that ‘the father’s vice – a certain anti-intellectuality, a certain unreflectiveness in the writing of history – has been passed down intact’.⁵¹³

But criticism of psychohistory also came from deep within its own ranks. In the February and March editions of the *New York Review of Books* of 1973, in a two-part article entitled ‘Shrinking History’, Robert Coles remarked that ‘Even friends get caught in such intellectual warfare, where sides are taken and one is considered either a friend or a foe.’⁵¹⁴ In the essay, Coles gave an extremely critical overview of the field of psychohistory, and was especially critical towards ‘the editor of a volume of essays on *Psychoanalysis and History*’.⁵¹⁵ In a response to the two articles, published in the May edition of the same magazine, Bruce Mazlish asked: ‘Why must one be either friend or foe? Cannot different inquirers work in different ways, without being enemies?’⁵¹⁶

In the essay, Coles surveyed various works that were labelled psychohistory and held them up to Freud’s study of Leonardo, written some fifty years before the term psychohistory was first used by Erikson. ‘Words like ‘oral’ or ‘anal’ or ‘phallic’ are not fastened upon Leonardo. His ideas about religion are discussed in the context of the fifteenth and sixteenth

⁵⁰⁸ Barzun, Jacques. *Clio and the Doctors: Psycho-history, Quanto-history, & History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974. x.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 11.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.* 14.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁵¹² Sennett, Richard. ‘Review: Clio and the Doctors’. *The New York Times*, October 20, 1974.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ Coles, Robert. ‘Shrinking History Part 1’, *New York Review of Books*, February 22, 1973.

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1973/02/22/shrinking-historypart-one/>

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁶ ‘An Exchange on Psychohistory’. *The New York Review of Books*, May 3, 1973.

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1973/05/03/an-exchange-on-psychohistory/>

century in which he lived.’⁵¹⁷ In Coles’ opinion, no work labelled psychohistory, with the exception of *Young Man Luther*, held up in comparison to Freud’s study; even though Freud’s work, Coles acknowledges, was flawed as well. Coles conceded that there was a need for psychoanalytically informed historians and historically minded psychiatrists, but the former Wellfleetian did not believe in psychohistory as an independent field. Coles exempted his former mentor from his critical gaze: ‘One can look at a sentence [by Erikson] and be grateful for the subtlety of its content and expression.’⁵¹⁸ In *Young Man Luther*, he found: ‘the facts are assembled to tell a story, to interest and maybe bestir the reader, to allow a writer with, say, psychological or philosophical interests [...] a medium for self-expression through another’s life.’⁵¹⁹ Interestingly, Coles did not accept the term psychohistory at all, yet his view on what good history is: ‘self-expression through another’s life’, might well serve as a summary of what Erikson defined as good psychohistory in ‘On the Nature of Psychohistorical Evidence: In Search of Gandhi’.

‘Shrinking History’ was first and foremost a critique of the use of psychoanalytic vocabulary in historical writing: ‘[Few scholars] can give biography the power and drama of a novel, while providing the most vivid and searching kind of history.’⁵²⁰ And Coles was particularly critical of Mazlish’s book on Nixon. ‘The “search” for Nixon,’ he wrote, ‘ends with the discovery of “three traits”, which Mazlish characterizes as “role identification”, “ambivalence” and “denial”. We have already been informed that any of us can possess these qualities.’⁵²¹ He continued: ‘One wonders [...] why the author has bothered to write this book at all, especially since the rest of the book offers nothing else about the President’s “character”, only an extensive justification of the value of “psychohistory” as a “science”.’⁵²² Unsurprisingly, then, Coles was also rather dismissive of Walter Langer’s OSS-report, which had been recently published under the title *The Mind of Adolf Hitler*. Among other things, he was unimpressed by Langer’s prediction of Hitler’s suicide: Clearly,’ he wrote, ‘Dr. Langer was right in suggesting suicide as “the most plausible outcome”. But then, my ninth-grade Latin teacher made a similar prediction – he was more unequivocal – in a class around the same year; [...] and so did the journalist Dorothy Thompson, who mentioned the very same likelihood several times in her syndicated columns during the early 1940s.’⁵²³ Coles was implicitly criticizing Mazlish’s interpretation of psychohistory, and ridiculing his intention to seek out the predictive qualities of the discipline.

Coles’ article is an important document for two reasons. First, it is the clearest indicator of the failure of the initial aims of the Group for the Study of Psychohistorical Process: no ‘foundations’ of psychohistory were settled upon, and no ‘psychohistorical baseline’ was established by this point. The article makes clear that, by 1973, there was quite some interest in psychohistory, and there were a fair number of people calling the work they wrote psychohistory, but there was hardly any agreement on what these various projects had in common. Psychohistory, in other words, remained what Claude Lévi-Strauss would call a ‘floating signifier’, with no single meaning and no authority appointed to anchor a stable meaning to it.⁵²⁴ In a response to Coles’s article, Mazlish wrote: ‘It is therefore doubly dismaying to have a “friend” of psychohistory attack it in the same dogmatic, intolerant way—

⁵¹⁷ Coles, Robert. ‘Shrinking History Part 1’, *New York Review of Books*, February 22, 1973.

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1973/02/22/shrinking-historypart-one/>

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*

⁵²² *Ibid.*

⁵²³ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁴ Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987. 63.

legitimate criticism is another matter—as its out-and-out enemies.’⁵²⁵ Second, it shows the stark differences between the idiographic and nomothetic interpretations of psychohistory. Coles seems to have taken Erikson’s and Lifton’s approach to psychohistory to its extreme conclusion, even dropping the term psychohistory altogether. History, he suggested, should be judged for its artistic merits, and seen as an expression of the author’s (unconscious) prejudices and preoccupations, thereby blurring the lines between fact and fiction. Again, Mazlish retorted: ‘Others before Freud, of course, had had intuitive glimpses into the human psyche,’ and he went on to quote from his own book:

What Freud added to their insights... was system, and the grounding and regrounding of his systematized concepts in clinical evidence, and then the hard work of detailed analysis of particular case ‘histories,’ which in turn provided new concepts. If one adds that, naturally, such an effort at a ‘new science’ will discard, modify, and enlarge its concepts and data, would Coles agree? If not, what does he think psychoanalysis is, and how does he see its difference, at least in principle, from, say, literary intuition?⁵²⁶

It was exactly this element of ‘literary intuition’ that Mazlish had attempted to banish from historiography and replace with the scientific framework of psychoanalysis, and it was this position that aligned him with other interdisciplinary historians such as the ones who published in the *Journal for Interdisciplinary History*.

Mazlish was not alone in his nomothetic approach to psychohistory. If Coles represented a type of critic that did not trust psychohistory’s scientific claims, there were also critics who held a very firm belief in psychohistory as a science. In 1976, the American Psychiatric Association published a short document entitled *The Psychiatrist as Psychohistorian*. Spurred by the Goldwater controversy some years earlier, the aim of this document was to assess to what extent psychohistorical studies were impinging upon the privacy of the persons studied if these persons were still alive; to look critically at the discipline’s methodological underpinnings; and to determine if the analysis of persons ‘in a significant and sensitive government position – such as a Secretary of State’ (the author here is alluding to the psychohistory of Henry Kissinger that Mazlish was preparing at the time) might ‘place the subject, and therefore the Nation, at a disadvantage in negotiating with foreign powers’.⁵²⁷ The authors of the document were convinced that psychoanalytic profiles compiled by intelligence agencies ‘in the service of national interest’ were of value.⁵²⁸ By implication, they were now determining if psychohistory could also be deemed a national security threat. According to the authors, psychiatrists made for especially dangerous psychohistorians, for two reasons, worth quoting in full:

(1) By reason of his special perceptive and deductive skills and his special knowledge of depth-psychology, the psychiatrist as psychohistorian is often in a position to discern certain things about the subjects mind and behavior that are not discernible to the subject himself or to those observers lacking the special training and knowledge. (2) By reason of his special status as a physician, a psychiatrist, and a scientist, the author is, to a considerable extent, accepted by a large segment of society as having special powers, and his report is therefore likely to be taken very seriously, often as having

⁵²⁵ ‘An Exchange on Psychohistory’. *The New York Review of Books*, May 3, 1973.

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1973/05/03/an-exchange-on-psychohistory/>

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁷ Hofling, Charles K. *The Psychiatrist as Psychohistorian: Report of the Task Force on Psychohistory of the American Psychiatric Association*. Washington: APA, 1976. 10.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.* 13.

even greater authority than he claims for it. [...] In a case in which the psychiatrist had reasonably ample data – let us say, interviews with the subject, interviews with persons on familiar terms with the subject at various periods of his life, access to some of the subject’s speeches, writings and behavior in the public domain – his psychohistorical analysis of the subject would, at least in theory, be analogous to clinically deductive reports of X-ray films of the patient’s body.⁵²⁹

The document betrays some interesting assumptions about psychiatry and psychoanalysis: first, that ‘depth-psychology’ was based upon, and produced, a ‘special knowledge’ which was only accessible to those who had gone through proper training; second, that it was a science, which, if based upon enough data, produced certain knowledge, analogous to the physician’s knowledge of a patient’s body. Also, that this knowledge was obtainable through the use of documents and interviews with the patient and people surrounding the patient, and was therefore not contingent upon the psychoanalytic (or otherwise therapeutic) process itself. Finally, the passage above seems to acknowledge that ‘physician’, ‘psychiatrist’ and ‘scientist’ were terms that, in the public’s imagination, were invested with a considerable amount of authority; an authority that was put at risk by the association of psychiatry and psychohistory, and the latter’s use by non-specialists, such as journalists and historians. John Mack, who was a member of the task force, explained: ‘Although some of us felt there could be exceptions, we were trying to avoid the irresponsible armchair stuff that pretends to be clinical.’⁵³⁰ The psychiatrists were fighting a losing battle, as ‘the actual practice of psychoanalysis’ increasingly became ‘less important than its cultural impact’.⁵³¹

Finally, the task force concluded that there was nothing improper or unethical (even if written by a psychiatrist) about a study such as the one written by Walter Langer about Hitler for the OSS. If an extreme situation warranted it, psychiatrists and historians were allowed – even expected – to serve their country. In fact, in times of peace, the authors could find no fault in producing ‘for confidential use of government officials’, psycho-profiles and psychobiographies of significant international figures whose personality formation needed to be understood ‘to carry out national policy more effectively’.⁵³² The authors held that ‘this type of activity blends by almost imperceptible degrees into common practices of educational institutions, businesses, charitable organizations, and so on, many of which compile basically harmless files or “dossiers” on the tastes, likes and dislikes, biases, and eccentricities of key individuals with whom they must deal.’⁵³³ Only when a person under scrutiny was currently alive *and* a fellow-citizen or a functioning component of the same nation as the writer, did ethical considerations ‘assume considerable weight’. It would only be ethical for a psychiatrist to write and publish a psychohistory, psychobiography or psycho-profile of a living person if the subject had been informed, and had freely given consent for personal interviews and publication. That meant Mazlish’s ‘psychohistorical inquiry’ of Nixon was suspect.

From the taskforce’s perspective, then, psychohistory not only impinged upon the privacy of individuals and possibly formed a threat to national security; in its crudest form, it also jeopardized the authoritative position of psychiatry as a profession. In an interview with *The New York Times* in response to the report’s publication, Mazlish dismissed the worries

⁵²⁹ Hofling, Charles K. *The Psychiatrist as Psychohistorian: Report of the Task Force on Psychohistory of the American Psychiatric Association*. Washington: APA, 1976. 9.

⁵³⁰ Noble, Philip. ‘A Controversial Discipline’. *New York Times*, October 10, 1976

⁵³¹ Quoted in Samuel, Lawrence R. *Shrink: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in America*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013. xiii.

⁵³² Hofling, Charles K. *The Psychiatrist as Psychohistorian: Report of the Task Force on Psychohistory of the American Psychiatric Association*. Washington: APA, 1976. 12.

⁵³³ *Ibid.* 13.

expressed in the document: ‘It staggers me to imagine that the Syrians could read my book and say, “Ah, now we know how to deal with Kissinger. That’s a fantasy”’.⁵³⁴ To be on the safe side, Mazlish decided to drop the term psychohistory from the title of his psychohistory of Henry Kissinger. The cover of that book simply read: *Kissinger: The European Mind in American Politics. A biographical inquiry by Bruce Mazlish*.⁵³⁵

⁵³⁴ Noble, Philip. ‘A Controversial Discipline’. *New York Times*, October 10, 1976.

⁵³⁵ Mazlish, Bruce. *Kissinger: The European Mind in American Policy*. New York: Basic Books, 1976.

Chapter 5 The Clio Complex

As the psychohistorical project increasingly suffered attacks from inside and outside the movement in the 1970s, it returned elsewhere – not unlike a psychoanalytic symptom – in different guises. Psychohistory had crossed the threshold of American intellectual awareness, and now appeared in more pronounced conceptual forms, with stronger institutional ties and advocated by more zealous proponents. At this point there was, in effect, a race on to determine what exactly psychohistory was – to anchor meaning to the word and to establish the standards of its practice. Two highly competitive groups of loosely connected scholars competed in this race, the Group for the Use of Psychology in History (GUPH) led by historian Charles ‘Chuck’ Strozier, and the so-called ‘deMause group’ led by Lloyd deMause.

Psychohistorical works were now extensively reviewed in publications such as *The New York Times* and *New York Magazine*. Two professional psychohistory periodicals were established: *The Journal of Psychohistory* (until 1973, the *History of Childhood Quarterly*) and the *Newsletter of the Group for the Use of Psychology in History* – which became a fully-fledged journal, *The Psychohistory Review*, in 1976.⁵³⁶ A *Journal for Interdisciplinary History* was set up in 1969 with the aid of Mazlish; it would publish psychohistorical articles until around 1980. Those pieces appeared alongside essays using social science methods on, for example, voting patterns in mid-Victorian England. *History and Theory*, also co-founded by Mazlish, published psychohistory articles, and mainstream history journals such as the *American Historical Review*, under editorship of Robert K. Webb (1968-1975) and Otto Pflanze (1977-1985), published psychohistorical pieces too. Psychoanalytic journals (such as *American Imago* and *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*) increasingly published psychobiographical studies, and in 1975 Lloyd deMause founded the Institute for Psychohistory. In 1978 the first convention of the International Psychohistorical Association was held in New York City. In *The Psychohistory Review*, the conference was announced in the Fall 1977- 1978 edition: ‘The IPA’s Committee on Organization welcomes proposals and encourages all psychohistorians and friends of psychohistory to attend.’⁵³⁷

The majority of works published around this time were psychobiographical texts and studies on leadership inspired by Erikson’s work. Psychobiographies included subjects such as: Frederick Taylor, Andrew Jackson, Theodore Herzl. Studies of women included works on Lou Andreas Salomé and Florence Nightingale. Book titles such as *Young Man Thoreau* (1989) and *Young Louis Fourteenth: The Early Years of the Sun King* (1970) attest to Erikson’s lasting influence on the field. Leadership studies occasionally went beyond the political realm to include the study of business leaders and tycoons, such as: *The First Henry Ford: A Study in Personality and Business Leadership* (1970). Dana Ward’s *Kissinger: A Psychohistory* (1975) shows that contemporary politicians were still under scrutiny. Titles such as *Napoleon: Bisexual Emperor* (1972) point to the unwavering dominance of Freudian theory in psychohistory.⁵³⁸ It is around this time when the first distinctions between psychohistory and psychobiography become visible. Psychobiographies, in general, tended to focus more internally on the life of the subject studied. And although, similar to psychohistory proper, psychoanalytic concepts were used to assist the historian in his explanation, psychobiographies did not claim to explain, for example, the dynamics of the interaction between the subject

⁵³⁶ For a detailed discussion of these journals and the increase in popular books labelled psychohistory, see Chapter Five.

⁵³⁷ ‘Communications from the Editor’. *The Psychohistory Review*, Fall-Winter 1978, Volume VI, No. 2-3.

⁵³⁸ See Sinovsky, Faye and John J. Fitzpatrick, Louis W. Potts, Lloyd deMause. ‘A Bibliography of Psychohistory’. *History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory*, Volume 2, No. 4, Spring 1975. 517-562.

studied and his or her historical context. In this sense, psychobiographies were closer to earlier applications of psychoanalytic concepts to historical characters within the early psychoanalytic movement. However, at this point, psychobiographies were no longer the exclusive domain of psychoanalysts: biographers, too, started to apply Freudian concepts freely. Where many psychohistorians insisted that they were engaged in a project that could be neither classified as psychoanalysis or history, psychobiographers more often than not situated their work in either 'parent' tradition. In this context, the work of Leon Edel on Henry James comes to mind. Although psychohistory's popularity undoubtedly created fertile ground for the positive reception of Edel's impressive, five-volume psychobiographical study of Henry James; he did not claim that this work was psychohistory, nor did he believe himself to be a part of a psychohistorical 'movement'. He did, however, reflect on his relationship with his object of study from a psychoanalytic perspective, as is evident from his discussion of his 'transference' to James in an extensive interview with the *Paris Review*. In 1985, he is quoted:

Biographical transference takes many forms. It can be so powerful that the biographer after spending a lifetime gathering materials isn't able to get the life down on paper. Some strong inhibition occurs. I've known such would-be biographers—one young biographer who followed a living novelist all over Europe, drank with him, developed a friendship, they corresponded, the subject was helpful and willing to be questioned . . . and then the friendship stood in the way. Nothing the young man could put down seemed good enough; or, in the fantasy, there remained a fear that perhaps the subject wouldn't like it. The history of Boswell's dilemma after Johnson died fits what I'm saying. He'd had a long friendship with Johnson and it was one of continual admiration; Johnson had also liked Boswell's own genial candor. Boswell struggled to get the book written, but he finally had to get the help of a great scholar, Edmond Malone, who, being an outsider, could help give the narrative an objectivity Boswell didn't always have.⁵³⁹

It is fair to say that psychohistory simultaneously produced and was part of an intellectual climate that led to the dissemination of psychobiography. Psychobiography was, in that sense, a 'child' or 'product' of psychohistory, and most psychohistorians ranked psychobiographies as part of their over-all project. It is only later, with the publication of William McKinley Runyan's *Life-History and Psychobiography* that psychohistory and psychobiographies become clearly separated categories from the perspective of psychobiographers. In Runyan's view, psychohistory was an independent project, with its own aims and ideals, and in practice focused more narrowly on the use of psychoanalytic theory, whereas psychobiography held the promise of one day being free from psychoanalysis.⁵⁴⁰ Differences aside, the psychohistorians considered psychobiographies as a fundamental part of their project, and people who wrote them allies – if not psychohistorians themselves.

Although psychohistory proper was unequivocally an American phenomenon, ideas associated with psychohistory achieved international status in the 1970s. In an overview published in the 'History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory' in 1975, deMause and his colleagues noted that in France, the influential historian Alain Besançon had published *L'Histoire Psychoanalytique* (1974); in Germany, *Psycho-pathografieen I: Schriftsteller und Psychoanalyse* (1972) appeared; in Italy, Giangaetano Bartolomei published

⁵³⁹ Edel, Leon. 'The Art of Biography, Vol. I. Interviewed by Jeanne McCullough'. *Paris Review*, issue 98, winter 1985.

⁵⁴⁰ Personal communication with Runyan, July 11, 2016.

an article 'Psicoanalisi et storiografia: Prospettive per un dibattito' (1972)⁵⁴¹. As Mazlish put it, in the 1970s, 'psychohistory took on all the outward trappings of a field in rapid expansion.'⁵⁴²

Langer's 'Next Assignment', it seemed, was being fulfilled. In the introduction to an edited volume entitled *The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of History* (1971), he wrote:

[The historian's] struggle to expand the field of historical research beyond the confines of political and military affairs to include economic, intellectual, and social factors has been brought to a successful close. Many historians – notably younger scholars – now see the need to deepen their understanding of the past by far more rigorous analysis of individual and social action. [...] If we are to understand the world-shaking and world-shaping events of either the past or the present, we historians need all the help that other disciplines can provide – not only economics, geography, demography, and so on, but also and especially psychoanalysis.⁵⁴³

But despite a growing interest in the potential of the field, psychohistory was still a floating signifier. There was a remarkable lack of agreement among practitioners as to what methods the interdiscipline should employ, and how the validity of psychohistorical explanation should, or even could, be measured. As Strozier, one of the founding editors of the GUPH newsletter noted at the time: 'For every good study published, numerous disgraceful works surface,' and further: 'in many historical circles Barzun flourishes, while all too often psychoanalysts insist on locking psychohistory in the institutes'.⁵⁴⁴ Disgraceful or not, the number of self-proclaimed psychohistorians was steadily growing, and there seems to have been a strong sense that something important was at stake in debates about the content of the term.

With the rise of social history and an openness to the inclusion of the findings from the social sciences in historical research, academic historians became increasingly interested in the idea of psychology as an auxiliary discipline. In her overview of the field, Joan W. Scott argued that the 1970s were a period of 'tumultuous disciplinary and national politics marked by calls for the inclusion in the annals of history the histories of neglected groups: workers, peasants, women, African-Americans, homosexuals, and others.'⁵⁴⁵ And yet advocates of these histories, 'did not turn to psychohistory,' she held, 'even though it was a lively and expanding area at the time'.⁵⁴⁶ In this chapter we will strongly take exception to that position. Some of the most interesting examples of psychohistorical literature produced at the time served as intellectual vehicles for subaltern voices and representatives of emancipatory movements. Feminists started using the term, as did Marxists; as well as the deMause group, who were extremely concerned about the effects of child-abuse. As Scott would have it, through psychohistory, psychoanalytic terminology served to uncover 'hidden motives, desires, life trajectories'.⁵⁴⁷ This is undoubtedly the case. In addition, we will argue that, perhaps even more importantly, psychohistory served to address societal issues: to slander, to critique, and to pathologise perceived injustices in American society.

⁵⁴¹ Bartolomei, Giangaetano. 'Psicoanalisi et storiografia: Prospettive per un dibattito'. *Nuova Rivista Storica* 56, 1972. 192-203.

⁵⁴² Mazlish, Bruce. 'Reflections on the state of Psychohistory'. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 5, No. 4, March 1977. 2.

⁵⁴³ Wolman, Benjamin B. *The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of History*. New York: Basic Books, 1971.

⁵⁴⁴ Strozier, Charles B. 'A Rationale for Teaching Psychohistory'. GUPH Newsletter, Volume IV, No. 1, June 1975. 8.

⁵⁴⁵ Tileagă, Cristian and Jovan Byford. *Psychology and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 71.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Whether they were conscious of it or not, the psychohistorians' work betrayed a sense that *interpretation is assault* – to paraphrase Susan Sontag.⁵⁴⁸ Because psychohistory itself was marginalised by practitioners in both its parent disciplines, it seems it was especially open to being used to provide other excluded voices a platform. In the process, psychoanalytic theory and its jargon were liberated from their psychiatric and academic confines. As many authors have described, American psychoanalysis' insistence on the 'scientific' nature of its theory increasingly tended to reconcile the discipline with morality and received social values.⁵⁴⁹ The importance of psychohistory lay, to a large extent, in the fact that it became a vehicle for the iconoclastic, rebellious aspects of psychoanalytic theory that had initially appealed to the European psychoanalytic intelligentsia of the 1920s. Fueled by a surge of interest – fused with intense criticism – in the 1970s, psychohistory came to serve as a shelter for a number of institutionally homeless and theoretically wayward psychoanalytic authors in the United States.

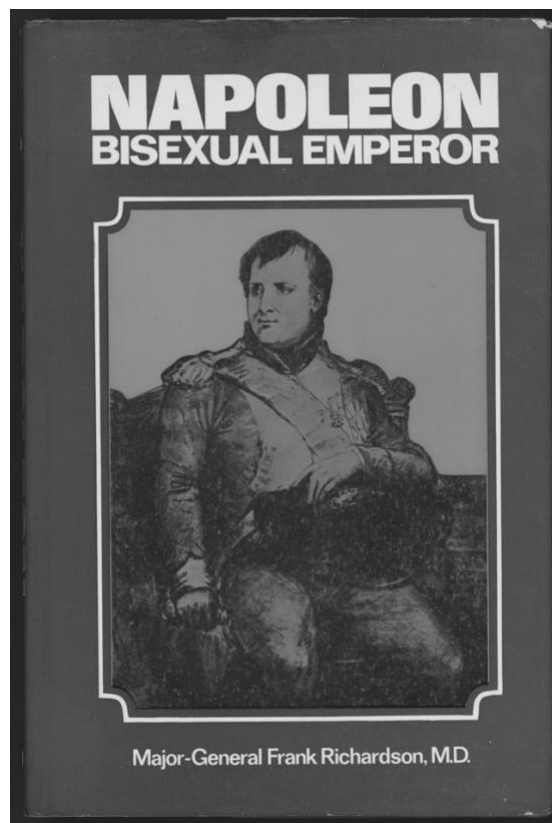


Fig. 5 *Napoleon: Bisexual Emperor* (1972)

California Dreaming

Much of the resistance towards psychohistory was not based on an evaluation of any actual achievements of psychohistorians, but sprang rather from antipathy towards the idea that the rituals of psychoanalysis could be performed by anyone other than medical doctors. Since the 1930s, the American Psychoanalytic Association (ApsA) had limited membership to medical specialists, with only a few exceptions granted to well-known analysts such as Erik Erikson and David Rapaport. In 1985, when a lawsuit alleging restraint of trade was filed by a group

⁵⁴⁸ Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation: And Other Essays*. New York: Dell Publishers, 1966. 16.

⁵⁴⁹ Hale, Nathan G. *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. 299.

of psychologists, the APsA's official position changed.⁵⁵⁰ Criticism of psychohistory has to be read against the backdrop of these developments.

The debate over lay analysis in North America caused much controversy from the very beginnings of psychoanalysis on that continent, and it has continued to do so.⁵⁵¹ As late as 2007, in a discussion on the state of psychoanalysis in the United States organised by the Philoctetes Center in New York City, Robert Michels, a psychoanalyst and professor of medicine and psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medical College, argued that two different worlds of psychoanalysis should exist. In one world, he explained, psychoanalysis 'is a treatment for sick people. It's a profession of caretakers, and its sister professions would be surgery and medicine and paediatrics'.⁵⁵² In the other world, psychoanalysis is an area of human knowledge, 'which has a unique and immensely valuable perspective on how to look at and understand all types of human activity'.⁵⁵³ In the first area, 'the greatest error you could make, is to let someone in who might be of sub-threshold quality as a person, ethically, responsibly, clinically'.⁵⁵⁴ In the second area of psychoanalysis, he found, the worst mistake would be 'to keep somebody out who, although they are maverick, and different, and odd, and strange, and creative, and intelligent, are potentially gifted'.⁵⁵⁵ As it was practiced by both clinicians and historians, psychohistory inevitably inhabited the space in between these areas. It comes as no surprise, then, that Michels's words were aimed at another member of the panel: psychohistorian and lay psychoanalyst Peter Loewenberg, whose life-long project has been to give clinically informed psychoanalytic thinking a space in academia, and to open up clinical training for non-medical specialists.

Loewenberg won a crucial battle for this position in 1977, when the California Research Psychoanalyst Law passed – this made it possible for academics in the state to train to become licensed practitioners of psychoanalysis and register with the Medical Board of California. Loewenberg was one of the first self-proclaimed psychohistorians to be fully trained in history as well as in psychoanalysis. At the time of writing, he is Professor Emeritus of history at UCLA, where he taught European cultural and intellectual history, political psychology, and psychohistory. He is also a Training and Supervising Analyst of the Southern California Psychoanalytic Institute. In 1992, he created (with Nancy Chodorow and Robert Nemiroff) the University of California Interdisciplinary Psychoanalytic Consortium (UCIPC) – a discussion forum for 'research psychoanalysts', academics who practice psychoanalysis, which holds annual meetings to this day. Loewenberg has published numerous psychohistorical works: *Decoding the Past: The Psychohistorical Approach* (1983), *Fantasy and Reality in History* (1995), *100 Years of the IPA: Centenary of the International Psychoanalytical Association, 1910-2010* (2011), and *Evolution and Change* (2011, with Nellie Thompson), and has authored articles on psychohistory and psychoanalysis.

Loewenberg studied history at the Meinecke Institut at the Freie Universität in Berlin, at a time when, as he put it, students 'were still living in the East because the rent was cheaper'.⁵⁵⁶ He was in graduate school when William Langer gave his Next Assignment address. 'I was awed,' he has said in an interview, 'and we were hoping for psychoanalysts [to

⁵⁵⁰ Pear, Robert. 'M.D.'s Make Room for Others In Ranks of Psychoanalysts', *The New York Times*, August 19, 1992.

⁵⁵¹ Burnham, John C. *After Freud Left: A Century of Psychoanalysis in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

⁵⁵² 'Psychoanalysis in the United States', Youtube video, Published on 27 December 2007.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPzIc-xQADg>

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁶ 'Life is Strange', *Vimeo* video, published 2012. <https://vimeo.com/41035334>

be hired] in all the major social science departments. But that didn't happen.'⁵⁵⁷ In the development of Loewenberg's work we see the three important psychohistorical positions reflected – traditional psychobiography and leadership studies, the study of groups, and the awareness of the transference towards one's subject.

During his time as a student in Berlin, Loewenberg was impressed by attending a guest lecture by Theodor Adorno. In that lecture Adorno argued that Germany was in need of psychoanalysis, because it lacked self-reflection and introspection. As a result, the young Loewenberg developed the conviction that one cannot really understand the twentieth century 'without understanding what the twentieth century knew about human behavior'.⁵⁵⁸ His subsequent career has been dedicated to putting that belief into practice. As a Professor at UCLA, he has taught psychohistory courses since the early 1970s, and has arranged for many of his students to spend time working at psychoanalytic institutes. Loewenberg's early writings are traditional applications of psychoanalytic theory to historical subjects. Two of his best known articles 'The Unsuccessful Adolescence of Heinrich Himmler' and 'The Psychohistorical Origins of the Nazi Youth Cohort', both published in the prestigious *American Historical Review* in 1971, constituted a triumph for psychohistory in terms of acceptance in mainstream journals. His first collection of essays, *Decoding the Past* (1983), included these and other articles, and was judged 'a stunning departure from the standard examination of events as a series of social/military/economic/political causes and results' by historian Arnold Kammer.⁵⁵⁹ Fellow psychohistorian Richard Schoenwald judged the collection 'solid but unexciting'.⁵⁶⁰

The piece on Himmler was based on Loewenberg's close-reading of Himmler's adolescent diaries. He concluded that Himmler was schizoid and obsessive-compulsive. Using the adolescent diary as a source, Loewenberg attempted to show how psychoanalytic theory and clinical insight could be utilised to demonstrate an emotional coherence and internal consistency between the adolescent and adult Himmler. To make his case, Loewenberg drew on the work of a variety of analysts and thinkers: Bruno Bettelheim, Peter Blos, Erik Erikson, Anna Freud, Harry Guntrip and Theodor Adorno. 'At the end of Himmler's adolescence,' Loewenberg concluded, 'Hitler became a father figure to him. [...] As Freud has noted, if enough narcissistic support is available from identification with a leader, then the superego may be completely disregarded.'⁵⁶¹ Loewenberg described Himmler as a character with a weak mind, constantly seeking external figures to identify with, and who served to prop up an underdeveloped emotional structure. To the question what set Himmler apart from millions of other boys of his time and culture, Loewenberg answered:

Could one have predicted from his adolescence that this youth would grow up to be the greatest mass murderer of all time? Clearly such prediction is beyond the scope of either history or psychoanalysis. The variables are too numerous; as Freud said, psychic life is 'overdetermined'. History, too, seeks multiple explanations for a single phenomenon and is not engaged in the tasks of replication or meeting the scientific test of predictability.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁹ Kammer, Arnold. *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Volume 25, No. 1, Winter, 1984. 109.

⁵⁶⁰ Schoenwald, Richard. *Pacific Historical Review*, Volume 53, No. 3, August, 1984. 381.

⁵⁶¹ Loewenberg, Peter. 'The Unsuccessful Adolescence of Heinrich Himmler'. *The American Historical Review*, Volume 76, No. 3, June 1971. 633.

⁵⁶² Loewenberg, Peter. *Decoding the Past, The Psychohistorical Approach*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002. 241.

Although Loewenberg's Himmler-article can be read as part of a tradition of psychohistorical thinking about the origins of Nazism, begun with the analysis of Adolf Hitler commissioned by the OSS, Loewenberg differed from psychohistorians such as Mazlish. Loewenberg did not consider it the task of a psychohistorian to do 'profiling', and he did not believe in the predictive qualities of psychohistory. Instead, his work can be better understood as a deepening of the tradition of applied psychoanalysis. In the second article, 'The Psychohistorical Origins of the Nazi Youth Cohort', Loewenberg looked at the postwar experiences of the children and young persons born in the wake of World War I, and attempted to show how their experience had 'explicitly conditioned the nature and success of National Socialism.'⁵⁶³ He wrote: 'It is time to lay at rest the idea that psychoanalytical explanations are necessarily uncausal or that they are inherently incompatible with quantitative data such as demographic, election, consumption, and health statistics,' and further: 'psychoanalysis can give these macrodata new coherence and meaning, thus adding a vital qualitative dimension to history.'⁵⁶⁴ As we shall see, this aligned him theoretically with work done in the deMause group on the history of child-rearing practices.

The Nazi-cohort article was an account of the experience of a large group: a generation. As such it was influential in the further history of psychohistory, departing as it did from the standard application of psychoanalysis to individuals. Loewenberg was inspired by the work of Karl Mannheim, who proposed a conceptual formulation of the generation as a force acting within history in his 1927 essay 'The Sociological Problem of Generations'. Mannheim adhered to an idea of the human mind as a layered structure, with earliest experience lying at the base of all other experience. 'Early impressions,' Mannheim wrote, 'coalesce into a natural view of the world. All later experiences then tend to receive their meaning from this original set, whether they appear as that set's verification and fulfilment or as its negation and antithesis...'⁵⁶⁵ Cloaked in vaguely Hegelian terms was a fundamentally psychoanalytic viewpoint that Loewenberg successfully appropriated. He then used these ideas to show how 'the new adults who became politically effective after 1929 and who filled the ranks of the SA and other paramilitary party organizations, such as the Hitler-Jugend and the Bund-Deutscher-Mädel, were the children socialized in World War I.'⁵⁶⁶ In the essay Loewenberg examined 'what happened to the members of this generation in their decisive period of character-development – particularly in early childhood – and studies their common experiences in childhood, in psychosexual development, and in political socialization that led to similar fixations and distortions of adult character.'⁵⁶⁷ In contrast to Erikson's work on Luther and Gandhi, the essay did not focus on a leader, but on followers. Loewenberg argued that this generation, disturbed by years of privation and paternal absence, was unable to resolve Oedipal complexes and was therefore susceptible to National Socialist ideology. It was not a radically new conception of the use of psychoanalysis in history, but it shifted perspective on existing approaches.

Increasingly Loewenberg's attention moved away from the application of psychoanalytic thought to historical subjects towards a psychoanalytic understanding of the relationship of the historian with his research. The battle to win psychoanalytic training for non-medical students in California undoubtedly influenced Loewenberg's perspective on the possible interactions between history and psychoanalysis.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.* 244.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 248.

⁵⁶⁵ 'The Problem of Generations' in *From Karl Mannheim*. Edited by Kurt H. Wolff. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993. 373.

⁵⁶⁶ Loewenberg, Peter. *Decoding the Past, The Psychohistorical Approach*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002. 244.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 245.

‘One day,’ he recalled, ‘I received a call from a friend on the California Psychology Licensing Board, who told me there had been a complaint filed against me for “practicing psychology without a license”.’⁵⁶⁸ As a result, Loewenberg decided to secure what was to be called the ‘Research Psychoanalyst Law’, which would allow academics from any field to train in and practice psychoanalysis. ‘The most important lobby we had on our side was the University of California Student Lobby,’ he noted.⁵⁶⁹ The lobby represented the 130,000 students and their extended families and ‘argued with great understanding of the nature of academic psychoanalytic training and practice and of what was at stake for students of the university.’⁵⁷⁰ The students’ argument ran as follows: if professors were not allowed to actually engage in the practice of psychoanalysis, their instruction would consist entirely of theoretical knowledge with no solid foundation in practice. At the time, there were professors teaching courses that involved some form of psychoanalytic thought at UCLA in various fields: history, law, medicine, political science and the humanities. Legislation was carried in the senate by Senator Walter Stiern, Loewenberg’s veterinarian in his hometown of Bakersfield. Stiern secured unanimous passage. On 30 September 1977, Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr., signed the first Research Psychoanalyst Law, which was the first time in the history of any jurisdiction that psychoanalysis was legitimated by a state. Upon passage of the law, Anna Freud wrote to Loewenberg: ‘I think this legal decision is a wonderful thing and will mark an important development in the history of psychoanalysis in America.’⁵⁷¹

An article published in *The International Review of Psycho-Analysis* in 1977, the same year as the California bill was passed, outlined clearly Loewenberg’s arguments for why academics should be allowed to train to be clinicians and shows how he conceived of a cross-fertilisation of historical and psychoanalytical thought.⁵⁷² He opened the piece by quoting Freud:

If – which may sound fantastic today – one had to found a college of psychoanalysis, [...] analytic instruction would include branches of knowledge which are remote from medicine and which the doctor does not come across in his practice: the history of civilization, mythology, the psychology of religion and the science of literature. Unless he is well at home in these subjects, an analyst can make nothing of a large amount of his material.⁵⁷³

Loewenberg argued that there was a lot to be gained for history when it was enriched by psychoanalytic insight, but that psychoanalysis too could learn from history by exploring the developments of humanistic and social science methodology. He showed, by using clinical vignettes, the relevance of filling in the social and cultural context of clinical cases. The emphasis on the unique aspects of a clinical case, according to Loewenberg, ‘is a standard canon of historical method’, and could feed psychoanalytic thinking, thereby leading it away from grand theory-building and towards a focus on the particularities of individual cases.⁵⁷⁴ Using Thomas Kuhn’s theory of paradigm shifts and Einstein’s comments on the nature of science relying on ‘Einfuehlung’, Loewenberg argued that psychoanalysis could only grow if it did away with its nineteenth-century, positivistic assumptions about the growth of

⁵⁶⁸ Daum, Andreas W., and Hartmut Lehmann, James J. Sheehan. *The Second Generation: Émigrés from Nazi Germany as Historians*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2016. 124.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷² Loewenberg, Peter. ‘Why Psychoanalysis Needs the Social Scientist and the Historian’, *International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, 4. 305-315.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.* 305.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 307.

knowledge, and adopted a 'relativistic and pluralistic view' of its own enterprise. 'Cultural and historical relativism, the modern history and philosophy of science, and conceptual abstraction from reality can be used to build bridges between the social sciences, the humanities and psychoanalysis,' he thought.⁵⁷⁵ But the most important contribution to psychoanalytic thought, Loewenberg held, would come from the historian's 'procedure of reconstruction of the past by inferring the thoughts and feelings of particular men in the past from the historical evidence of the present.'⁵⁷⁶ This process of immersion in problems and identification with their solution, Loewenberg drew from R.G. Collingwood's work, who had himself been inspired by Freud. Collingwood's insights might, he thought, shed new light on the psychoanalytic concept of transference and the therapeutic situation. 'Each discipline can make better sense of its own problems if it understands the methods of the other,' he concluded.⁵⁷⁷

Since the passage of the research bill, Loewenberg has consistently argued that clinical practice and theoretical understanding of psychoanalysis are inextricably intertwined. 'The critical difference,' he once stated, 'between those who use only theory and those who have a thorough familiarity with a hands-on clinical situation is that the psychoanalyst uses his subjective self empathically to know the 'other' in the emotional field they jointly occupy. This field may be the chaos of a research project or the inner pain of an analysand.'⁵⁷⁸ The crucial similarity between the interpretive task of the historical scholar and that of the psychoanalyst, Loewenberg held, is that both construct narrative explanations. 'The tool of cognition is the self – the emotional insight and sensibility of the researcher.'⁵⁷⁹ The use of psychoanalysis for historians, in Loewenberg's view, was to acknowledge, analytically pick apart, comprehend and then use productively the subjective aspects of historical scholarship. 'Knowledge, understanding, and problem-solving do not lend themselves to narrow scotomized approaches. Fields such as history and psychoanalysis must be related to each other by the researcher, not statically, but as independent variables, each with its own context and imperatives.'⁵⁸⁰

This view aligned him theoretically with Erikson and his ideas about the historian's transference towards his or her object of study.⁵⁸¹ Although he did not quote Erikson, Loewenberg wrote an article about the use that the psychohistorian should make of his own unconscious in 1985. He argued that a researcher is only ever able to write rigorously and truthfully about the past if he is aware that there is always a transaction between the historian and his or her data: 'Thus an historian's communication of his unanalyzed counter-transference to his subject can be our most valuable clue that we are upon unconscious conflictual material in an historical problem.'⁵⁸² In the article, Loewenberg quoted four historians' countertransferences as communicated in their writings: Isaac Deutscher on Leon Trotsky; Joel Colton on Leon Blum; Eugene Lunn on Gustav Landauer; and Kenneth Stampf on the Civil War (Loewenberg posited that these psychodynamic insights need not be limited to biography). Linking his findings back to Freud, Loewenberg quoted:

The psychoanalyst researcher, Freud said: 'should turn his own unconscious like a receptive organ toward the transmitting unconscious of the patient. He must tune himself to the patient as a telephone receiver is tuned in to the transmitting mouthpiece.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 311.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 313.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 315.

⁵⁷⁸ Loewenberg, Peter. 'Dual Training: Professional and Personal Insights'. *Clio's Psyche*, Volume 4, No. 2, September 1997. http://www.cliospsyche.org/sample_dt.html

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸¹ See Chapter Two.

⁵⁸² Loewenberg, Peter. 'Historical Method, the Subjectivity of the Researcher, and Psychohistory', in: *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 14, No. 1, Fall 1985. 34.

Just as the receiver converts back into soundwaves the electric oscillations in the telephone line which were set up by sound waves, so the doctor's unconscious is able, from the derivatives of the unconscious which are communicated to him, to reconstruct that unconscious.⁵⁸³

Loewenberg argued that, similarly, 'an historian's unconscious must "tune-in" to the materials of his research and listen for its underlying cadences' that would lead to insights regarding key structures and relationships.⁵⁸⁴ It is likely that Loewenberg was aware of the similarities between these notions and Erikson's idea of 'disciplined subjectivity' and the countertransference to the historical subject, but he did not acknowledge this in his paper at the time. He concluded the article with these words: 'The integration and fuller conceptualization of these conjunctures remains the future task for historians in which psychohistory will play an important if not central role.'⁵⁸⁵ Like many of Loewenberg's significant contributions to psychohistory, the article appeared in a journal entitled *The Psychohistory Review* – one of the most important vessels of knowledge in the scattered psychohistorical field.

The GUPH

The Group for the Use of Psychology in History (GUPH, or 'goof', as it was referred to affectionately by some of its earliest editors) was established as an affiliate of the American Historical Association (AHA) in 1972 by Richard Schoenwald, professor of history at Carnegie Mellon University. In 1971, Schoenwald sent out a mimeographed sheet to a list of colleagues, asking for support for a psychohistory group that was to meet at AHA congresses annually. He also planned to issue a newsletter to enhance communication between people interested in the new field of psychohistory. There was quite some response: from H. Stuart Hughes, for instance, who became an early supporter of the initiative. Schoenwald set up the group as planned, and operated as the head of GUPH; Patrick Dunn was appointed coordinator of the *Newsletter*; Jack Fitzpatrick edited a 'teaching psychohistory' section; William Gilmore wrote an ongoing bibliography of psychohistorical works; and Charles 'Chuck' Strozier, a young unemployed historian, handled the 'research notes', including brief profiles of people working in psychohistory and summaries of their research projects.⁵⁸⁶

At the time, Charles Strozier was 'fresh from a couple of years in Europe and had a newly minted Ph.D. from the University of Chicago'.⁵⁸⁷ Inspired by reading Erikson, he had written a psychoanalytic study of the nineteenth-century Polish Revolution. 'I spent a year-and-a-half in Warsaw and Krakow,' he recalled in an interview. 'This was during the Cold War: phones were tapped and there were men in dark suits talking into their wristwatches and following me whenever I went to the library.'⁵⁸⁸ After his return, Strozier started calling himself a psychohistorian, but had no job. When he received Schoenwald's announcement, he decided to jump on the bandwagon. For the *Newsletter* he wrote to psychohistorians throughout the country and asked about their works in progress. His work was then to edit and assemble their replies. As he recalled, 'it turned out to be a good way to make contacts in the field'.⁵⁸⁹ The early *Newsletters* appear short and primitive by contemporary standards, but they served

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁶ Personal communication with Strozier, April 1, 2016.

⁵⁸⁷ Elovitz, Paul H., 'A Conversation with Charles B. Strozier', *Clio's Psyche*, Volume 3, No. 4, November 22, 1996.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁹ Strozier, Charles B. 'Autobiographical Reflections on The Psychohistory Review'. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 15, No. 1, Fall 1986. 2.

their purpose at the time. According to Strozier, ‘those associated with it were eager to know what was happening where and who was doing what in psychohistory’.⁵⁹⁰ In those days, he recalled, ‘psychohistory courses were being taught everywhere’, and people shared a lot of excitement about the new field: ‘There was something in the air.’⁵⁹¹

Yet things started to unravel in the GUPH soon. Within a year Schoenwald decided that he did not want the responsibility of leading the group. At an AHA convention in New Orleans, he stepped down, and was replaced by historian James H. McRandle. During the following year no meetings were planned and the *Newsletter* slowed down: ‘Those of us working on the *Newsletter* and interested in GUPH felt a mounting sense of frustration.’⁵⁹² In May 1973, subscription renewals had not reached the goal of 100, which the editor considered ‘psychologically and financially necessary to continue’.⁵⁹³ By the end of the year, over breakfast at a conference in San Francisco, Strozier, Gilmore and Fitzpatrick decided that they had had enough. They planned ‘something, it was not a coup’.⁵⁹⁴ Strozier now felt more secure, as he had been hired at Sangamon State University (SSU), a small, progressive university in Illinois set up in 1969. Through Peter Loewenberg, SSU had contacted Strozier: ‘it was definitely the first and probably the last such position ever opening up.’⁵⁹⁵ He applied and got the job. Now, ‘in one bold stroke of genius, arrogance, youth, or whatever,’ Strozier, Gilmore and Fitzpatrick decided that ‘our vinyl-covered table, now filled with eggs and ham, was the site of a reconstituted GUPH.’ Strozier took over the *Newsletter* and agreed to coordinate activities within the group, but the three men ‘shared responsibilities as a kind of triumvirate’.⁵⁹⁶

As Strozier remembers it, the reason for the initial collapse of GUPH and the *Newsletter* was ‘the stormy entrance into psychohistory of Lloyd deMause, who had money, flair, and the apparent support of all the top names in the field.’⁵⁹⁷ This left members of the GUPH disheartened, as the *Newsletter* had none of those things. ‘It turned out later,’ Strozier recalled, ‘when records were transferred [from Dunn to Strozier], that our worst fears were justified: the GUPH *Newsletter* had six paid subscribers and \$70 in the kitty.’⁵⁹⁸ However, it soon became clear that Lloyd deMause’s journal, *The History of Childhood Quarterly* (HCQ), was, in an attempt to be pluralistic and open-minded, publishing material that did not conform to the academic standards of the time. This quickly led authors who had been initially interested in the journal, such as Robert Lifton and Peter Loewenberg, away from deMause and his journal. Strozier and his colleagues saw an opening. With a touch of bravado, he recalled: ‘we were young, low-key and under the radar – this worked in our advantage at the time. We had absolutely nothing to lose.’⁵⁹⁹

The newly-formed triumvirate consciously constructed the *Newsletter* in opposition to the *History of Childhood Quarterly*. As Strozier put it later: ‘I thought deMause was froth from the start. I found his imperious style impossible and his understanding of psychoanalysis and psychohistory off-beat, if not bizarre.’⁶⁰⁰ In contrast to the *HCQ*, which had a glossy cover and

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹¹ Personal communication with Strozier, April 1, 2016.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.* 2-3.

⁵⁹³ From the Editor. *GUPH Newsletter*, Volume II, No. 1, May, 1973. 1.

⁵⁹⁴ Personal communication with Strozier, April, 1, 2016.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁶ Strozier, Charles B. ‘Autobiographical Reflections on The Psychohistory Review’. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 15, No. 1, Fall 1986. 4.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 3.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁹ Personal communication with Strozier, April 1, 2016.

⁶⁰⁰ Strozier, Charles B. ‘Autobiographical Reflections on The Psychohistory Review’. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 15, No. 1, Fall 1986. 3.

was attractively designed, the *Newsletter*'s goal was to be 'avowedly all book and no cover, to be highly professional in the editorial control of what we published but simple in appearance.'⁶⁰¹ In this way, the group sought to make the contrast with the competition complete. Money remained an issue. 'Sometime around this period after the change (or the takeover, depending on your point of view), I remember David Musto of Yale sent the *Newsletter* an unsolicited gift of \$25,' Strozier remembered, 'it represented a quarter of our operating budget'.⁶⁰²

By 1976, Strozier had metamorphosed the *Newsletter* into a peer-reviewed journal: *The Psychohistory Review*. 'In those days Jack, Bill, Fred, and I all read the submitted papers,' he recalled, 'then I usually got one, two, or three outside readings. It was thus not uncommon for an article submitted to the *Review* to be read by six people.'⁶⁰³ In the fall of 1978, an impressive editorial board was established, consisting of Fred Weinstein, as Chairman; Rudolph Binion, at Brandeis; John Demos, also at Brandeis; Howard Feinstein, at Cornell; Arnold Goldberg, of Michael Reese Hospital; Joel Kovel, of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine; George M. Kren, at Kansas State University; Robert Jay Lifton, at Yale; Peter Loewenberg, at UCLA; Steven Marcus, at Columbia; Bruce Mazlish, at MIT; David F. Musto, at Yale; Gerald M. Platt, at University of Massachusetts; George Pollock, of The Institute of Psychoanalysis in Chicago; Lucian W. Pye, at MIT; Paul Roazen, at York University, Ontario; Suzanne Rudolph, at the University of Chicago; Richard L. Schoenwald, at Carnegie Mellon University; Miles F. Shore, at Harvard Medical School; Cushing Trout, at Cornell; and Eli Zaretsky, at the University of California, Berkeley. Only Frederick Crews, who 'no longer believed in psychoanalysis', and Erik Erikson kindly refused Strozier's request to be members of the board. The purpose of the board was 'to review, read, help, counsel – and, of course, to provide some window-dressing.'⁶⁰⁴

Until 1978, Strozier found there was a seemingly chronic shortage of publishable articles: 'I would have in hand loyal Fred Weinstein's sixth article in two years, a couple of short communications, Bill Gilmore's bibliography and a few book reviews. Such a collection does not a journal issue make.'⁶⁰⁵ Over the decade, the *Review* published a score of articles on psychohistorical methodology, such as: 'On Methodological Strategies of Political Biography: a Précis, by Barbara Kellerman, 1976; 'History as Mythology: The Punjab Style in British India, by Lewis Wurgaft, Spring 1978; 'Is Psychohistory really history?' by Peter C. Hoffer, Winter 1979; 'Evaluating Psychohistorical Explanations', by Faye Crosby, Spring 1979. These reflections on psychohistorical methodology were crucial, as more and more work groups, university courses and even training programmes in psychohistory emerged, which the *Newsletter* and the *Review* dutifully recorded. In an early *Newsletter*, Richard Schoenwald recounted an attempt to set up a psychohistorical reading group with both historians and psychiatrists in an article entitled 'Setting Up Sitting Up with Psychiatrists':

We usually met on the same day each month, mainly for the convenience of the analysts. We started at 8, later 8.15 p.m., and stopped promptly at 10. Beer and pretzel-type snacks were the only refreshments, at fifty cents a head, regardless of how much anyone consumed. [...] On balance, I think our shambling, stumbled-into eclecticism met our needs, and that is why we stuck to it as long as we did.⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰² *Ibid.* 4.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.* 7.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 7.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 8.

⁶⁰⁶ Schoenwald, Richard L. 'Setting Up Sitting Up with Psychiatrists'. *GUPH Newsletter*, Volume II, No. 1, May 1973. 5.

A lot changed in the next few years. Besides the annual meetings at the AHA gatherings, and meetings at the Convention of the Organization of American Historians in 1974, the *Newsletter* announced the birth of Chicago's Center for Psychosocial Studies, led by self-proclaimed psychohistorian John Demos, who would later publish the highly influential psychohistorical work *Entertaining Satan* (1980), on the history of witchcraft in New England.⁶⁰⁷ By 1977, George M. Kren and the *Review* proudly announced that Kansas State University and the Menninger Foundation were setting up a collaborative graduate training programme in psychohistory. Another important genre of articles published in the *Review* were psychobiographical pieces, often modeled after Erikson's work. Examples of such articles were: 'The Unstrung Orpheus: Flaubert's Youth and the Psycho-Social Origins of Art for Art's Sake', by Arthur Mitzman, who won the 'Langer-Award', a \$500 award set up by the GUPH to encourage psychohistorical work; '1866: Bismarck's Gamble', by Charlotte Sempell; 'Why America Loved Theodore Roosevelt: or Charisma is in the Eyes of the Beholders', by Kathleen Dalton. New methodologies were sought after. David Luck, at the Russian Institute at Columbia University was using interdisciplinary methods to conduct a comparative psychobiographical study that, the *Review* judged, 'could have important methodological implications for psychohistory generally':

A content analysis of the available articulations of Hitler, Stalin, and Mao was undertaken and the results so far are encouraging. One of the coding categories is 'primary' oral imagery, involving projections of food and mouth images onto political objects (e.g., 'The Jew would devour us'), while another is 'primary' anal imagery, involving peculiarly violent verbals and dirty-clean adjectives (e.g., 'We must smash that filthy theory'); of Hitler's imagery which can be coded into one or the other primary category (about 20 per cent of total imagery N, so far, of 10,000), the distribution is skewed orally by roughly 65-35 per cent; of Stalin's (15 per cent of an N of about 60,000), the distribution is skewed anally by about 80-20 per cent; Mao's primary distribution (10 per cent of an N of 20,000) is clearly more balanced, with a 60-40 anal skew.⁶⁰⁸

Although this approach may have seemed promising at the time, the majority of articles published in *The Psychohistory Review* were either applications of psychoanalytic theory, or reflections on the history, method and future of the movement. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, major figureheads in the psychohistorical movement were publishing in the *Review*. Robert Lifton published an article in 1980, 'On the Consciousness of the Holocaust', which was widely re-published and translated, and Bruce Mazlish published two pieces in the early 1980s: 'The Next "Next Assignment": Leader, Led, Individual and Group', in which he addressed psychohistory's incapacity to formulate a coherent theory of groups, in 1981; and 'American Narcissism', in 1982. Fitzpatrick, who could not find an academic position so retrained as a psychoanalyst, and William Gilmore stayed on as editors until the fall of 1982. Strozier stepped down as editor in 1986, when Robert Lifton invited him to come and teach at John Jay College of Criminal Justice at City University in New York. At the time of writing, he is still there.⁶⁰⁹

Women's Psychohistory

⁶⁰⁷ *GUPH Newsletter*, Volume 3, No. 1, June 1974. 4-5.

⁶⁰⁸ Research Notes. *GUPH Newsletter*, Volume II, No. 1, May, 1973. 3.

⁶⁰⁹ Personal communication with Strozier, April 1, 2016.

Post-war America produced a number of visible female figureheads of psychoanalysis (such as Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, Karen Horney, and Clara Thompson). And yet, the psychoanalytic profession was dominated by men until the 1980s, when non-medical analysts were gradually allowed to train. In the preceding decades, publications such as *Psychoanalysis and Female Sexuality* (1966) and *Psychoanalysis and Women* (1973) gave a voice to female and, increasingly, feminist perspectives in and of the field. With the advent of women's history and feminist movements in the 1960s and 70s, a number of female authors interested in the use of psychoanalytic concepts took refuge in the field of psychohistory. In the first ten years of *The Psychohistory Review's* existence (from 1976 onwards), roughly 20% of the articles were written by women; for the *History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory*, this was only 13%. Although such figures seem to lend credence to Joan Scott's assertion that 'psychohistory was primarily the province of intellectual history, a largely (white) male field,' a number of female historians began exploring the interface between women's history, feminism, and psychohistory.⁶¹⁰

The result, as seen in the work of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, was a new history that focused on the events, patterns, and psychodynamics of private places. She wrote: 'I became a psycho-historian because I had first become a historian of women,'⁶¹¹ Smith-Rosenberg wrote in an article in the *GUPH Newsletter*. 'My route was neither idiosyncratic nor fortuitous. Inherent parallels exist between these two innovative forms of contemporary social history.'⁶¹² A shared focus on the private world of sex and domestic relations produced a convergence in concerns between women's history and psychohistory. Historians of women had been primarily concerned with women's roles in social processes and institutions, and with women's location and status within society; but now, with the aid of psychoanalytic theory, light was cast onto women's experiences, and the question how their particular standpoint fed back into the abstract formative structures and procedures that determined their subjugation.⁶¹³ 'Childrearing practices, sexuality and family dynamics cannot be understood if the reality of the women involved in these processes are ignored,' Smith-Rosenberg forcefully argued.⁶¹⁴ Her aim was to examine 'the internal structure and dynamics of institutions and processes, as well as the existential or emotional quality of life lived within them.'⁶¹⁵ Psychohistory provided a model that did not sever particular experience from an investigation of the determining symbolic structures and institutions of a given society, but rather emphasised their connection and interdependence.

Smith-Rosenberg did, however, urge her fellow psychohistorians to move away from the speculative areas of psychoanalysis and psychohistory, such as the reconstruction of childhood experience. She emphasised that there were avenues of psychohistorical research now open that were far less contentious, yet still rewarding. Following Hartmann and Anna Freud, Smith-Rosenberg's interest lay primarily in the ego's structure and its function: the ways in which it mediates between the needs of the individual and his or her society; the defences it develops in this interaction; and the various ways in which culture shapes character formation. 'I would urge historians,' she said,

⁶¹⁰ Tileagă, Cristian and Jovan Byford. *Psychology and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 71.

⁶¹¹ Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. 'The New Woman and The Psycho-Historian: A Modest Proposal.' *GUPH Newsletter*, December, 1975, Volume IV, No. 3. 4.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*

to focus on the ways in which ego development and levels of ego maturation seem to be affected by social institutions and cultural values: by gender role socialization, by punishment patterns, by the presence or absence of a broad range of legitimate behavioral options for the maturing individual, by cultural structuring of mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, father-son relations, and by the existence of role discontinuity at various points during the life cycle.⁶¹⁶

By studying discrete groups within a culture and relating the findings of those studies to the experiences of individuals, Smith-Rosenberg felt that the relationships between 'social structure and gender roles, social change, psychic stress and the development of defence mechanism against such stress' could be fruitfully examined.⁶¹⁷ There are, she held, 'quite concrete ways in which a culture influences personality development', and these ways were open to be explored by psychohistorians.⁶¹⁸ In fact, in her view, these ways were possibly far more accessible to the psychohistorian than to the psychoanalyst, who had a far narrower, clinical focus. This insight, she thought, might eventually lead to a contribution of psychohistory to the edifice of psychoanalysis: the conceptual framework of ego-psychology made possible an investigation of culture and its influence on individuals' experiences in the past that was radically new and promising. Smith-Rosenberg put her ideas into practice in her article: 'The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America', published in the same year as her 'The New Woman and the Psycho-Historian: A Modest Proposal'. She explored the largely ignored experience of intimate friendships among women, and showed how women in eighteenth and nineteenth-century North America 'routinely formed emotional ties with other women', as the rigid gender-role differentiation within the family and society led to a physical and emotional segregation of women and men.⁶¹⁹ Although her perspective here was psychohistorical, she analysed female friendships within a cultural and social setting, as opposed to what she called the 'exclusively individual psychosexual perspective'.⁶²⁰

For some female authors, however, such an analysis of the experience of women's predicament in a patriarchal society was not nearly radical enough. Nancy Gager Clinch (née Nancy Land Gager) was an outspoken feminist author and editor, and founding president of the Washington chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW). She was a mountaineer, a member of the American Historical Association, and served as a civilian intelligence analyst in Korea for the United States army. Clinch spent time in Nepal, and worked as part of the staff of *National Geographic*. She also wrote for the *Women's Right Almanac*. One of her most successful projects was the creation of the script for 'How We Got the Vote', an Emmy Award-winning documentary narrated by Jean Stapleton. The film highlighted, among other things, how feminists were once labeled by psychologists as mentally disturbed. She earned her BA in political science from Wellesley College and studied literature at Oxford University. In 1980, at the age of 48, she died of leukemia.⁶²¹

Clinch's best known work, *The Kennedy Neurosis* (1973), was a self-proclaimed exercise in psychohistory, and more specifically, in what she termed 'psychohumanism'.⁶²² From her perspective as a feminist, she found in Freud too 'gloomy and pessimistic' a thinker,

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.* 6.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.* 7.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁹ Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. 'The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America.' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* Volume 1, No. 1, 1975. 1.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶²¹ 'Nancy Gager, Author and Editor, Dies', *Washington Post*, February 4, 1980

⁶²² Clinch, Nancy Gager. *The Kennedy Neurosis*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1973. 7.

who was not only sexist, but who also conceived of human nature as ‘essentially hostile and self-destructive’.⁶²³ Erik Erikson’s work, in turn, ‘provided much stimulation’, but she found his theories less convincing than his insights: ‘I do not subscribe to his psychoanalytic basis’, she admitted.⁶²⁴ As such, Clinch’s work is a rare example of explicitly non-Freudian psychohistory. Instead, Clinch drew heavily on authors such as Karen Horney, Erich Fromm and Harry Stack Sullivan (also psychoanalysts, albeit more wayward ones, and arguably less sexist), as well as humanistic psychologists such as Gordon Allport, Rollo May and Abraham Maslow. On its release, the book was deemed controversial: author Jim F. Heath called it ‘overly astringent and methodologically questionable,’⁶²⁵ but a writer for *New York Magazine* judged that ‘if one accepts psychohistory at all, this is a pretty persuasive, sympathetic and even tragic contribution to it.’⁶²⁶ Bruce Mazlish wrote the introduction to the work. ‘In spite of certain flaws,’ he prophesied: ‘there is a very good chance that it will end up as a landmark in political biography.’⁶²⁷

Clinch opened her book with a short story, told as if it were a fairy tale: ‘Once upon a time there was a country in which white men were often able to work very hard and acquire great personal fortunes, depending upon their individual circumstances and energies...’⁶²⁸ What followed was the life history of a dynasty. Instead of focusing on one particular member of the Kennedy family, Clinch reconstructed how the history of the family had produced in its members a particular type of shared ‘neurosis’. The Kennedy family, she argued, had indeed acquired great personal fortune, but had at the same time also suffered from always being cast as ‘outsiders’. This split between material wealth and social acceptance had led to a particular harsh upbringing of the three Kennedy sons, and their neurosis, which she defined as: ‘a human sickness which prevents the victim from achieving his own humanity and thus from fulfilling his capacity for ethical living’.⁶²⁹ Any authority the Kennedy family possessed rested on the irrational fears and desires of much of the voting public, and came to rest more and more on the creation of illusions and the assertion of magical qualities rather than on actual performance.

The Kennedys, in Clinch’s eyes, were charlatans, unable to achieve any full sense of humanity. Central to her story (and her conception of neurosis), was the idea that one becomes ill when one is somehow unable to fulfil one’s promises or potential. Here she drew heavily on Erich Fromm, who made a distinction between ‘rational authority’, based on competence, and ‘irrational authority’, based on intimidation and an admiration of so-called ‘magic’ qualities. The source of such irrational authority, Clinch decided, was power over people. But Clinch was worried that it was not only the Kennedy family who were cursed. The Kennedy neurosis, Clinch held, was also very much ‘an American neurosis’. In her book, she was attempting to undo the spell that the Kennedys had cast over the voting public.

With all their wealth and power, Clinch’s argument ran, the Kennedys had had the chance to achieve in their time and place what Erik Erikson had termed ‘psychohistorical actuality’ – ‘an encounter between a great leader (such as Martin Luther or Gandhi) and his people that actualizes or releases fruitful new potentialities in both.’⁶³⁰ They had possessed the necessary intelligence, energy, and single-minded concentration to fulfil this task. What had

⁶²³ *Ibid.* x.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.* 18.

⁶²⁵ Heath, Jim F. *Decade of Disillusionment: The Kennedy-Johnson Years*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976. 305

⁶²⁶ *New York Magazine*, 11 September 1972. 61.

⁶²⁷ Clinch, Nancy Gager. *The Kennedy Neurosis*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1973. ix

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.* 2.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.* 8.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.* 17.

been missing, however, was ‘the crucial moral vision – the essence of courage’.⁶³¹ Not only their background, also their ultimate goal: self-gratification, rather than a genuine self-fulfilment, had kept them emotionally separated from the people who they had professed to lead. It had also, it seems, brought misfortune on them:

Of four Kennedy sons, three are dead: one by wartime disaster and two by assassination. The fourth son was nearly killed in a plane crash; and half a decade later, he disgraced himself in the eyes of millions by contributing to the death of a young woman under ambiguous circumstances, severely, if not irreparably, damaging his presidential ambitions. One daughter was killed in a plane crash. Another daughter has been confined since young adulthood in a home for the mentally retarded. Thus, of the nine heirs, only four have survived as functioning adults: one son and three daughters.⁶³²

The Kennedy Neurosis was a moral tale, and the Kennedys’ ‘neurosis’ was something akin to a modern curse. The Kennedys were the victims of their parents, their social ethos, and their inexplicable appeal and mystique. In other words, they had been cursed by their background and upbringing. ‘Science and technology,’ Clinch wrote, ‘have precipitated a situation where the risks of executive compulsions and illusions become potentially more dangerous every year. In short, it is imperative that we search out within ourselves and within our leaders the neurotic conflicts that could mean the difference between national survival and national extinction.’⁶³³ Not only had their curse led to the Kennedy family’s downfall; it was increasingly a threat to the American public that needed to be tackled. The book reads like a political statement and a moral indictment, more akin to the Woodrow Wilson book by Freud and Bullitt than to any work by Erikson, Mazlish or Lifton. In *The Kennedy Neurosis*, the language of psychoanalysis was used in the guise of psychohistory to pathologise a powerful family and everything it stood for. And indeed, this was exactly Clinch’s intention: ‘If my emphasis seems generally negative, it is largely because the lavish praise of the Kennedys has been so irrational and untrue that a revisionist must inevitably feel the weight of writing against an enormous tide of published opinion.’⁶³⁴ Despite its hostile tone, Mazlish judged that the book was written in ‘a clear and compelling style’ and ‘pleasure joins importance in urging us on to its reading.’⁶³⁵

Clinch’s use of this conception of neurosis-as-curse points to a growing confusion inside and outside of psychoanalytic circles about what was exactly meant by the word neurosis. By distancing herself from Freud, and associating with thinkers such as Horney and Fromm, Clinch accepted a particular view on neuroses and their aetiology: a view that located their origin less in intrapsychic mechanisms such as repression, and more in a skewed confrontation of the individual with his particular society and its demands. Society, according to Clinch, was making its subjects, including its leaders, ill. Such a view places her book in a tradition of authors who based their work on the Frankfurt School, and makes it a precursor to works such as Christopher Lasch’s: *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979). In this tradition, the analyst (or historian’s) view of his particular society was crucial; his or her own value-system intruded much more openly on the studied material than in traditional psychoanalytic literature, where moral values were mostly implicit. The emptiness of the signifier ‘psychohistory’ meant that it could be appropriated easily, and, combined with the loosening of the definition and aetiology of neuroses by the neo-Freudians. This facilitated a position where the language of

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*

⁶³² *Ibid.* 11-12.

⁶³³ *Ibid.* 19.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.* 11.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.* x.

psychoanalysis was used as a vehicle for moral indictment and cultural critique. As Mazlish observed in his introduction to *The Kennedy Neurosis*: ‘The counterculture seeks to change the values the Kennedys represented. Manliness in an atomic age is seen as a form of madness; and boys wear long hair like girls to symbolize the acceptance of community,’ and he continued: ‘without passing judgment on these attempted value changes, it should be clear that Ms. Clinch’s book must be seen as a part of this movement.’⁶³⁶ Clinch not only wished ‘to analyze the Kennedys,’ Mazlish judged, ‘but to offer treatment to the American “psyche”.’⁶³⁷

Psychohistory and Racism

The use of psychoanalysis as a tool in studies of racism in the United States goes as far back as the 1920s. African-American authors such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Zora Neale Hurston used Freudian concepts to gain a deeper understanding of the ‘double consciousness’ they experienced being black Americans: ‘two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder’.⁶³⁸ The concomitant idea of a so-called ‘racial unconscious’ was further explored by literary authors such as Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison. Eli Zaretsky has convincingly shown how psychoanalysis provided African-American intellectuals with a conceptual framework to explore and explain the conflicts inherent in racial self-awareness.⁶³⁹ Authors such as Horace Clayton, an African-American sociologist who underwent psychoanalysis and wrote on psychoanalytic topics, used Freud’s theories to understand white Americans’ “guilt-hate-fear-complex”, as he called it.⁶⁴⁰ As early as 1943, William V. Silverberg had argued that there was a connection between race-prejudice and social immaturity.⁶⁴¹ In 1972, historian Earl Thorpe published a book entitled *The Old South: A Psychohistory* (1972), in which he explored Southern black consciousness in the antebellum era. But the first comprehensive psychoanalytic study of racism written by a white American was entitled *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (1970), by psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Joel Kovel.

Kovel, the son of Jewish immigrants, graduated from Yale in 1957. He received his M.D. from the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1961, and in 1977 graduated from the Psychoanalytic Institute, Downstate Medical Center, Brooklyn, New York. As such, he was one of the few self-proclaimed psychohistorians who was a psychiatrist and had completed a full psychoanalytic training. In the 1980s, Kovel made a drastic intellectual turn: he abandoned the mental health profession altogether and became a full-time Marxist social theorist. He ran as a candidate for the Green Party for the United States Senate in 1998. Together with radical anthropologist Michael Löwy he released an *Ecosocialist Manifesto* in 2001, in which he set out to define the ideology of ecosocialism, which seeks ‘the emancipation of people from capital’, as well as ‘the emancipation of the earth from the cancer of capitalism’.⁶⁴² He is also advisory editor of the British periodical, *Socialist Resistance*. The roots of his activism, as well as the roots of his only book labeled psychohistory, *White Racism*, can be traced back to his work in the Public Health Service during the Vietnam War, which he

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.* xiii.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁸ Du Bois, William E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*, New York, Dover, 1994. 10-11.

⁶³⁹ Zaretsky, Eli. *Political Freud: A History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 58.

⁶⁴¹ Silverberg, William V. ‘Race-Prejudice-social immaturity’. *Current History* 5, 1943. 25-29.

⁶⁴² Kovel, Joel and Michael Lowy. ‘An Eco-Socialist Manifesto’. Paris, 2001.

<http://members.optushome.com.au/spainter/Ecosocialist.html>. (Accessed on September 13, 2016).

has described as: ‘a two-year agony to discharge my military obligation to Uncle Sam, which succeeded in radicalizing me politically.’⁶⁴³

Written in the late 1960s, according to its author *White Racism* bore ‘the imprint of that stormy decade’.⁶⁴⁴ In any case, the book was key in Kovel’s personal transformation from a Freudian psychoanalyst to a radical social theorist. Two years after its publication, a review appeared in a small philosophy journal, *Telos*. The reviewer, Chip Sills, praised the book, but asked why the author had not considered Marx among the intellectual sources of the work. Sills recognised in Kovel ‘an intuitive Marxist’ who, for his lack of historical materialist theory, remained limited, subjectivistic, in his approach. Kovel would later recall that the review changed his life: ‘Sills made me aware of a lack I scarcely knew existed; in so doing, he kindled in me a passion.’⁶⁴⁵ Writing *White Racism*, then, did two things: it confirmed Kovel in his vocation as an author, and after its publication it also altered his intellectual trajectory. About this, he wrote:

For a while, I saw the change in terms of the notion with which I had subtitled *White Racism* – that it was to be a ‘psychohistory’, a kind of melding of two disciplines, psychology and history each informing and enriching each other. Fine, I would be a psychohistorian. Other scholars had begun using the term at the same time, and assembling new journals and associations devoted to the new field, and I would join them. I found this intriguing, but also unsatisfying. As practiced, psychohistory was about the skilful weaving together of scholarly discourses. But I was fast coming to recognize, through the legacy of the radical urges that had prompted the writing of *White Racism*, a different kind of desire altogether – not to weave together but to transform.⁶⁴⁶

But *White Racism* did more than just awkwardly hold together psychoanalytic theory and history. *The New York Times* praised the book, but called it ‘profoundly pessimistic’.⁶⁴⁷ In a review in *The New York Review of Books*, once again adopting his comfortable role of the internal critic of the psychohistorical endeavour, Robert Coles compared Kovel’s book to Herbert Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man*, and complained that the psychoanalytic component in both works suffered from a lack of interviews and clinical materials.⁶⁴⁸ Kovel would later admit that his book was less about the psychology of individual cases of racism, and more about the ‘social unconscious’ of white men and women.⁶⁴⁹ In it, he described what he called the ‘Varieties of Racist Experience’. And as he recalled: ‘It was plainly insufficient to make racism identical to the set of racist behaviors, if only because it had a history. More deeply, I was unhappy about the ability of the psychological canon to adequately express the sense of evil entailed in racism.’⁶⁵⁰ The main premise of the book was classically Freudian, and deceptively simple: dark-skinned people in the United States had been, and were still being, treated like shit.

Kovel put it as follows: ‘Thus the root symbol between the idea of dirt and the blackness of certain people is that highly colored, strongly odored, dispensable and despised substance

⁶⁴³ Kovel, Joel. ‘Reflections on White Racism’. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, Volume 10, 2000. 581.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 579.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 586.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 585.

⁶⁴⁷ Lehmann-Haupt, Christopher. ‘Black, Black, Black is the Color of the White Man’s Dirt’. *The New York Times*, March 30, 1970.

⁶⁴⁸ Coles, Robert. ‘Understanding White Racists’. *The New York Review of Books*, December 30, 1971.

⁶⁴⁹ Kovel, Joel. ‘Reflections on White Racism’. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, Volume 10, 2000. 583.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 581.

which the human body produces so regularly.’⁶⁵¹ The idea came to him early in his career. During his residency, Kovel had presented to his supervisor a patient’s dream in which black people had figured as characters: ‘Oh don’t you know about that?’ the supervisor had pronounced airily, ‘She means her shit. That’s what black people always mean in the unconscious. It’s the color, you know.’⁶⁵²

The years leading up to the publication of *White Racism* were spent trying to figure out how to commit ‘such an awful proposition to paper’.⁶⁵³ Kovel asked himself: ‘How could I write something that consigned millions of souls, with their history and culture and unique individualities, to the level of the most commonplace, undifferentiated, and despised substance common to human existence?’⁶⁵⁴ The answer was, through psychohistory. He wrote:

I loved the audacity of the old Freudian observation, further developed by Ferenczi, that feces stands for possession, and especially money, in the unconscious. [...] Could it be that the special association of blacks with feces in the racist unconscious is grounded in the historical reality of their enslavement – that they had in fact been considered property within an emergent capitalism, held as degraded things within a grasping yet idealistic society?⁶⁵⁵

By describing the meaning of racism in what he later went on to call the ‘social unconscious’, Kovel followed the vicissitudes of the symbol ‘darkness’ in its American context, showing, among other things, how it had for a long time served a social, unifying function for white-skinned people when it was applied to dark-skinned people. Through this scapegoating mechanism, differences within one group were projected onto another easily identifiable group. Following Freud and Ferenczi, Kovel held that feces stood for possession, especially money, in the unconscious:

The American slaver went one step further in cultural development: he first reduced the human self of his black slave to a body and then reduced the body to a *thing*; he dehumanized his slave, made him quantifiable, and thereby absorbed him into a rising world market of productive exchange. In the creation of this world market, the Westerner was changing his entire view of reality – and changing reality in view of his new conception of it.⁶⁵⁶

In tracking the social function of the symbol of ‘darkness’ and how it was applied to African American people, Kovel reconstructed the story of how a symbol (and a cluster of fantasies attached to that symbol) shaped, and in turn was shaped by, the course of American political history. He wrote, for example: ‘The wilderness that stimulated Americans into their expansion was also an ambivalent symbol of darkness – a darkness which combined with the color of enslaved skin to stimulate the particular American response to blackness.’⁶⁵⁷ More specifically, he showed that what had begun as a symbol that served to justify a form of concrete domination and discrimination was in time overlaid and then replaced by a symbol that cradled a widely-held internal aversion, leading to pernicious resentment and frustration. With the triumph of the Northern way of life over the Southern, racism in the United States became de-

⁶⁵¹ Kovel, Joel. *White Racism, a Psychohistory*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1970. 87.

⁶⁵² Kovel, Joel. ‘Reflections on White Racism’. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, Volume 10, 2000. 582.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 583.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 584.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 18.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 185.

institutionalised, yet, at the same time, internalised in a new guise by a large segment of the population, now fused with resentment.⁶⁵⁸

Although he was aware of the limited predictive qualities of any psychological theory, Kovel's conclusion was that this new form of racism was at the very heart of American culture, and that the future, even after the re-appropriation of the symbol of darkness by African-Americans, was bleak. He predicted: 'First, there is the possibility that the black rebellion, feeding upon its frustrations, will turn into guerrilla warfare and frank revolution, and bring on in turn the fascist regression that already looms so large.'⁶⁵⁹ Another, more likely option, was that 'the malaise which Freud postulated as the conscious derivative of the repressed guilt [...] is bound to increase with the growth of civilization [and] the result, while bland and smooth, may reach the same end-point as that attained by fascist regression: the creation, perhaps indeed by 1984, of a totalitarian State.'⁶⁶⁰ The legacy of racism and slavery could simply not be overcome, according to Kovel, because it had been on this contaminated soil that the whole edifice of American culture had been erected. Kovel could find no cure, not within the vocabulary of psychoanalysis, for what ailed the American psyche. For that, as we have seen, he would have to turn to an entirely different, more actively revolutionary, discourse:

Here we have the nuclear creation: the radical dehumanization – the 'thingification,' with all the excremental implications it involves – of black people. By making property of men, Americans raised the mystique of property – and with it the whole matrix of anality – to untold powers in their culture; from then on it was to become engrained indelibly and increasingly in American history.⁶⁶¹

The History of Childhood

Lloyd deMause has, without any doubt, been the most controversial character in the history of psychohistory. He attended a General Motors Institute in Flint, Michigan, where he trained as an accountant. As a young man, deMause joined the army in order to obtain the GI Bill to attend Columbia in order to redo his undergraduate studies. He was shipped to Korea, where he was strongly impressed by the atrocities of war. 'After I came back,' he said in an interview in 1996, 'I was very much interested in why those little Korean kids were living underneath those bridges, and starving to death at the end of the war I had joined over there.'⁶⁶² He majored in political science, started psychoanalytic treatment and training (as a lay analyst, at the New York Center for Psychoanalytic Training), and decided to try to apply his findings in a study of Hitler. At Columbia, deMause was impressed by the work and teaching of C. Wright Mills, a sociologist who influenced the New Left movement, and he studied with Jacques Barzun. But, as he recalled: 'Columbia threw me out while I was doing my doctorate, saying there's no combining political science and mental health.'⁶⁶³

DeMause rose to prominence within the psychohistorical movement as the publisher and editor of a journal: *History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory* (later simply: *The Journal of Psychohistory*). The journal originally grew out of a collective book project: 'Feeling that the failure of applied psychoanalysis to become a real science was due to its failure to become truly historical,' deMause wrote in the first edition of the journal, a group

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 191.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 228.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 229.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.* 185.

⁶⁶² Lentz, Bob. 'Interview: Lloyd deMause, Editor The Journal of Psychohistory'. *Clio's Psyche*, Volume 3, No. 1, June, 1996. 8.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*

of likeminded historians and psychologists, began what he described as ‘a long-term project to examine primary source material back to antiquity in order to begin constructing an empirically accurate history of childhood.’⁶⁶⁴ The result was *The History of Childhood*, self-published by deMause’s company: The Souvenir Press. It was a collection of essays on child-rearing practices throughout time, written by different authors, with a theoretical introduction by deMause. ‘Its history begins five years ago’, he wrote, ‘with a group of twenty historians and psychoanalysts working with me on a research project under the sponsorship of the Association for Applied Psychoanalysis. Feeling that the failure of applied psychoanalysis to become a real science was due to its failure to become truly historical, we began a long-term project to examine primary source material back to antiquity in order to begin constructing an empirically accurate history of childhood.’⁶⁶⁵

‘What we found,’ deMause wrote, ‘was so startling, so important to the understanding of historical change, and so generative of further research, that we began this Journal [The *HCQ*] in order to have a place to publish our continuing findings.’⁶⁶⁶ The book became very influential, especially among psychoanalysts and workers in the field of child mental health. William Langer summarised its importance in the foreword: ‘It seems clear that the history of childhood must be of major importance to any study of human society, for if, as it is said, the child is father to the man, it should be possible, with an understanding of any individual’s group’s past, to form a more intelligent judgment of their performance as adults.’⁶⁶⁷ Reuben Fine, director of the New York Centre for Psychoanalytic Training, wrote in a review: ‘Neither history nor psychiatry can ever be the same again. It is not impossible that this book will at some future time be considered a turning point in the integration of the social sciences’.⁶⁶⁸ Erich Fromm found it was ‘just magnificent – an extremely important contribution to the knowledge of man’.⁶⁶⁹ Several years before, Mazlish had already pointed out the importance of family history for psychohistory in a lecture given for the Royal Historical Society in 1970, entitled: ‘What is Psycho-History?’ He wrote:

The family is, additionally, of crucial importance in working towards group history because it establishes the nuclear social and psychological relations from which all others spring. Loving and hating, giving and receiving, obeying and commanding, controlling and being controlled all take their origin here. By transference, they become the basic patterns on which are erected such abstract political problems as Authority, Liberty, Equality, and so forth. *How* the transferences take place, and *in what ways* they are shaped by social, political and economic forces, for example, is an empirical question. Until now, the key approaches to these problems have been in terms of child-rearing practices and socialization processes; and it is these that psycho-historians, along with social anthropologists and social psychologists, have attempted to study.⁶⁷⁰

For his book, deMause pursued this line of inquiry and co-ordinated research into hitherto neglected sources on childhood. Subsequently, he constructed a speculative evolutionary theory out of his findings. Using Freudian theory loosely, he asserted that there have been

⁶⁶⁴ DeMause, Lloyd. ‘The History of Childhood: The Basis for Psychohistory’. *History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory*, Summer 1973, Volume 1, No. 1. 1.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁷ DeMause, Lloyd., ed. *The History of Childhood* (1974). Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006. 6.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁰ Mazlish, Bruce. ‘What is Psycho-History?’ Transactions of the Royal Historical Society Conference, September 22 1970, Volume 21, 1971. 79-99.

basically three attitudes parents adopt with their children: 1) they use their child as a vehicle for the projection of the contents of their own unconscious; 2) they use the child as a substitute for an important figure in their own childhood; or 3) they empathise with the child's needs and attempt to satisfy them. DeMause periodised the history and development of parent-child relations and carved it up into six modes: Infanticidal (Antiquity to fourth century A.D.), Abandonment (fourth to thirteenth), Ambivalent (fourteenth to seventeenth), Intrusive (eighteenth), Socialisation (nineteenth to mid-twentieth), and Helping (mid-twentieth and on). Projective and reversal reactions, he held, dominated until the eighteenth century, after which empathic reactions increasingly became the norm.⁶⁷¹

He argued that the importance of parent-child interactions for social change had been known long before Freud: 'St. Augustine's cry, "Give me other mothers and I will give you another world," has been echoed by major thinkers for fifteen centuries without affecting historical writing.'⁶⁷² Since Freud, deMause argued, man's 'view of childhood has acquired a new dimension, and in the past half century the study of childhood has become routine for the psychologist, the sociologist and the anthropologist. It is only beginning for the historian.'⁶⁷³ And yet, in deMause's view, even Freud had focused on the wrong elements of childhood experience: 'the fact that most of the children, most of [Freud's] patients, were quite obviously swaddled, sexually-abused, and beaten to a pulp – of this Freud and all the psychoanalysts around him said all this had absolutely no effect. Beating and raping of children, which I think was the reason they came to him, the reason they were sick, he said had no influence.'⁶⁷⁴ In deMause's opinion, Freud's biggest mistake had been to give up his seduction theory. DeMause's study of childhood posited that actual, lived trauma was at the root of mental illness, not the fantasies underlying the Oedipus complex. He wrote: 'The history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken.'⁶⁷⁵ But there was hope. With every new generation of less traumatised children, deMause speculated, the world would grow more peaceful and less prone to wars and poverty.

The History of Childhood dealt with issues that were pertinent at the time. The 1960s had witnessed an increase of interest in the prevention and identification of child abuse in the United States. Before the 1960s, medical schools provided little training on the subject. This changed with the publication of the article 'The Battered Child Syndrome' (1962) by paediatrician Henry Kempe, which brought nation-wide attention to the subject.⁶⁷⁶ Feminists had also increasingly taken an interest in the topics of motherhood, childhood and child-rearing practices, and the history of childhood had become an important object of scholarly study with the publication of Philippe Aries's *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, which appeared in English in 1962. Whereas Aries had argued that childhood was a social construct, deMause and his team focused on the impact of abuse and its effects on generations of traumatised adults.

But deMause's theory raised questions: 'I found that most psychoanalysts, other psychotherapists, and historians did not follow me,' deMause recalled.⁶⁷⁷ 'Even the family

⁶⁷¹ DeMause, Lloyd., ed. *The History of Childhood* (1974). Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006. 11-83.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.* 12.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁴ Lentz, Bob. 'Interview: Lloyd deMause, Editor The Journal of Psychohistory'. *Clio's Psyche*, Volume 3, No. 1, June, 1996. 9.

⁶⁷⁵ DeMause, Lloyd., ed. *The History of Childhood* (1974). Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006. 11.

⁶⁷⁶ Meyers, John E.B. 'A Short History of Child Protection in America'. *Family Law Quarterly*, Volume 42, No. 3. 449-463.

⁶⁷⁷ Lentz, Bob. 'Interview: Lloyd deMause, Editor The Journal of Psychohistory'. *Clio's Psyche*, Volume 3, No. 1, June, 1996. 8.

historians I got to write *The History of Childhood* [with] finally nearly threw me out of the book even though I was editor.’⁶⁷⁸ His colleagues found deMause’s evolutionary theory – which he called ‘the psychogenic theory of history’ – too positivistic, teleological and reductionistic, while deMause himself accused his fellow authors of whitewashing their materials and turning a blind eye towards the inhumanity of child-rearing practices of the past. He recalled: ‘They were cutting out all the material that was emotionally important. So I wrote my own article at the beginning with my own research and all of the people had a revolution and wanted to throw me out of the book, saying that they wouldn’t appear in a book with me, that they didn’t agree with it at all.’⁶⁷⁹

Other psychohistorians were also sceptical of deMause and his theories, but not so much as to prevent them from publishing material in his newly-founded, well-advertised journal. When asked what he thought of deMause’s evolutionary theory at the time, Strozier answered: ‘It’s a good theory. Good for one book, perhaps, or a set of articles, but not an entire oeuvre.’⁶⁸⁰ Mazlish judged more harshly at the time: ‘History is reduced to psychology, as when deMause claims that ‘the central force for change in history is neither technology nor economics, but the ‘psychogenic’ changes in personality occurring because of successive generations of parent-child interactions.’⁶⁸¹ Despite his reservations, Mazlish’s name appeared on the *HCQ*’s initial board of contributing editors. The *HCQ*’s early emphasis was unequivocally on the study of the history of child-rearing practices, but deMause led a broad church. In the early years, contributing editors were listed as: John F. Benton, Rudolph Binion, Glenn Davis, John Demos, Patrick Dunn, Henry Ebel, Barbara Finkelstein, Gerald J. Gargiulo, Arthur E. Hippler, Joseph Illick, George M. Kren, William L. Langer, Bogna Lorence, Peter Loewenberg, Richard Lyman, Elizabeth Wirth Marwick, Bruce Mazlish, Herbert Moller, Leon Rappoport, Stanley Renshon, William Saffady, Edward Saveth, Edward Shorter, Helm Stierlin, Michael Stone, Charles Strickland, Melvin Tucker, John Walzer, and John Waters.⁶⁸²

In choosing material for his journal, deMause purposely did not discriminate among theoretical positions. He published the work of Freudians, Jungians, and, preferably, deMauseans. The journal had no referee system and published on both the history of child-rearing practices and psychohistory. ‘Most articles for The Journal are submissions by people who are uniquely qualified in their areas, who have no peers,’ deMause said in an interview.⁶⁸³ ‘I myself as editor check out each article at the library for accuracy of references, simply because I learn so much doing so.’⁶⁸⁴ Despite the controversies, deMause’s theories were popular especially among psychotherapists, and even inspired playful literary works that were published in the journal. A poem by William Batstein (a pseudonym), ‘From the First Part of the Revelation of Moses the Son of Jehoshar’ (1974) is worth quoting. An excerpt:

Vaginanuswomb.
Down there is where we drop our shit.
Down there is where we drop our corpseshit.
But suppose our shit came back to haunt us?

Dr. Nudnick Archaeologist finds a prehistoric grave.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 9.

⁶⁸⁰ Personal communication with Strozier, April 22, 2016.

⁶⁸¹ Mazlish, Bruce. ‘Reflections on the State of Psychohistory’, *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume V, No. 4, March 1977. 8.

⁶⁸² *History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory*, Volume 3, No. 3, Winter 1976.

⁶⁸³ Lentz, Bob. ‘Interview: Lloyd deMause, Editor The Journal of Psychohistory’. *Clio’s Psyche*, Volume 3, No. 1, June, 1996. 8.

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

It contains an infant skeleton, and other objects.
'How curious,' says Dr. Nudnick, 'that they would bury such fancy offerings with a baby.'
SCHMUCK! THE BABY IS AN OFFERING!⁶⁸⁵

As his journal's influence rapidly grew, deMause's theories became increasingly radical, and his over-all tone more confident. In 'The Independence of Psychohistory', he announced that psychohistory was an independent scientific field, not part of history, nor, for that matter, of psychology. 'Sooner or later [it will be] necessary for psychohistory to split off from history and form its own department within the academy in much the same way that sociology broke off from economics and psychology from philosophy in the late 19th century,' he wrote.⁶⁸⁶ In his view, psychohistory should be concerned with establishing eternal laws, and discovering definite causes: 'the relationship between history and psychohistory is parallel to the relationship between astrology and astronomy,' deMause held.⁶⁸⁷ 'Psychohistory, as the science of historical motivation, may concentrate on the same historical events that written history covers, but its purpose is never to tell what happened one day after another.'⁶⁸⁸ DeMause argued that the accusation that psychohistory reduced everything to psychology was philosophically meaningless. All it studied, in his view, was historical motivation, which was by definition psychological. Increasingly, the words 'psychohistory' and 'Lloyd deMause' became conflated in deMause's own writings. To one of the many criticisms that were aimed at deMause and his theories, he retorted: 'This matter of psychohistory 'ignoring' other fields when it specialized is a matter of some importance, since it is so often repeated by historians when criticizing psychohistorical works.'⁶⁸⁹ And he explained:

I have been accused of being ignorant of economics (although I am the founder and Chairman of a company which publishes seven professional economic newsletters), of being ignorant of sociology (although I am trained in sociology and was C. Wright Mills's research assistant at Columbia), of being unable to use statistics (although I earned my living as a professional statistician for five years) and of ignoring political factors (although all my graduate training was in political science). What seems not to have occurred to the critics of psychohistory is that we might choose to focus on the historical evolution of the psyche because only thereby can we reach the unresolved problems of precisely these same fields of politics, economics and sociology, fields which are shot through with unproven psychological assumptions and which have failed to become reliable sciences precisely because of the unresolved psychohistorical problems within them.⁶⁹⁰

DeMause's approach drew criticism from psychohistorians who did not subscribe to his theories. 'At any meeting we organised,' Strozier remembered, 'Lloyd and some of his acolytes would turn up and cause a ruckus.'⁶⁹¹ DeMause's wild speculations played into the hands of critics of psychohistory, who eagerly reproduced his more radical statements. At the journal's peak, deMause claimed that it had 10,000 subscribers, but Paul Elovitz – a close associate of

⁶⁸⁵ Batstein, William. 'From the First Part of the Revelation of Moses the Son of Jehoshar.' *History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory*, Volume 1, No. 3, Winter, 1974. 427.

⁶⁸⁶ DeMause, Lloyd. 'The Independence of Psychohistory'. *History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory*, Fall 1975, Volume 3, No. 2. 167.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 164.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 165.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹¹ Personal communication with Strozier, April 22, 2016.

deMause – thinks the real number was closer to 8,000.⁶⁹² The *History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory* did two things, at least: it provided a platform for more speculative texts in psychohistory, and it encouraged the historicisation of child-rearing practices. DeMause's wild theoretical speculations were inspiring to child mental healthcare workers, as his gruesome portrayal of ancient child-rearing practices and his hopeful conception of helping modern parenting brought attention to changing attitudes towards parenting in the 1960s and 1970s and to the detrimental effects of child abuse.⁶⁹³ Psychoanalysts were critical of deMause's approach, as his interpretation of psychoanalysis returned to a model that resembled Freud's conception of the aetiology of neuroses that preceded him giving up his seduction theory.⁶⁹⁴ His historicisation of child-rearing practices challenged the universality and timelessness of the Oedipus complex, while it took other psychological mechanisms for granted.

Historian Clifford Griffin wrote a review of the first three years of the *HCQ* entitled 'Oedipus Hex' in *Reviews in American History*: '[The *HCQ*] is a kingdom divided against itself.'⁶⁹⁵ And he continued: 'The title of the journal expresses its divided nature. In the western part of the kingdom – the better part, left of the colon – lies the history of childhood (including adolescence and even young childhood), which is a most important subject long ignored by professional historians. But in the east dwells that strange thing its practitioners call psychohistory, and here is where the kingdom is being brought to desolation.'⁶⁹⁶ The main problem, Griffin found, was 'that in the ten issues published before I wrote this essay, no writer in the journal – including conspicuously deMause himself – has provided an intellectually adequate explanation of what psychohistory is, and no one seems to know with any clarity what it is.'⁶⁹⁷

Besides problems concerning the definition of psychohistory, the deMause group also had trouble living up to the expectations of institutionalisation. In 1975, Lloyd deMause decided to try to capture the unruly spirit of psychohistory in an institutional framework.⁶⁹⁸ The International Psychohistorical Association (IPA) was founded by deMause, Paul Elovitz, David Beisel, Henry Lawton and others. The Psychohistory Press and the Association for Psychohistory followed soon after. The basic goal of these institutions was to further the study and teaching of psychohistory. They were the product of deMause's longing to anchor a stable meaning to the term psychohistory, and they were meant to give psychohistory the semblance of unity and authority. 'I think Lloyd at times saw himself as the Freud of psychohistory,' Paul Elovitz recalled.⁶⁹⁹ DeMause was 'incredible at getting people together', according to Elovitz, but he seems to have been equally skilled at driving them apart.⁷⁰⁰ Although it is arguable that deMause's attempts were successful at creating some unity within the movement for a short period of time, the institutions were not invested with a significant amount of authority by leading psychohistorians to generate the vitality needed to sustain a movement. They served primarily as a vehicle to develop and propagate deMause's own speculative theories.

⁶⁹² Personal communication with Elovitz, August 11, 2016.

⁶⁹³ Personal communication with Kahr, October 30, 2015.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁵ Griffin, Clifford S. 'Oedipus Hex', *Reviews in American History*, Volume 4, No. 3, September, 1976. 305.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁸ DeMause's attempts have been well documented by Joseph F. Campbell in his article 'Psychohistory, Creating a New Discipline'. *The Journal of Psychohistory*, Volume 37, No. 1, Summer 2009. 2.

⁶⁹⁹ 'IPA 2015: Dr. Paul Elovitz on Leadership in Freudianism and Psychohistory'. Youtube Video. Published on 22nd July 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOK04p4RfIM>

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

‘Occasionally [the institutions] meant something,’ Paul Elovitz recalled, ‘most of them just existed on paper, although some of it became real.’⁷⁰¹

As Elovitz would recall, deMause was ‘torn between being very practical and loving very extreme ideas.’⁷⁰² In 1978, deMause published a controversial paper in the *HCQ* by Howard Stein of the University of Oklahoma. In the paper, entitled: ‘Judaism and The Group-Fantasy of Martyrdom: The Psychodynamic Paradox of Survival Through Persecution’ (1978), Stein wrote that the ‘subject of [...] history is fantasy rather than reality – or, rather, group-fantasy that generates cultural ethos which, in turn, generates myth which, in turn, generates polity that sculpts reality to conform to fantasy and thereby confirms externally the fantasy of history.’⁷⁰³ His thesis was bold: ‘I suggest that it is the specific nature of the Jewish conscience that has made of Jews a persecuted and martyred people not merely at the hands of Christians, but long antedating the Judeo-Christian split – in fact tracing in Semitic history to the covenant between Abraham and Isaac.’⁷⁰⁴ And further: ‘Victimology or martyrdom is the dominant group-fantasy of the Jewish people, a fantasy in which ego-alien and ethos-alien cultural groups come to be delegated and assume the role of persecutor. The Chosen people are self-chosen to be sacrificial people.’⁷⁰⁵ It was controversial papers such as this one that drove away a number of scholars, including Peter Loewenberg, who deemed this particular piece of work anti-Semitic. In 1983, a part of the IPA broke away – Elovitz set up the Psychohistory Forum, a work-group with far less lofty ambitions than deMause’s.⁷⁰⁶

Psychohistory emerged in the 1970s as a genre of psychoanalytic and historical literature that encompassed many different perspectives. It produced interesting biographical narratives and became an important vehicle for political critique and the voices of emancipatory movements. Psychohistory occupied the space between institutionalised psychoanalysis and wider culture. However, competition between different ‘factions’ within psychohistory – most notably centred around the two competing journals – led to disunity and hostility among practitioners. Differences between theoretical approaches were magnified by differences in style, and a division appeared between practitioners who considered psychohistory an independent discipline and those who thought of it as a subdiscipline or interdiscipline subordinate to the discourses it was born out of. Most psychohistorians came to psychohistory from one or other parent discipline – history or psychoanalysis – and carried over onto the subject presuppositions about its practice drawn from their parent discipline. This made communication between practitioners difficult. Unburdened by the constraints of an academic affiliation and supported by sufficient financial means, Lloyd deMause constructed imaginative and wildly speculative theories about historical motivation that he propagated in his successful journal. His attempts to institutionalise psychohistory’s practice in an Institute for Psychohistory and an International Psychohistorical Association were disheartening to other psychohistorians who took advantage of the term’s openness and malleability. At the same time, this openness led to a multitude of perspectives incapable of dialogue. By the end of the decade, the once promising field had produced trench warfare between practitioners defending incommensurable theoretical positions; no credible authority had been capable of unifying the movement or anchoring a stable meaning to the term. Psychohistory entered the 1980s in disarray.

⁷⁰¹ Personal communication with Elovitz, August 11, 2016.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*

⁷⁰³ Stein, Howard F. ‘Judaism and the Group-Fantasy of Martyrdom: The Psychodynamic Paradox of Survival Through Persecution’. *The Journal of Psychohistory*, Fall 1978. 152.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 153.

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 154.

⁷⁰⁶ Personal communication with Elovitz, August 11, 2016.

Chapter 6 Decline of a Signifier

*The surprising fact, C, is observed;
But if A were true, C would be a matter of course.
Hence, there is reason to suspect that A is true.*

C.S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol.V⁷⁰⁷

In 2006, the American Historical Association decided to remove ‘Psycho-History’ from its taxonomic list of research specialisations. This caused a mild stir. Peter Loewenberg, always ready to defend the cause, wrote an angry letter to the editor of the AHA’s *Newsmagazine*, saying: ‘I am dismayed to learn that the AHA Council approved the deletion of psychohistory as a specialty choice for members. [...] The tent of ‘history’ should be ecumenical, embracing, and offer many options.’⁷⁰⁸ Judith M. Hughes, of the University of California at San Diego, wrote a letter as well, offering her own reason for wanting to keep psychohistory on the list: ‘If I take the subjects that interest my younger colleagues as any indication of where the discipline is headed, it would seem that psychology is making a comeback – albeit pursued differently from how it was pursued a generation ago.’⁷⁰⁹ But she suggested: ‘Perhaps the subspecialty should be renamed psychological history.’⁷¹⁰ In an issue of the *Newsletter* published later that year, the president of the AHA at the time, Linda Kerber, responded apologetically: ‘The decision to omit psychohistory from the list of fields of specialization printed in the membership renewal form did not indicate a new disciplinary stance minimizing the significance of the field.’⁷¹¹ She rationalised as follows:

The decision was dictated purely by practical considerations – how to make space available in the printed form for new fields that scholars were declaring as their fields of interest. The only way to do this (without reducing the type size beyond legibility or increasing the size of the form) was, it seemed, to de-list the fields with the fewest adherents. Psychohistory, which was a field selected by only four – out of 14,000 people who can each make up to three choices – thus appeared to be an ideal candidate for exclusion from the printed form. However, it now turns out that thanks to the technical wizardry of our designers, psychohistory can – and will – remain on the printed forms.⁷¹²

The decline of psychohistory set in during the 1980s. By this point, Erikson himself had on several occasions expressed the wish that psychohistory as a label would disappear. To him it was purely a transitional word, and he made clear that he regretted that a movement had ever

⁷⁰⁷ Peirce, Charles Sanders, Charles Hartshorne, and Paul Weiss. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, Volume V*. Cambridge (Mass.): Belknap of Harvard UP, 1934. 189.

⁷⁰⁸ Loewenberg, Peter. ‘Categorical Imperatives?’, January 2007 (<https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2007/letter-to-the-editor-categorical-imperatives>)

⁷⁰⁹ Hughes, Judith M. ‘What’s in a Subspecialty’s Name?’, January 2007 (<https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2007/letter-to-the-editor-whats-in-a-subspecialtys-name>)

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹¹ Linda Kerber’s Response to ‘Categorical Imperatives?’ and ‘What’s in a Subspecialty’s Name?’ Linda Kerber, January 2007 (<https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2007/letter-to-the-editor-linda-kerbers-response>).

⁷¹² *Ibid.*

been constructed around it.⁷¹³ Even with its most staunch defenders, the term did not sit well – like Erikson, Lifton was increasingly hesitant to use the term; Mazlish at times claimed that he had a personal preference for the term ‘Psycho-social History’. In *The Meaning of Karl Marx* (1984), an acclaimed analysis of the messianic themes in Marx’s youthful writings and poetry, Mazlish wrote: ‘I might add that my attention to Marx’s individuality is not in terms of a psychohistorical study. Such a study, unlike this one, aims at a systematic application of psychological concepts and theories to its subject. I must also add that I cannot imagine any historical treatment, mine included, that is not informed by a particular sort of psychological understanding.’⁷¹⁴ Several years before, it had been Mazlish’s aim to rid history from unsystematic applications of psychology. But by 1984, Mazlish’s ‘particular sort of psychological understanding’ was under fierce attack inside and outside of academia.

The Field Entrenched

By the 1980s, psychoanalysis in the United States was changing. The introduction in American academia of what Bruno Latour later referred to jokingly as ‘Lacanium’ – an exotic drug that he felt was as addictive as crack – was threatening the hegemony of American, more clinically-oriented interpretations of Freud in academia.⁷¹⁵ The publication of Jacques Lacan’s *Écrits* (1966) had nearly coincided with the earliest Wellfleet gatherings. By the 1980s, the French thinker’s structuralist reinterpretation of Freud was gaining momentum in the United States. Lacan’s version of Freud was cryptic, malleable, and couched in a structuralist ontology that made it easily adaptable to theories current in literature and philosophy departments. The psychohistorians’ overwhelmingly Freudian, more biologicistic interpretations of psychoanalysis were losing appeal fast.⁷¹⁶

But psychoanalysis in general was also increasingly challenged in the 1980s. Scholars coming from different fields were launching harsh critiques of Freud and his followers, including his historian-followers. Adolf Grünbaum, philosopher of science, wrote a philosophical critique of psychoanalysis’ natural scientific underpinnings in his *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis* (1984); Frank Sulloway looked critically at how a Freud-myth had been constructed in *Freud: Biologist of the Mind* (1979); Hans Eysenck looked critically at Freud’s scientific assumptions in *The Decline and Fall of the Freudian Empire* (1985); Elizabeth Thornton, a medical historian, argued that Freud’s theories were fueled by an addiction to cocaine in *The Freudian Fallacy* (1983); Paul Roazen, a political scientist, had portrayed Freud’s treatment of his patients and acolytes critically in *Freud and his Followers* (1975).

Texts such as Henri Ellenberger’s *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (1970) and Lancelot Law Whyte’s *The Unconscious Before Freud* (1960) had paved the way for the historical critiques of the foundations of psychoanalysis that followed in the 1980s. In his article ‘Dispatches from the Freud Wars’, historian of psychoanalysis John Forrester judged that most of these critics were ideologues, who operated with the ‘heartfelt wish that Freud might never have been born or, failing to achieve that end, that all his works and influence be made as nothing.’⁷¹⁷ But that did not explain their sudden rise to prominence. The controversies

⁷¹³ For example: ‘The Jefferson Lecture’, Washington D.C., May 1, 1973. Quoted in Friedman, Lawrence J. *Identity’s Architect: A Biography of Erik H. Erikson*. London: Free Association Books, 1999.

⁷¹⁴ Mazlish, Bruce. *The Meaning of Karl Marx*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984. 5.

⁷¹⁵ Quoted in: Cusset, Francois. *French Theory. How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

⁷¹⁶ For a detailed exposition of the dissemination of Lacan in the United States, see: *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁷ Forrester, John. ‘Dispatches from the Freud Wars: Psychoanalysis and Its Passions’. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, Volume 16, No. 1, 1999.

concerning psychoanalysis that arose around this time have been documented best by authors such as Nathan Hale and Eli Zaretsky⁷¹⁸. Shamdasani and Borch-Jacobsen's *The Freud Files* (2012) is partly based on interviews with key participants of the 'Freud Wars'.⁷¹⁹ Remarkably, some of the critiques were philosophical, others came from psychology, but most of them were, at least in part, historical in nature – in almost all cases some form of historical method was used to demythologise the origins of psychoanalysis. In an unpublished paper delivered at the Radcliffe Institute, historian Lynn Hunt argued that as social and cultural history became dominant in the 1970s, history over-all became more anti-psychological.⁷²⁰ In the 1980s, we might add, history was turned against psychoanalysis.⁷²¹ As a consequence, the two disciplines no longer appeared as natural allies; pressure mounted on historians who were keen to incorporate psychoanalytic insight into their methodology. One of psychohistory's parent disciplines had been set against the other.

Outside of academia, Freud and the Freudians were not receiving good press either. On the brink of the decade, *Time* magazine reported that: 'Freud's struggles, as recounted by Freud and the Freudian historians, is heavily laced with legend and much of it is false.'⁷²² This was remarkable criticism coming from a periodical that had generally been amenable to Freudian ideas, and had featured Freud on the cover three times in the first half of the century. However, it would reflect the tone of the debate inside and outside of academia for the coming years. Psychoanalysis' cultural and academic hegemony was being challenged from different quarters, and no part of its legacy was spared, including its wild child – psychohistory. By 1981, Marcus Cunliffe, a British professor of American Studies, noted that even the psychohistorians themselves were beginning to concede that the Oedipus complex was largely dated, the reputation of Erikson was on the wane, and prominent one-time believers were publicly turning apostate.⁷²³ The problem was, they had no theories to substitute them with. In the same year, *Newsweek* judged that 'The figure [of Freud] that steps from recent biographies is no longer the majestic prophet of the legend, but more like one of the neurotic egoists who might have frequented his own couch.'⁷²⁴ The issue featured Freud on the cover, opened up like a Russian doll to reveal a more sinister version of himself. It read: 'The Hidden Freud, his secret life, his theories under attack'.⁷²⁵

Emboldened by this shift in perspective, academic critiques of psychohistory by traditional historians mounted. Donna Artzt, although generally sympathetic to psychohistory, criticised the psychohistorians notion of transference towards the object of study, as she feared that the application of this idea might compromise the historian's concern with the coherence

⁷¹⁸ Zaretsky, Eli. *Political Freud*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. & Hale, Nathan G. *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

⁷¹⁹ See, for example: 'The Decline of Psychoanalysis' in: Hale, Nathan G. *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

⁷²⁰ Hunt, Lynn. 'Psychoanalysis and History', Presented at the Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, February 22, Cambridge, MA.

⁷²¹ Hunt, Lynn. 'Psychoanalysis and History', Presented at the Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, February 22, Cambridge, MA. Hunt's argument is convincing, but only as a partial explanation. After all, authors such as Swales and Masson used arguments derived from psychoanalysis to demythologize its origins. I believe the cannibalization of psychoanalysis and psychohistory in the 1980s cannot be explained by shifting historiographical emphases alone. She acknowledges this in the paper. Also, psychohistory – to an extent – identified as part of the social science movement within historiography.

⁷²² Leo, John. 'Did Freud Build His Own Legend?' *Time Magazine*, July 30, 1979.

⁷²³ Gay, Peter. *Freud for Historians*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985. 15.

⁷²⁴ 'The Hidden Freud'. *Newsweek*, November 30, 1981. 12.

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*

of history – ‘the consistency of his theory,’ she wrote, ‘can only be of secondary importance.’⁷²⁶ Historian Gertrude Himmelfarb wrote that she perceived psychohistory as fallacious and undisciplined. She regretted that psychohistory drew its criteria of validity from psychoanalysis and not from history. She cited Erikson in *Young Man Luther*, who claimed that laying bare facts was less important than identifying psychological trends.⁷²⁷ David Stannard, author of *Shrinking History: On Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory*, was one of a number of scholars who had, after first having been advocates of psychoanalysis, defected from the discipline. Frederick Crews, a literary critic who had at one point been psychoanalytically oriented, belonged to this group as well. He argued that the empirical credentials of psychoanalysis were drastically weak, and the success rate of psychoanalytic therapy questionable.⁷²⁸ On this basis, he discarded its theory and practice completely. In his well-known article ‘Analysis Terminable’ (1979), he wrote: ‘Partisans of psychoanalysis can take comfort, furthermore, from an unabated outpouring of ‘applied psychoanalysis’ in the form of psycholiterary, psychobiographical, and psychohistorical studies which, if not always a credit to the tradition, attest to the continuing seductiveness of Freud’s ideas.’⁷²⁹ But, Crews continued, ‘given the diminished standing of psychoanalysis as a psychiatric modality and a theory of mind, it is questionable how much longer the Freudian vogue can last.’⁷³⁰

In this chapter we will look at how psychohistory was taught in universities, and how this reflects some core difficulties of psychohistory, and discuss two books that appeared in the 1980s – *Shrinking History*, by David Stannard and *Freud for Historians* by Peter Gay and show how they both, in their own distinct ways, contributed to the decline of psychohistory as a signifier. It is no coincidence that David Stannard chose to attack psychohistory through an attack on psychoanalysis. Psychohistory was particularly vulnerable to criticisms of psychoanalysis because it lacked the means to prove or disprove claims about the therapeutic efficacy or philosophical legitimacy of its parent discipline. Although there were immanent reasons for the decline of psychohistory, the movement became collateral damage in the wars waged against psychoanalysis. When Peter Gay, an authoritative figure within the psychohistorical movement, decided to continue the tradition of psychoanalytic history-writing under the new guise of psychoanalytic history, psychohistory was left in a state of confusion – an empty shell of a word.

Dreams in a Classroom

Psychohistory proved exceptionally hard to teach. And in the difficulties to establish psychohistory as an academic subject we see reflected the diversity, complexity and general aimlessness of the field. As we have seen, there was a significant growth of interest in psychohistory in academia during the 1970s. George M. Kren, a professor of psychology at Kansas State University, remarked in an interview that ‘academic interest in psychohistory peaked during the 1970s.’⁷³¹ In 1966, Mazlish and Erikson were the only academics teaching courses on psychohistory at MIT and Harvard respectively. By 1977, Kren reported that there were ‘more than 200 courses in psychohistory with varying titles being offered around the country in colleges, universities and psychoanalytic institutes.’⁷³² A similar estimate was given

⁷²⁶ Artzt, Donna. ‘Psychohistory and its Discontents’. *Biography*, Volume 1, No. 3, Summer 1978. 27.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁸ Crews, Frederick C. ‘The American literary critic Frederick Crews explains why he has rejected Freud’, *London Review of Books*, Volume 2, No. 23, December 4, 1980. 3-6

⁷²⁹ Crews, Frederick. ‘Analysis Terminable.’ *Commentary*, July 1, 1980.

<https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/analysis-terminable/>. (Accessed on September 13, 2016).

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷³¹ Kren, George. ‘Pioneering Psychohistory in Kansas’. *Clio’s Psyche*, Volume 5, No. 4, March 1998. 136.

⁷³² Kren, George M. ‘Psychohistory in the University’, *The Journal of Psychohistory*; Winter 1977. 339

by Mazlish around the same time.⁷³³ ‘Not unexpectedly,’ he wrote, ‘in the light of such a figure, some universities have even been hiring psychohistorians as specialists, comparable, for example, to an economic or intellectual historian.’⁷³⁴ But that was wishful thinking. Although the field of psychohistory mushroomed in the 1970s, academic psychohistorians were unable to transform the growth in literature into a comprehensive body of knowledge that could be taught to students and young practitioners; only two full academic graduate programmes grew out of the field’s growth in popularity.

This was not for lack of interest in teaching on the part of the psychohistorians. The very first *Newsletter* of the Group for the Use of Psychology in History, published in 1972, had a ‘Teaching Section’, which, in its later guise *The Psychohistory Review*, became the ‘Teaching Forum’.⁷³⁵ In the column, an academic psychohistorian would discuss his or her approach and present a syllabus for their course in psychohistory.⁷³⁶ The first *Newsletter* stated: ‘Since many of us teach, or plan to teach, history courses that explicitly utilize psychological theory, it is my hope that this section of the Newsletter can draw upon this common interest and serve as a vehicle for the transmission of information about the teaching of psycho-history. I think we have much to learn about this relatively new endeavour.’⁷³⁷ And further: ‘As a regular feature of this column I would also like to publish a list of psycho-history courses in the planning stage. Many undergraduate and graduate students will be reading the Newsletter and information about the new course and programs (like the one planned at UCLA) will be useful to them as they assess which graduate school to attend.’⁷³⁸

The following years would prove that transmitting psychohistorical knowledge was easier said than done. In 1977, only a limited number of psychoanalytic institutes offered courses for graduate credit in psychohistory; the Southern California Institute of Psychoanalysis, the Topeka Institute for Psychoanalysis, and the New York Center for Psychoanalytic Training all offered a form of training for historians and social scientists. Mazlish reported that: ‘the Boston [Psychoanalytic Society] offers basic courses in ‘Clinical Concepts for the Social Scientist’, in cooperation with social scientists from the surrounding universities, to give specialized instruction for non-training candidates interested in psychohistory.’⁷³⁹ But the aim of psychoanalytic institutes was to train therapists, and they had little interest in applying psychoanalytic ideas to history. ‘An examination of the 1974/5 catalogue of the Menninger Foundation and the 1976/7 catalogue of the New York Center for Psychoanalytic training indicates, except for one course on psychoanalysis and the social sciences, a common absence of any course work dealing with psychohistorical problems,’ Kren found.⁷⁴⁰ The medical background of most candidates tended to work against consideration of psychohistorical questions and approaches.

On the other hand, there were problems facing academic approaches to psychohistory. Kren reported on the basis of informal inquiries ‘that enrollment in psychohistory courses ranges from half a dozen to about forty.’⁷⁴¹ He explained that universities often decided if

⁷³³ Mazlish, Bruce. ‘Reflections on the State of Psychohistory’, *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume V, No. 4, March 1977. 1.

⁷³⁴ It is unclear to what ‘some universities’ Mazlish is referring here; possibly Charles Strozier’s appointment at Sangamon State University.

⁷³⁵ *GUPH Newsletter*, Volume I, No. 1, March 1972.

⁷³⁶ For the first psychohistory syllabus submitted to the *GUPH Newsletter* by Richard Schoenwald, see appendix 1.

⁷³⁷ Teaching Methods and Materials. *GUPH Newsletter*, Volume 1, No. 1, March 1972. 3.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁹ Mazlish, Bruce. ‘Reflections on the State of Psychohistory’, *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume V, No. 4, March 1977. 3.

⁷⁴⁰ Kren, George M. ‘Psychohistory in the University Kren’, *The Journal of Psychohistory*, Winter 1977. 342.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.* 341.

courses would be continued to be taught not on the basis of theoretical merit but – ‘in a truly capitalistic fashion’ – on the bases of adequate demand on the part of the students.⁷⁴² Concern with ‘bread and butter’ subjects in academia militated against history generally, and against psychohistory in particular. A similar complaint had been made by Jacques Barzun some years before.⁷⁴³ In addition, psychology programmes seemed to be overwhelmingly anti-Freudian: ‘Psychology departments seek frequently to identify their work as ‘hard’ science, and methodologically are close to nineteenth century positivism’.⁷⁴⁴ Students were not sufficiently acquainted with Freudian thought to become interested in applying Freudian ideas to history. According to Kren, ‘The inability of students to find an introduction to psychoanalytic material in psychology departments constitutes one of the biggest difficulties for psychohistory at the university and the college.’⁷⁴⁵ Because of the lack of Freudian approaches taught at universities, he reported that ‘students appear to have difficulties dealing with material that is conceptual rather than narrative. They find Freud difficult, the vocabulary of psychoanalysis strange, and are not really convinced of the whole approach.’⁷⁴⁶

According to Strozier, psychohistorians had ‘trouble rationalizing the place of psychohistory in the university. There are many reasons for this state of affairs, but one of the more important I think is our tendency to confuse the training of psychohistorians with the teaching of psychohistory.’⁷⁴⁷ He held that ‘the difference parallels that between a graduate seminar and a freshman introductory course; between the New York Yankees and a sandlot baseball; or between a musical apprenticeship to a master craftsman and fumbling through the scales.’⁷⁴⁸ The question was: how, if at all, were the psychohistorians to teach psychohistory in universities? And to whom? Was psychohistory a subject that could be taught to undergraduates? Strozier felt that ‘psychohistory should not be hidden away as an advanced graduate specialty, but I am not arguing it should supplant other disciplines or even other interdisciplines.’⁷⁴⁹ He advocated a cautious, gradual approach to integrating psychohistorical ideas in university curricula: ‘the ground is only freshly broken in psychohistory and we must move with caution or run hopelessly amuck.’⁷⁵⁰ Here, again, we see a stark difference between the GUPH approach and deMause’s, who argued for ‘the eventual establishment of independent psychohistory departments in the university separate from history departments.’⁷⁵¹ After all, Strozier conceived of psychohistory as an interdiscipline born out of history and psychoanalysis; for deMause it was an independent, scientific enterprise.

What the varieties of psychohistory had in common was an underlying belief shared by their advocates that traditional history’s answers and explanations were, in some way, inadequate. But with divergent notions of the status of psychohistory came very different ideas about the actual nature of the material that should be taught in psychohistory courses. A survey of the ‘Teaching Section’ and ‘Teaching Forum’ in the *Newsletter* and *The Psychohistory*

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*

⁷⁴³ He wrote: ‘In any event, the combination of the dominant social sciences (‘social studies’ in the lower schools), the cult of the new in art, commerce, technology, and natural science, and the numerous anxieties expressing themselves in ‘futurism’ (planning, forecasting, ‘educating for the year 2000,’ and other forms of astrology) has created the impression that History can no longer speak in an important way to the contemporary world.’ (Clio and the Doctors, p.3)

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 341-342.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁷ Strozier, Charles B. ‘A Rationale for Teaching Psychohistory’. *GUPH Newsletter*, Volume IV, No. 1, June 1975. 8.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 10

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵¹ DeMause, Lloyd. ‘The Independence of Psychohistory’. *History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory*, Fall 1975, Volume 3, No. 2. 167.

Review suggests that most approaches focused on psychobiography. In his paper, Kren gave a summary of varying approaches:

Without even attempting a comprehensive listing, the following are cited as an example of the wide range of psychohistorical inquiries – not always taught within history departments – that deal with special subjects. Paul Elovitz teaches a course on the psychology of political leaders, which discusses Kennedy, Nixon, Robespierre, Mao, Lenin, Stalin and Hitler. Stanley Allen Renshon's course at Herbert Lehman College C.U.N.Y., on psychology and politics emphasizes the socialization process of politics and examines the psychological dimensions of political belief. Neil Smelser, a sociologist at the University of California, examines the application of psychoanalysis to such areas as social work, criminology, the study of personality and culture, and the interpretation of literature. Charles Strozier at Sangamon State University – an institution that appears especially hospitable to psychohistory – teaches a course which deals with ego psychology and includes readings not only of Sigmund Freud but also of Anna Freud, Hartman, Lederer and Robert White, which attempts to provide a theoretical examination of this part of analytic theory.⁷⁵²

A survey of the syllabuses collected in *The Psychohistory Review* similarly shows that some programmes focused on biography; some on the history of childhood; some on leadership; some on the theoretical underpinnings of psychohistory. As transference to the historical subject was a central notion for many psychohistorians, the students' own motivations were often scrutinized in class. Paul H. Elovitz wrote that students came to his courses 'seeking knowledge that will give them insight and improve their lives.'⁷⁵³ To harness students' motivations, sometimes unorthodox and haphazard therapeutic interventions were used in the classroom. This reveals the psychohistorians' ongoing struggle over how far to incorporate not only the theoretical components of psychoanalysis, but also the rituals of its practice, into their own psychohistorical practice.

This insight led to creative teaching interventions. In his article 'Springfield Über Alles', Strozier describes how he encouraged his students to assume the characters of Nazi figureheads in roleplay, so as to teach them to understand their historical subjects' motivations and behaviour. Strozier highlighted the strong emotional responses that his method evoked: 'The majority of the students did not regret their choices. Interestingly enough, however, the only two students who acted Jewish roles – the actress and the shopkeeper – regretted their choices and were unable to articulate clearly why. The actress was almost incoherent: "If I were to do it again I would not be Jewish as that fact got in the way of finding out what I was interested in knowing."⁷⁵⁴ Richard Schoenwald, founder of the GUPH, reported that the direction of his class on psychohistory consistently revealed that 'most of students wanted some kind of real or semi-real therapeutic experience.'⁷⁵⁵ To accommodate the interest, he encouraged students to 'bring personal experiences, dreams, and other relevant material to the class discussions. The student previously may have analyzed the material, either in whole or part, or the class could participate in the analysis.'⁷⁵⁶ Richard Lyman, a historian associated with the deMause group, reported that he had 'excellent results when we asked students to develop some aspect of their own life context into a paper. We got long papers, often illustrated, based on heavy extensive and imaginative research. Entire new lines of communications were

⁷⁵² Kren, George M. 'Psychohistory in the University', *The Journal of Psychohistory*, Winter 1977. 347.

⁷⁵³ *Ibid.* 342.

⁷⁵⁴ Strozier, Charles B. 'Springfield über Alles'. *GUPH Newsletter*, Volume IV, No. 2, September, 1975. 14.

⁷⁵⁵ Teaching Materials. *GUPH Newsletter*, Abstract of Volume I, No. 1-2, March and May, 1972. 7.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 8.

opened up, they reported, with members of their own families as a direct by-product of the paper.⁷⁵⁷

But not all psychohistorians were convinced that an exploration of students' motivations was particularly useful, or the task of the psychohistorian. Patrick Dunn, a historian of Russia based at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, reported that 'Students ought to be encouraged to express emotions in class, but unless the instructor is a trained analyst he/she ought not to try to work with those emotions.'⁷⁵⁸ Kren agreed: 'One element in the understanding of the motivations and feelings of historical figures is recognizing one's own. Yet the primary object of a psychohistory course is the comprehension of a historical figure in the past and not that of the student – although the two questions are related.'⁷⁵⁹

In the 1977-1978 academic year, Kren and Leon Rappoport, authors of *Varieties of Psychohistory* (1976), set up a graduate training program in psychohistory. Around the same time, Loewenberg announced that the State of California passed a bill that established the profession of Research Psychoanalysis. For the course in Kansas, Kren and Rappoport received financial support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. 'We applied and received a grant for starting a degree in psychohistory. [...] Students would fulfill the normal requirements for a PhD in history or psychology, but their dissertation would be on a psychohistorical subject. In addition to the regular courses at the Menninger Foundation in Topeka, where they would do some supervised clinical work.'⁷⁶⁰ The grant allowed them to bring in well-known psychohistorians for a series of lectures: Peter Loewenberg, Rudolph Binion, Lloyd de Mause, John Demos and Bruce Mazlish all spoke. 'The lectures,' Kren later recounted, 'resulted in sensitizing the history department in particular to psychohistory.'⁷⁶¹ But the programme over-all did not succeed. The grant provided money to pay for the lectures, but not enough money was left over to support students. 'After a few years,' Kren reported, 'interest on the part of undergraduates in psychohistory also dropped and in the 1980s we gave up teaching courses in psychohistory and the history of childhood.'⁷⁶² Peter Loewenberg's programme in psychohistory at UCLA was successful and ran until Loewenberg retired, but graduates failed to find teaching positions. It was impossible to make a living out of psychohistory. Some of Loewenberg's students made use of the legacy of the Research Psychoanalysis bill and became clinicians instead.⁷⁶³

The Freudian Vogue

A psychohistorian might well, at one point, have considered David E. Stannard a colleague. In his book, *The Puritan Way of Death* (1977) – a historical attempt to understand the role of the concept of death for the Puritans of New England – Stannard not only drew on philosophy, literary criticism and anthropology; he also found it useful to draw upon Freud's work, and psychoanalysis in general, to understand what the concept of death could have meant to the early Americans.⁷⁶⁴ A historian and professor of American Studies at Hawaii University, Stannard became well-known in the early 1990s for his popular book *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World* (1992), in which he applied the terms 'racism', 'genocide' and

⁷⁵⁷ Kren, George M. 'Psychohistory in the University', *The Journal of Psychohistory*, Winter 1977. 343.

⁷⁵⁸ Kren, George M. 'Psychohistory in the University Kren', *The Journal of Psychohistory*, Winter 1977. 343.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁰ Kren, George M. 'Pioneering Psychohistory in Kansas'. *Clio's Psyche*, Volume 5, No. 4, March 1999. 136.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*

⁷⁶³ Daum, Andreas W., and Hartmut Lehmann, James J. Sheehan. *The Second Generation: Émigrés from Nazi Germany as Historians*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2016. 121-122.

⁷⁶⁴ Freud is referred to positively on the first page of Stannard, David E. *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

‘holocaust’ – with their twentieth-century connotations – to mass slaughterings of Native Americans by European settlers in the fifteenth and sixteenth century.⁷⁶⁵ By then, Stannard was already notorious among psychohistorians and psychoanalysts for his small book, *Shrinking History: On Freud & the Failure of Psychohistory* (1980). In that book he attempted to show that, as he put it, ‘little, if any, psychohistory is good history’.⁷⁶⁶

It is no coincidence that Stannard chose to attack psychoanalysis instead of psychohistory. Psychohistory, a young and amorphous discipline, was much harder to pin down. In the book, Stannard judged that the quality of psychohistorical writing ranged ‘from the elegant and sensitive writings of Erik H. Erikson, to the tawdry and crackpot disquisitions of too many to name without fear of overlooking others equally deserving of mention.’⁷⁶⁷ One psychohistorian stood out particularly: ‘Clearly,’ Stannard wrote, ‘Mr. de Mause works well beyond the fringe of even the most generous definition of the world of scholarship’.⁷⁶⁸

Stannard borrowed the title for his book from another important piece of criticism of psychohistory, Robert Coles’ series of articles in the *New York Review of Books*, in which he criticised Bruce Mazlish’s book *In Search of Nixon* – also entitled ‘Shrinking History’.⁷⁶⁹ Stannard’s book was principally a response to the idea expressed by Bruce Mazlish that the idiosyncratic, common-sense psychological element involved in history-writing might be better substituted by the coherent theory of psychoanalysis. ‘In the abstract,’ Stannard wrote, ‘this argument appears to have merit. But first such a theory must be shown to exist and be logically and empirically credible. Otherwise we are merely adding to the confusion by substituting an unverified and logically reductionist explanation that stands a very good chance of being dead wrong for the sensibly diverse, modest, cautious, common sense, experientially derived wisdom of the traditional historian.’⁷⁷⁰ Stannard was not satisfied with debunking psychohistory alone. Psychoanalysis in its entirety was suspect. If Freud’s theories had provided him with a perspective on the meaning of death in the unconscious of Puritans in 1977, three years later he was arguing that there was no such thing as an unconscious at all. Psychoanalysis, he held, suffered ‘from problems with illogic, experimental nonconfirmation, and cultural parochialism.’⁷⁷¹ Reviewer Michael Franz Basch, a psychoanalyst based in Chicago, concluded: ‘This is a very angry book.’⁷⁷²

In his book, Stannard drew on critics of psychoanalysis such as Adolf Grünbaum and Hans Eysenck. ‘It is worth emphasizing,’ Stannard wrote about Sophocles’ Oedipus myth, ‘that the entire sequence of events began with the oracle’s prediction to the troubled young man. The same pattern holds with Freud’s analysis of Little Hans (and with psychoanalysis in general). [...] Freud referred to Little Hans as a ‘little Oedipus’ after, under much parental prodding, the child grudgingly seems to have accepted his father’s observation that he wanted his father out of the way in order to be alone with his mother.’⁷⁷³ If psychoanalysis worked at all, Stannard suggested, it operated by the power of suggestion. He did not review a single

⁷⁶⁵ Stannard, David. ‘American Holocaust’, reply by J.H. Elliott. *The New York Review of Books*, October 21, 1993.

⁷⁶⁶ Stannard, David. ‘Shrinking History: Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory’. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980. Xiii.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.* xi

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.* xii

⁷⁶⁹ Coles, Robert. ‘Shrinking History Part 1’, *New York Review of Books*, February 22, 1973.

⁷⁷⁰ Stannard, David. ‘Shrinking History: Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory’. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980. 82.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.* 30.

⁷⁷² Basch, Michael Franz. ‘Comment on David E. Stannard’s Shrinking History.’ *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 9, No. 2, Winter 1980. 136.

⁷⁷³ Stannard, David. *Shrinking History: Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980. 86.

psychohistorical study in depth, and decided to instead argue that psychoanalysis was a weak foundation for historical work to rest upon. Stannard based his argument on existing critiques of psychoanalysis. The book was a patchwork of behavioural and philosophical arguments against psychoanalysis. One of Stannard's main points, based on Eysenck's research, was that studies suggested that other forms of therapy were as successful as, if not more successful than, psychoanalysis in curing neuroses; and, moreover, that neuroses often spontaneously went into remission without any form of therapy. Stannard held that in the face of these criticisms, psychoanalysis had been unable 'to provide acceptable evidence to indicate that it is more successful as a therapeutic device than any other form of recognized therapy.'⁷⁷⁴ Stannard discarded the psychoanalysts' argument that psychoanalysis works with other evaluative criteria for cure, and then turned quickly to philosophical critiques of the natural scientific underpinnings of psychoanalysis. He reviewed some of the standard philosophical critiques of the concept of the unconscious such as Popper's arguments that, like astrologers, psychoanalysts were able to 'explain away anything that might have been a refutation of the theory had the theory and the prophecies been more precise,' by making their interpretations and prophecies sufficiently vague.⁷⁷⁵ He then attempted to show that there were severe flaws in the logic employed by psychohistorians. One substantive point of criticism was the circularity of the psychoanalysts and psychohistorians' arguments concerning the foundations of adult behavior in childhood experience:

Post hoc, ergo propter hoc describes the error built on the assumption that if event B followed event A, then B must have happened because of A. This is a common enough mistake in all historical writing, but since Freud it has been given a dizzying new twist: it is now apparently no longer necessary to historically establish the existence of A. So long as B is found to exist, it is assumed that A must have happened since B is a psychoanalytically posited consequence of A. Once having ascertained, then (by means of conjecture), the alleged existence of A, the cause of B's existence is made clear: it exists because of A—even though there may be not a shred of real evidence that A ever existed!⁷⁷⁶

Another important point of criticism that Stannard raised was that psychohistorians used theoretical models and cognitive assumptions derived from present experience which they subsequently imposed on the past. In doing so, psychohistorians assumed 'that in most fundamental ways all people, at all places, at all times, have viewed themselves and the world about them in substantially the same fashion.'⁷⁷⁷ This seemed unlikely to Stannard: 'While not always addressing directly the then still exotic vogue of psychoanalysis,' he explained, 'such great early twentieth-century historians as Huizinga and Febvre (who were by no means always in agreement with one another) both implicitly and explicitly suggested that the historical past was in *fundamental* ways a very different world from that of the present.'⁷⁷⁸ In Stannard's hands, the question of whether or not to use psychoanalysis in history became a question concerning one's willingness to accept the idea of a fundamental, timeless human experience.

To substantiate his claim that it was unlikely for people in the past to have experienced themselves in terms close to 'a trinity of mystical forces' of id, ego, and superego, Stannard drew on the work of social psychologists such as Hans H. Toch and Richard Schulte, who had

⁷⁷⁴ Stannard, David. *Shrinking History: Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980. 148.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 67.

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 24.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 122.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 122.

performed controlled experiments suggesting a strong influence of a person's particular experience on perception.⁷⁷⁹ 'Abstract and at first glance seemingly removed from the problems of psychohistory, the implications of these experiments for the psychohistorian are in fact acute,' he explained: 'for if an individual in the past did not even *perceive* a person, event, or other seemingly 'objective' phenomenon in the same way as does the modern historian, it would clearly be a mistake to apply retrospectively contemporary psychoanalytic or any other highly structured explanatory concepts of motivation to the historical figure's behavior.'⁷⁸⁰

In a kaleidoscopic manoeuvre, Stannard had criticized psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic history using classically psychohistorical argumentation, based upon the notion that the psychological aspect of history-writing (attributing motives and explaining behavior in the past) was best carried out using up-to-date, coherent and scientifically sanctioned psychological theory. Ironically, but not coincidentally, the psychological theory that Stannard chose to base his argument on supported an idiosyncratic and common-sense approach to explaining motivation in the past. As reviewer Dominick Cavallo put it in the journal of *Social Science History*: 'In assuming the role of critic as executioner, Stannard forces himself into an untenable intellectual corner. In his ardor to prove that psychohistory 'cannot work,' Stannard makes statements whose lack of subtlety, ahistoricity, logical perversity, and lack of verification rival the worst psychohistory.'⁷⁸¹ *Shrinking History* can be read as psychohistory turning upon itself; and what the book illustrated more than anything was the general ideological shift away from psychoanalytic theory that took place in academia during the 1980s. The 'vogue of psychoanalysis', as Stannard and Crews had both called it, was coming to an end.

For obvious reasons, psychohistorians were troubled by Stannard's work. His arguments pointed to substantial weaknesses in their justifications for using Freudian theory in history. It also pointed to the disarray that psychohistory as a movement found itself in. *The Psychohistory Review* published a series of clumsy responses by psychohistorians, followed by a response from Stannard. Fred Weinstein, an important contributor to the *Review*, had nothing good to say about Stannard's work. The book was 'so bad' that he did 'not care to say much about it.'⁷⁸² Michael Franz Basch was interested particularly, 'over and above the content of his essay,' in 'the ongoing struggle in these pages between Stannard the scholar and Stannard the polemicist. The ridicule, sarcasm and sophistry employed by the author in his attempt to make those who would take a different position from his feel foolish and/or intellectually dishonest does his cause no service.'⁷⁸³ The most telling review came from Travis L. Crosby, a psychobiographer, who judged that: 'Part of Stannard's difficulty in evaluating psychohistory dispassionately lies in the lack of an effective definition of the term.'⁷⁸⁴ It was simply impossible to systematically criticise psychohistory, Crosby argued, because – despite efforts by people such as Lloyd deMause to institutionalise its practice and anchor a stable meaning to the term – there existed such a wide-ranging variety of works that called themselves psychohistory that a comprehensive critique of psychohistory was nearly impossible. He wrote: 'Very few psychohistorians have thought seriously about the problems of definition, and have

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 141.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 133.

⁷⁸¹ Cavallo, Dominick. 'Review of Shrinking History'. *Social Science History*, Volume 5, No. 4, Autumn, 1981. 492-495.

⁷⁸² Weinstein, Fred. 'Comment on David Stannard's Shrinking History'. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 9, No. 2, Winter, 1980. 145.

⁷⁸³ Basch, Michael F. 'Comment on David Stannard's Shrinking History'. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 9, No. 2, Winter, 1980. 136.

⁷⁸⁴ Crosby, Travis L. 'Comment on David Stannard's Shrinking History'. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 9, No. 2, Winter, 1980. 149.

glided too readily into a reliance on psychoanalysis.⁷⁸⁵ As we have seen, a number of authors did try to define psychohistory, but it remained an elusive concept that changed guise in the hands of different practitioners. The second half of Crosby's remark points to a growing awareness among psychohistorians that the 'vogue' of Freudian theory was passing; one of psychohistory's parent disciplines – arguably the principle one – was increasingly under fire, and practitioners had to take up position in response to these criticisms. Crosby's position was clear:

There are two possible avenues that could lead to an acceptable redefinition of psychohistory, and thereby avoid present day views that psychohistory must be married to a psychoanalytic technique. The first is to jettison those aspects of psychoanalysis that are least suitable to a study of the past. For example, psychohistory would be well advised to relinquish any attempt at drawing causal relationships between childhood experiences and adult behavior.⁷⁸⁶

Crosby was willing to give up one of psychohistory's core principles – an emphasis on the importance of the reconstruction of childhood experience. And he continued: 'A second avenue toward a redefinition of psychohistory, lies in the application of non-psychoanalytic psychology to the study of the past.'⁷⁸⁷ This was not a new idea, and had been advocated by members of the Wellfleet group almost from psychohistory's conception onwards. Later, William McKinley Runyan had been interested in exploring the possibilities of a non-psychoanalytic psychohistory and psychobiography. When he wrote to B.F. Skinner to ask his opinion of psychobiography, he received a short reply, worth quoting in full:

Dear Dr. Runyan: I have no strong confidence in the psychobiography of my colleague Erik Erikson nor am I well read in related fields. I am afraid I can give you no help.
Yours Sincerely, B. F. Skinner⁷⁸⁸

After World War II, with a burgeoning psychiatric field in the United States, most psychohistorians had clung to psychoanalysis in the hope that they had found a unified and unifying psychological theory to work with. Psychohistory had relied on psychoanalysis as one of its parent disciplines – it had been conceived that way by Erikson and Langer. Because psychoanalysis was the most dominant psychological discourse, with sufficient scientific authority, psychohistorians had been able to rely on it relatively uncritically over the past decades. That was now changing.

Stannard did not spare his critics. 'First,' he wrote in his reply to the comments, 'I wish to congratulate Charles Strozier for selecting three reviewers whose comments represent a broad range of perspectives: one of them appears to think my argument substantially correct (with reservations); one of them thinks my argument is largely incorrect or at least incomplete (again, with reservations), and one of them doesn't think.'⁷⁸⁹ As for the book's style, Stannard explained he was following 'the wise counsel of J.H. Hexter to the effect that 'violent destruction is not necessarily of itself worthless or futile. Even though it leaves doubts about

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁸ Letter from B.F. Skinner to William McKinley Runyan, April 19, 1982. Quoted in: Runyan, William M. 'From the study of lives and psychohistory to historicizing psychology: A conceptual journey'. *Annual of psychoanalysis, special issue on psychoanalysis and history*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Analytic Press, 2003. 125.

⁷⁸⁹ Stannard, David. 'Reply to comments on David Stannard's Shrinking History'. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 9, No. 2, Winter, 1980. 150.

the right road for London, it helps if someone rips up, however violently, a ‘To London’ sign on the Dover cliffs pointing south.’⁷⁹⁰

Freud for Historians

Peter Gay (1923-2015) was Professor of History at Yale University. He was a historian of European thought and an important advocate of the psychoanalytic approach to history. The *New York Times* called him America’s pre-eminent cultural historian in 2007. Some of his best-known works include: *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (1968); *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* (1984-1998); *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (1988) and *Freud for Historians* (1985) – a defense of the use of psychoanalysis in history-writing. He received the Heineken-prize from the Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1990; the University of Munich’s Geschwister Scholl prize and a lifetime distinction award from the American Historical Association in 2004. Gay’s obituary in *The Guardian* stated that his ‘Freudianism was often applied with a light touch, however, as in *The Bourgeois Experience*, and his many essays and shorter books on Freud and aspects of his life and thought were not uncritical in their approach to the master.’⁷⁹¹ He was one of the most well-respected historians to have engaged with psychohistory.

In the early 1950s, Gay met left-wing political scientist Franz Neumann at Columbia University. Neumann was a Marxist scholar with ties to the Frankfurt School. He invited Gay to attend a reading group that he and his wife had set up with their friend Herbert Marcuse.⁷⁹² Through his interactions with Neumann and Marcuse, Gay became increasingly enamoured with the Frankfurt School’s reading of Freud – in particular with Erich Fromm’s revisionist interpretation of psychoanalysis. Yet it wasn’t until the mid-1970s that Gay underwent training in psychoanalysis. His application of Freudian thought to historical materials was very cautious, but committed. He was an advocate of having graduate students in history undergo psychoanalysis. ‘Intellectually,’ he wrote, ‘it is on a par with the reasonable demand that the historian inform himself of his terrain, as Samuel Eliot Morison, the great student of Columbus’s voyages reenacted Columbus’s bold ventures. The principle objection [...] is financial.’⁷⁹³

In an interview in 1997, Gay acknowledged that he did not much like the term psychohistory: ‘I haven’t used that word for myself because, although it’s very convenient, on the whole I’ve always thought that psychohistory has been excessively reductionist, giving too much weight, or causal importance, to certain inner experiences of whatever sort.’⁷⁹⁴ Instead, he chose to identify himself as a historian who was ‘oriented towards’ or ‘influenced by’ psychoanalysis. He advised his graduate students who were interested in psychohistory not to ‘come out of the closet’ until they had tenure.⁷⁹⁵ His ambivalence towards psychohistory was apparent in *Freud for Historians* (1985) – his important manifesto for the use of psychology in history. Gay’s alliance to psychoanalysis went unquestioned in the book: ‘It seems to me fairly obvious that the psychoanalytic view of the human animal is the most fruitful psychology

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹¹ Evans, Richard J. ‘Peter Gay Obituary.’ *Guardian*, May 24, 2015.

⁷⁹² Elovitz, Paul H., and David Felix, and Bob Lentz. ‘The Psychoanalytically-Informed Historian: Peter Gay’. *Clio’s Psyche*, September, 1997. http://www.cliospsyche.org/psychoint_pg.html (Accessed on September 13, 2016).

⁷⁹³ Gay, Peter. *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984. 465-466.

⁷⁹⁴ Elovitz, Paul H., and David Felix, and Bob Lentz. ‘The Psychoanalytically-Informed Historian: Peter Gay’. *Clio’s Psyche*, September, 1997. http://www.cliospsyche.org/psychoint_pg.html (Accessed on September 13, 2016).

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

we've got. To have psychoanalysis as one of your instruments to search with or as one of your fundamental orientations towards individuals and collective experiences makes dual training very valuable.'⁷⁹⁶ *Freud for Historians* was a defence of psychoanalysis and simultaneously a critique of psychohistory. His ambivalence, even hostility, towards the term psychohistory was apparent: 'Some pungent and irritated responses to psychohistory have been only too deserved,' he wrote.⁷⁹⁷ It seems that Gay set out to save psychoanalysis from psychohistory.

Gay's book was, in effect, a response to the responses of non-Freudian, 'ordinary' historians to psychohistory. 'I intend to take these aggressive defences against psychoanalysis seriously,' he wrote. 'I am visualising the historian's defensive manoeuvres as six concentric rings of intellectual fortification mobilized against the Freudian assault.'⁷⁹⁸ On Stannard, he wrote: 'In the rapidly growing contentious literature about Freud, the man and his work, David E. Stannard, *Shrinking History: On Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory* (1980) deserves particular attention, since it has shaped the way many historians think, and talk, about psychoanalysis as a possible discipline. Well-served by economy of expression, fluency of style, and a scrupulous abstention from personal vilification, this effort to devastate Freud's creation is, however, compromised by tendentiousness.'⁷⁹⁹ Apparently, Stannard's characterisation of Lloyd deMause as tawdry and crackpot did not count as personal vilification to Gay. About Paul Roazen, the other sceptical historian, Gay said: 'Nothing is more ludicrous than the picture of the historian growing skeptical about psychohistory because psychoanalysis is in trouble. He knows nothing about psychoanalysis, and cares less.'⁸⁰⁰

Freud for Historians was an attempt to reconfigure the debates about the use of psychoanalysis in history. Couched in the language of war, Gay's essay sought to muster whatever fighting power was left in the ranks of psychohistory and redirect it towards critics under a new banner: 'the sheer defensiveness that angry historians have displayed in attempting to stifle psychohistory is a tribute less to their acuity than to the dents that psychoanalytically oriented historians have made in their armor. The literature of responsible psychoanalytic history may be small, but it is growing.'⁸⁰¹ Gay called for a new kind of psychohistory – 'a kind that has not yet been explored, let alone practiced'.⁸⁰² As such, his book was not a direct attack upon the achievements of psychohistory, but a plea to reform the field to such an extent, and to discard so much of its achievements, that it was unclear what exactly remained of the enterprise after its purge. In content, his arguments for a new 'psychoanalytic history' were not much different from the psychohistorians's. Like Mazlish, he argued that 'the professional historian has always been a psychologist – an amateur psychologist.'⁸⁰³ Like most psychohistorians, Gay wrote from the strong conviction that 'psychoanalysis should inform other auxiliary sciences, other techniques; it should enrich, without disturbing, paleography, diplomatics, statistics, family reconstruction. Nor need it be reductionist.'⁸⁰⁴ The name Lloyd deMause is hauntingly absent from Gay's essay, but it was clear that he sought to rebrand psychohistory and give it back its academic respectability. Psychohistory had been marred by its irresponsible uses: 'The syllabus of errors rehearsing its offenses – including the familiar charges of reductionism and crimes against good sense, scientific procedure, the rules of

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹⁷ Gay, Peter. 'Psychoanalysis in History,' in: *Psychology and Historical Interpretation*, ed. William McKinley Runyan, Oxford, 1988. 113.

⁷⁹⁸ Gay, Peter. *Freud for Historians*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. 4.

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 11.

⁸⁰⁰ Gay, Peter. 'Reply to comments on Peter Gay's *Freud for Historians*', *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 15, No. 1, 1986. 98.

⁸⁰¹ Gay, Peter. *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984. 464.

⁸⁰² Gay, Peter. *Freud for Historians*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. xi.

⁸⁰³ *Ibid.* 6.

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 210.

evidence, and the English language – is not wholly unfounded.⁸⁰⁵ Psychohistory was not only under attack from outside, Gay held, there was as much danger coming from within its own ranks.

Historians interested generally in the use of psychology in history were quite amenable towards Gay's book. Robert G. L. Waite called *Freud for Historians* a 'graceful, wise, and witty essay', although he felt that the author confined himself by endorsing only Freudian analysis, and ignoring developments in psychoanalysis since Freud.⁸⁰⁶ Unsurprisingly, David Stannard was not impressed. In a lengthy review, he wrote: 'the book that would examine and answer, "one by one," the major objections to psychohistory had not yet come close to having been written. Gay seems to have made only a halfhearted try, it should not be surprising if unshrunk historians begin to conclude that such a book *has* not been written because it *cannot* be written.'⁸⁰⁷ The psychohistorians, not even the one's associated with the academically oriented GUPH, did not welcome Gay's assistance in their battle for psychohistory. As they had done for David Stannard's book, *The Psychohistory Review's* editors published a symposium on the work.⁸⁰⁸ Responses to *Freud for Historians* were furious. Richard Schoenwald felt that psychoanalysis was 'touted as a subservient helper for the historian who is intent, as ever, on carrying out the commandments into which he was inducted in graduate school: get facts, data, documents, and write up the stuff readably. Use a little psychology or literary criticism or sociology or anthropology to supply piquant perspective, but above all, get those facts!'⁸⁰⁹ Eli Zaretsky claimed that Gay had done Freud a grave injustice by reducing him to a theorist of personality, unconcerned with sociology and groups. He accused Gay of being a conformist who tried to make Freud palatable 'bit by bit'.⁸¹⁰

The psychohistorians felt that the achievements of their field had been overlooked – if not played down – in Gay's book. Gay defended himself by saying that he had put the book together as 'a coherent defence of the psychohistorical enterprise.'⁸¹¹ He explained: 'The point of my book, then, which I deliberately kept fairly short, was to take up arms against prominent historians who have neglected or ignorantly misused Freud, and to demonstrate that they are depriving themselves of an invaluable intellectual instrument.'⁸¹² At any rate, he did not seem too bothered by the psychohistorians' qualms with his text. 'I have had well over a hundred reviews, many of them prominent and most of them favorable,' he wrote.⁸¹³

An Eccentric Legacy

The publication of Peter Gay's *Freud for Historians* signalled a turning point in the history of psychohistory. In essence, Gay presented an alternative model for psychoanalytic history, not weighed down with the responsibilities of constructing or maintaining a movement. He distanced himself from the more speculative elements in psychohistory and just stopped short of giving up the term altogether. Although he savoured many of the ideas propagated by the psychohistorians, his book was a 'return to Freud' – a plea for a more modest application of

⁸⁰⁵ Strozier, Charles B., and Daniel Offer. *The Leader: Psychohistorical Essays*. New York: Plenum Press, 1985. ix.

⁸⁰⁶ Waite, Robert G.L. Review *Freud for Historians*, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 92, No. 3, June 1987. 633-634.

⁸⁰⁷ Stannard, David. 'Review of *Freud for Historians*'. *Reviews in American History*, Volume 14, No. 2, June, 1986. 298-308.

⁸⁰⁸ 'Comments on Peter Gay's *Freud for Historians*'. *The Psychohistory Review*, Volume 15, No. 1, Fall, 1986.

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 88.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.* 91.

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.* 96.

⁸¹² *Ibid.*

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*

psychoanalytic ideas and a humbler use of psychoanalytic models of the mind in history-writing. Gay was undoubtedly an heir to the psychohistorical movement, but his call to arms was far removed from William Langer's dreams of a cosmic shift in the perspective of the historian. Those days had passed.

With psychoanalysis under fire, psychohistory had to change its tune and its aspirations. As Lynn Hunt has argued in her unpublished lecture, Langer's 'Next Assignment' had not come to fruition.⁸¹⁴ T.G. Ashplant, in an essay on psychohistory's reception in Great Britain published in *The History Workshop Journal*, referred to psychohistory as a 'not-wholly successful attempt to establish a new sub-sector within the discipline of history.'⁸¹⁵ This sentiment was shared by many of the earliest psychohistorians. By the 1980s, psychohistory had lost nearly all of its impetus as a movement. It had not produced a coherent body of knowledge that could be successfully taught to a younger generation of scholars; parts of the field were deemed too speculative and reductionist to be taken seriously academically; its loosely defined foundations were no longer an advantage now that one of its parent disciplines was under attack from various quarters; psychohistory had not developed a secure enough foundation of literature to withstand the critiques leveled at psychoanalysis; it could not make up its mind if it was art or science; and, importantly, practitioners could not make a living out of work done in the field.

Publication of *The Psychohistory Review* was terminated in 1999. Although he was by this time no longer its main editor, Strozier gave as a reason that he was simply 'tired of it,' because 'psychohistory was never going to be recognized within the discipline of history as more than ephemeral with very few people having appointments in the field.'⁸¹⁶ A year before, in June 1998, a new British journal appeared: *Psychoanalysis and History*, edited by psychoanalyst Andrea Sabbadini. In their first issue, Sabbadini stated: 'While we are clear that the name of our journal is neither The Psychoanalysis of History nor The History of Psychoanalysis we hope to encompass both projects.'⁸¹⁷ In an interview, Sabbadini declared that he was not hostile to psychohistory, 'but I would feel uncomfortable about myself and our journal being described as having a psychohistorical approach. I think we don't.'⁸¹⁸ When asked if he considered psychohistory a natural extension of applied psychoanalysis, he answered:

An extension (how 'natural' I don't know!) of applied psychoanalysis, but one about which I have reservations, on the grounds of what too often seem to be rather wild speculations about past individuals and events -- especially when mechanisms about interpersonal relationships are applied to macrosocial/political phenomena of the kind: the Koreans suffer from an inferiority complex in relation to the Japanese and react to the ensuing castration complex by projecting their envy. Or when the only effort to understand, say, the Nazi period boils down to deciding whether Hitler was a psychopath or a paranoid schizophrenic, given what we know of his early relationships with his parents. Of course, these are caricatures, but based on papers submitted to our journal by authors calling themselves psychohistorians.⁸¹⁹

⁸¹⁴ Hunt, Lynn. 'Psychoanalysis and History', Presented at the Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, February 22, Cambridge, MA.

⁸¹⁵ Ashplant, T. G. 'Psychoanalysis in Historical Writing'. *History Workshop Journal*, Volume 26, No. 1, 1988. 102.

⁸¹⁶ Personal communication with Strozier, April 22, 2016.

⁸¹⁷ Sabbadini, Andrea. *Editorial*. *Psychoanalysis and History*, Volume 1, No. 1, 1998. 1.

⁸¹⁸ Schneidmann, J. Lee. 'Psychoanalysis and History: Andrea Sabbadini', in: *Clio's Psyche*, March 2001. 212.

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid.*

It is telling for a journal that listed as one of its main goals to publish works in the area of ‘the psychoanalysis of history’ that it looked so unfavourably upon psychohistory. The term psychohistory had been contaminated.

In an article published in 2013, Mazlish looked back on the history of the movement and ahead to its possible future. He argued that although psychohistory as a movement had failed many of its ideas had permeated historiography and the cultural field at large. He wrote: ‘It is important to note that psychohistorical understanding has entered the general awareness, even though psychohistory itself has fallen into somewhat extended disrepute. In this sense, the field has been a success.’⁸²⁰ Paul Elovitz expressed a similar idea when he stated in a lecture in 2015 that nowadays, ‘all sorts of historians, when they get to particular problems, will go ahead and do psychohistory, but just not call it that.’⁸²¹ Psychohistorian David Beisel made the claim concrete at the 2015 International Psychohistorical Association convention:

Sir Ian Kershaw is a good example. His two-volume Hitler biography has been widely praised. It is superb history. It is also openly anti-psychological. Early on, Kershaw denounces psychohistory as too speculative. [...] No sooner does Kershaw inform the readers that he wouldn’t be doing any psychology, when he says of Hitler: “It takes little to imagine that his later patronizing contempt for the submissiveness of women, the thirst for dominance and the imagery of the leader as a stern, authoritarian father-figure, the inability to form deep personal relationships, his corresponding cold brutality toward humankind and, not least, the capacity for hatred so profound that it must have reflected an immeasurable undercurrent of self-hatred, concealed in the extreme narcissism that was its counterpart, must surely have had its roots in the subliminal influences in the young Adolf’s family circumstances.” Sounds like psychohistory to me.’⁸²²

As Mazlish has argued, some of the ideas associated with psychohistory have been internalised in historiography and biography, and this can count as something of a triumph, but it remains unclear how far these assumptions are the legacy of the psychohistorical field or movement as such, or simply a by-product of the psychoanalytic ‘climate of opinion’ still dominating academia and common vernacular. ‘No biographer can fail to hint at the unconscious motives of his or her protagonist and hope to escape criticism (which, nevertheless, hardly stops many biographers from writing superficial accounts, oblivious to the depths of their subjects),’ Mazlish wrote.⁸²³ ‘Whatever battles are lost in the dismissive treatment of individual works of psychohistory or psychobiography (and the two are often treated as if they were the same), the war itself has been largely if silently won.’⁸²⁴ Psychoanalysis and psychohistory, he argued, had become vital, if unacknowledged contexts for present-day historiography. ‘They have done what the editors of the French *Encyclopedia* did in the eighteenth century: changed the way of thinking. [...] Consciously or otherwise, we live in a psychoanalytic cum psychohistorical world.’⁸²⁵

Another argument for psychohistory’s failure, Mazlish held, was that the works it produced are *eccentric* – that is, they fall ‘outside the circle of common scholarship and

⁸²⁰ Mazlish, Bruce. ‘The Past and Future of Psychohistory’, in: *The Annual of Psychoanalysis*, V. 31, Psychoanalysis and History. 267

⁸²¹ ‘IPA 2015 Panel on Psychohistory at the Crossroads - part 1’ Youtube video, Published 21 July 2015, 01:04:28, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aa_tlwoLRFo

⁸²² *Ibid.*

⁸²³ Mazlish, Bruce. ‘The Past and Future of Psychohistory’, in: *The Annual of Psychoanalysis*, V. 31, Psychoanalysis and History. 268.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁵ *Ibid.* 265.

between the proverbial two stools.’⁸²⁶ Those two stools, in the case of psychohistory, were its two parent disciplines. And this brought with it another problem: the legitimacy of psychohistory, in so far as it identifies with psychoanalysis, stands or falls with the legitimacy of psychoanalysis. As we saw, when psychoanalysis went out of fashion, psychohistory suffered. And although a non-psychoanalytic psychohistory had been presented as a possibility from the beginning of the movement, no concrete steps in that direction had been taken, and no viable non-psychoanalytic psychohistory had been developed.⁸²⁷

An illustration of the psychohistorians’ notion that ideas associated with psychohistory were adopted in non-psychohistorical academic historiography can be found in the work of postmodern historian Dominick LaCapra. LaCapra is Professor Emeritus of Humanistic Studies at Cornell University. Although he was heavily influenced by psychoanalytic thought, and even engaged directly with some of the psychohistorians’ ideas, LaCapra distanced himself from his psychohistorical heritage and rejected the term psychohistory as early as 1987, two years after Peter Gay published *Freud for Historians*. LaCapra was one of the academics who was more strongly influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis than by American interpretations of Freud. He has argued for a thoroughgoing investigation of the psychological processes that are elicited in historical research. Historians, he has held, have tendencies towards identification, negative identification, even denial. In an interview, LaCapra explained:

So for me, transference means a form of repetition, both in relations among researchers (for example, graduate students/instructors), and perhaps more interestingly – because less developed – in the relationship to the object of study. When you study something, at some level you always have a tendency to repeat the problems you were studying. This is related to your implication in the research. Something like transference (or one’s implication in the material and tendency to repeat) always recurs.⁸²⁸

Although his work was concerned with exactly the same problems as the early Wellfleetians – the consequences of the idea of transference towards one’s historical object of study and the ways in which there could be a mutually beneficial exchange between historical and psychoanalytic narratives – and he largely gave the same answers, it was no longer intellectually remunerative to work under the label ‘psychohistory’. In an article published in 1987, LaCapra wrote:

“Psychohistory” has won its way as a subdiscipline in the historical profession, although it is still able to raise the hackles of some traditionalists. Yet the typical procedure of psychohistorians has been to make more or less selective use of psychoanalytic concepts as they proceed to put individuals or groups from the past ‘on the couch’. [...] History as applied psychoanalysis does not confront the broader problem of how psychoanalysis can lead to a basic reconceptualization of historical self-understanding and practice or even to a mutual rearticulation of both history and psychoanalysis as implicated in a reciprocally provocative exchange.⁸²⁹

⁸²⁶ *Ibid.* 265.

⁸²⁷ For an example, see: Berkhofer, Robert. *A behavioral Approach to Historical Analysis*. New York: Free Press, 1971.

⁸²⁸ LaCapra, Dominick. ‘An Interview with Professor Dominick LaCapra’. Yad Vashem, Shoah Resource Center. Yadvashem.org

⁸²⁹ LaCapra, Dominick. ‘History and Psychoanalysis’, in: *Critical Inquiry*, Volume 13, No. 2, The Trial(s) of Psychoanalysis, 1987. 224.

In more recent years, psychohistory has been forced to go underground. Its various elements appear in splintered forms in scattered places. For example, the tradition of pathologising political leaders has been carried on successfully in popular culture. Justin A. Frank, a Kleinian psychoanalyst based in Washington, D.C., gained notoriety for publishing *Bush on the Couch* (2004), and more recently, *Obama on the Couch* (2011). His work was featured prominently in *Rolling Stone* magazine.⁸³⁰ Fidel Castro, in his annual speech in 2004, quoted at length from the former work.⁸³¹ More serious questions about the psychological origins of violence and warfare have been examined by Robert J. Lifton and Charles Strozier and their study groups at The Center for Violence and Human Survival at CUNY (now called the Center on Terrorism). The use of biography in psychology and its emphasis on the particularity of life-histories has been advocated by psychobiographers such as William McKinley Runyan, Alan C. Elms and, more recently, William Todd Schultz. DeMause's *The Journal of Psychohistory* is still being published intermittently, now by psychoanalyst David Lotto. Recent editions have featured articles such as *Incoherence in the Iraq War Narrative and the Concept of Collective Attachment, A Psychological Profile of Osama Bin Laden*, and *The Dream-Life of Hilary Clinton*.⁸³² DeMause's IPA still holds annual meetings. *Clio's Psyche*, a journal published by historian Paul Elovitz, and *The Psychohistory Forum* brings together what is left of the psychohistorical movement. In an interview, Elovitz confided that 'on good days I am pessimistic about the field.'⁸³³

Like the 'grand narratives' that psychohistory was born out of and responded to, it lives on in the postmodern era as an optional ontology – a 'lens' as Mazlish would put it; a niche, stripped of its authority and reduced to a voice amongst voices in the desert of historiography. Like psychoanalysis, psychohistory is still pursued and propagated by a small group of fervent disciples, but as a static endeavour – with little sense of progress to impel theoretical innovation. Psychohistory as a signifier now leads a spectral, undead existence. However, psychoanalysis still exists, and so does history. Both have their dynamic, unstable and controversial elements. As we have seen, the disciplines are not natural allies, nor are they inherently competitors. If psychoanalysis is evolving and history is evolving, then their relationship will also inevitably evolve. As for psychohistory – its future depends on its capacity to reimagine itself, as Mac Runyan would have it.

At a panel entitled 'Psychohistory at the Crossroads', held at the 2015 International Psychohistorical Association convention, psychohistorian David Beisel complained that: 'The self-appointed guardians of history's sacred precincts are after nothing less than psychohistory's complete annihilation [...]'⁸³⁴ It remains to be seen if adopting such a persecutory fantasy will be the most productive way forward for the movement. But the evidence does not contradict Beisel's pessimistic view. He continued: 'One subfield is not recognized by the AHA [American Historical Association] – psychohistory. After spending many years on the list, it was dropped from the AHA's taxonomy several years ago. I lobbied the AHA president for its restoration, citing thousands of books, flourishing journals, scholarly organizations and large college class enrolments. She insured me psychohistory would be reinstated; four years later it has not happened, and it is not likely to happen.'⁸³⁵ Such motivated

⁸³⁰ Frank, Justin A. 'Obama on the Couch'. *Rolling Stone*, November 11, 2011.

⁸³¹ Arrington, Vanessa. 'Castro-Bush feud turns personal'. *The Miami Herald*, July 28, 2004.

⁸³² Ross, Colin A. 'A Psychological Profile of Osama Bin Laden'. *The Journal of Psychohistory*, Volume 42, No. 4, Spring 2015.; Sochos, Antigonos. 'Incoherence in the Iraq War Narrative and the Concept of Collective Attachment'. *The Journal of Psychohistory*, Volume 42, No. 4, Spring 2015.' Dervin, Dan. 'The Dream-Life of Hilary Clinton'. *The Journal of Psychohistory*, Volume 36, No. 2, Fall 2008.

⁸³³ Personal communication with Elovitz, August 11, 2016.

⁸³⁴ 'IPA 2015 Panel on Psychohistory at the Crossroads - part 1', Youtube video, Published 21 July 2015, 01:04:28, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aa_tlwLRFo

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*

forgetting on the side of one its parent disciplines does not bode well for the signifier psychohistory. As for its signified, perhaps the last of psychohistory's practitioners can find solace in Freud, who wrote: 'we have been inclined to take the [...] view that in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish – that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances it can once more be brought to light.'⁸³⁶

⁸³⁶ Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1962.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

On August 15th 2016, *The New York Times* asked: ‘Is it Fair to Analyze Donald Trump from Afar?’⁸³⁷ In the article, the author noted that ‘Psychiatrists and psychologists have publicly flouted the Goldwater Rule, tagging Mr. Trump with an assortment of personality problems, including grandiosity, a lack of empathy, and “malignant narcissism”.’⁸³⁸ *Vanity Fair* asked: ‘Could Donald Trump pass a sanity test?’⁸³⁹ *The Atlantic* published an exposé on ‘The mind of Donald Trump’.⁸⁴⁰ *The Huffington Post* published a blog on ‘The Psychopathology of Donald Trump’.⁸⁴¹ And Jill Stein, a Harvard-trained physician and the Candidate for the Green Party, declared that the Republican Candidate had, what she called, a ‘memory problem’.⁸⁴² None of the authors mentioned psychohistory in their analyses – and their analyses of the analyses – of the presidential candidate. And yet their preoccupations, the questions that they asked and raised, were, in a sense, psychohistorical. What the APA Taskforce objected to in their report *The Psychiatrist as Psychohistorian* in 1976 – the application of psychological labels to living political figures – is still being done, forty years later. One cannot fully appreciate the preoccupation with the psychological analysis of a presidential candidate without an understanding of the history of psychohistory.

The history of psychohistory is the history of a failed movement. It is the story of how two discourses were soldered together in a way that produced interesting individual works, but failed to become institutionalised and widely recognised as a (semi-)independent discipline. Erik Erikson was right to emphasise the awkwardness of the union between psychoanalysis and history by his hyphenation of the term ‘psycho-history’. And as his follower Robert Lifton wrote: ‘Generally speaking, I would say that not only do the two traditions often work at cross-purposes; worse, each has something of an impulse to eliminate the other.’⁸⁴³ I would add that, arguably, the works that were most successful and had sustained public reception were those where the author clearly located his or her work in one of psychohistory’s two parent disciplines. For example, Erikson’s work is powerful and inspiring because it remains psychoanalytic literature, enriched by the insights of history. Similarly, Peter Gay’s work has a broad appeal because it is decidedly historical, but uses insights from psychoanalysis to support its arguments. Generally speaking, applied psychoanalysis aims to show that people of all ages had similar psychological constitutions; historical writing tends to emphasise the differences between the experience of people in different times and places. A marriage of the two is lopsided at best; unconvincing and contrived at worst.

I was surprised to find that the history of psychohistory was, and still is, very emotionally laden. It happened more than once that someone I interviewed cried when he spoke about the project. For its earliest practitioners, the marriage of psychoanalysis and history obviously held a lot of promise. Erikson’s work, well-written and clever, provided a blueprint for attempts to bring together the two disciplines. When William Langer, an authoritative voice

⁸³⁷ Carey, Benedict. ‘The psychiatric question: Is it fair to analyze Trump from afar?’, *The New York Times*. August 15, 2016.

⁸³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸³⁹ Alford, Henry. ‘Is Donald Trump Actually a Narcissist? Therapists Weigh in!’, *Vanity Fair*. November 11, 2015.

⁸⁴⁰ McAdams, Dan P. ‘The Mind of Donald Trump’, *The Atlantic*. June 2016.

⁸⁴¹ Blum, Bill. ‘The Psychopathology of Donald Trump’. *The Huffington Post*, August 3, 2016.

(http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bill-blum/the-psychopathology-of-do_1_b_11286500.html)

⁸⁴² Thrush, Glenn. ‘Jill Stein: Trump may have “memory problem”’. *Politico*, September 19, 2016.

(<http://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/jill-stein-trump-may-have-memory-problem-228346>)

⁸⁴³ Lifton, Robert J., and Eric Olsen. *Explorations in Psychohistory: The Wellfleet Papers*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974. 23.

among professional historians, sanctioned the use of psychoanalysis within history, this gave historians the green light for the construction of a movement. At its zenith, psychohistory presented itself as an important emancipatory project which defended the standpoints of a variety of subaltern groups, while it was religiously propagated and debated by its adherents. Psychohistory's opponents responded to the movement with an intensity that invited the use of some form of psychological terminology. Today, the remnants of the movement are being watched over hawkishly by a host of intellectuals who consider themselves heirs to an important and unjustly embattled tradition. For people involved in the project there was a lot at stake; the failure to find resonance inside and outside academia was a genuine disappointment. For people looking from the outside in, psychohistory appeared like a 'fad' or a 'hype' – a freakish extension of the infiltration of culture at large by psychoanalytic terminology and practice.

But psychohistory was more than just a passing fad. It raised serious and important questions about the disciplines it was born out of. Within psychoanalysis, it questioned the universality of the discipline's central concepts by historicising them. It showed how an individual derives a sense of self from the symbols that are handed to him *in* and *through* history. Within historiography, psychohistory emphasised the importance of the subjective experience of historical actors as it showed that psychical facts could have actual implications. It also problematised the objectivity of the historian, by showing that he or she too brings his or her subjective experience to the writing of history. It showed that in any explanation of the behaviour of persons in the past there are 'implicit psychologies' at work, and it forced the historian to become aware of these implicit psychological frameworks. Psychohistory appears to have been transgressive for both psychoanalysts and historians, because it confronted them with the limitations and taboos of their own practices. Although it is questionable to what extent the issues that psychohistory raised are recognised by modern-day historians and psychoanalysts as legitimate issues, a history of psychohistory provides a unique window onto these two disciplines and it seeks to bring these issues back to attention. On the one hand, it forms a contribution to the history of psychoanalysis; on the other hand, it is a contribution to the history of writing history and biography. And in an age of interdisciplinarity, it highlights the pitfalls and difficulties facing hybrid combinations of disciplines. Any historian, biographer or psychoanalyst who takes his craft seriously should at least have reflected upon them. The legacy of psychohistory is a plea for introspection, and provides a series of questions to guide it, if not a promise that those questions might, some day, be answered.

Appendix 1.

Richard Schoenwald's Teaching Syllabus
GUPH Newsletter, March-May 1972

Section 1: Reading: Freud, A General Introduction to Psycho-Analysis, pp. 19-142.

Assignment: Select an entry not longer than 1,000 words in either the Dictionary of American Biography or Dictionary of National Biography and analyze it psychoanalytically.

Section 2: Reading: Freud, General Introduction, pp. 143-471.

Assignment: Analyze an entry about a woman in the DAB or DWB.

Section 3: Reading: Freud, New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, pp. 5-182.

Assignment: Take something written by an historian about the status of women as a group and analyze it using Freudian theory.

Section 4: Reading: Otto Rank, The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, pp. 65-96, 184-210.
Carl Jung, Man and His Symbols, pp. 3-94, 97-156, 325-374.

Assignment: Select something written about a woman in a contemporary newspaper or magazine and then analyze the material using both Rank and Jung.

Section 5: Reading: Heinz Hartmann, et. al., Papers on Psychoanalytic Psychology, pp. 7-116, and 144-181.

Assignment: Read a biography about a woman who died before 1900; write an analytic essay about the same woman.

Section 6: Reading: Erikson, 'Womanhood and Inner Space,' and 'Reflections on the Dissent of Contemporary Youth,' Insight and Responsibility.

Assignment: In the final paper students were asked to select a topic which would lend itself to psychological explication: women, child-rearing patterns, biography, etc. They were asked to use a variety of analytic approaches, demonstrating what they had understood from the prior readings. In addition, they were asked to avoid an intra-psychic analysis – more emphasis needed to be placed on showing how human beings operate within a social setting, how they learn about the world in which they live, and how they adapt to it.

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