

The Repressed and the Projected in Psychohistory

Temporality and Resistance

The existence of any discipline is tied to, and intelligible in relation to, a temporal continuum. Its past is woven into the present and the future. For Heidegger the future is "the primary meaning of existentiality",¹ self-projection being grounded in it. Nevertheless, human as well as disciplinary existentiality may have a great future behind itself, in the past. The history of wished-for futures is full of the repressed, full of fixations and censored passages that could reveal, if unearthed, several vicissitudes of human/disciplinary desire. In order to analyze the schemas of desire, we need to look backwards (involving feedback systems) as well as forwards (involving feed-forward systems): wished-for futures have powers of retrospection and propection. When psychohistorians manage to create a "facilitating environment", they can proceed with playful transitions, and relate to themselves "by going on being".²

St Augustine argued in his *Confessions* that, strictly speaking, there were three time periods in the human mind: "a present of past things" ("the memory"), "a present of present things" ("direct perception") and "a present of future things" ("expectation").³ These varieties of the present form dynamic, experiential temporality. As Freud saw it, dreams cancel the future by seizing its wished-for contents and offering them in the present tense. Thus the future shown in dreams and fantasies "is not the one which *will* occur but the one which we should *like* to occur."⁴ What we wish, we believe. The optative mood is what we, as desiring and time-bound human creatures, are devoted to, and the future is constantly suppressed and replaced by a dream or fantasy representation in the here and now. The mobile of interconnected wishful states is the basis of mental temporality. "Past, present and future are strung together, as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them," Freud mentions, adding, "The wish makes use of an occasion in the present to construct, on the pattern of the past, a picture of the future."⁵ It is the analyst's, and also the psychohistorian's, responsibility to study temporal enactments and desirousness, to anticipate resolutely one's "potentiality-for-Being", coming toward oneself.⁶

¹ Heidegger (1927), pp. 375-376.

² Winnicott (1965).

³ Augustine (1961), p. 269.

⁴ Freud (1901), p. 674. – On Freud's account of human temporality, see Bowie (1993), pp. 16-21. Bowie argues that Freud diminished the role of the future in scientific enquiry in two main ways: first, by postulating an unconscious without any reference to the future, or to time at all; second, by applying a method of rational analysis that grants causal authority to past events; see Bowie (1993), p. 20.

⁵ Freud (1908), p. 148.

⁶ Heidegger (1927), p. 372.

Psychohistorical perspectives trace historical motivations to the development of human desires, emotions, fantasies, defenses, dependencies, and self-/object representations and relations. Psychohistorical conceptions (for example, child-rearing mode, group fantasy, psychoclass, the leader as a delegate and as a poison container, traumatic reliving) are used in connection with biographical information about childhood, youth and family background of the subjects/actors (both individual and collective) of history. Psychohistory was first heavily oriented toward psychoanalysis, and thus to unconscious motivations and intrapsychic undercurrents of historical (later also current) events. (On the origins of psychoanalytic psychohistory, see Pietikainen and Ihanus⁷.) Rudolph Binion has called this applied psychoanalysis a "false start",⁸ since it easily led psychohistorians to neglect the close reading of historic records while reading into them psychoanalytic patient records. Clinical concern for the assessment and psychodiagnosis of personality tended to infiltrate psychohistorical-psychobiographical research, thus stressing individual psychological issues instead of large-scale human group processes and interactions.

Early researchers of budding psychohistory were psychoanalysts, psychiatrists and psychologists who often lacked the skills for sound historical research. Historical records usually have a shortage of detailed data on childhood and sometimes even on youth. Thus, psychobiographical developmental interpretations often have to be made from scant data, but related to the careful study of historical records they may give intriguing and unique insights into the doings of man.

Different kinds of psychological theories can be used for psychohistorical and psychobiographical purposes. (On psychobiography and psychological interpretations of history, see also Elms⁹, McAdams and Ochberg¹⁰ and Runyan¹¹.) No pregiven theory should totally determine psychological interpretations of history. These theories were traditionally mostly psychoanalytic or, more broadly, psychodynamic. This theoretical orientation reached saturation in the 1970s. Since then there have been more eclectic trends, mixing and modifying earlier traditions with ego-psychological, object-relations, humanistic and phenomenological, as well as social-psychological, cognitive-psychological and even evolutionary-psychological impacts in their links to personality, developmental, motivational and social-interactional issues. Psychohistorical materials and ways of interpreting are nowadays often included in biographies. The history of mentalities, gender history, gay and lesbian history as well as the history of emotions also often verge on psychohistory.¹²

There have been some historical transformations of psychohistory, from its beginnings (in psychoanalytically-oriented psychohistory and psychobiography), via deMausean "new science", to the present inter- and cross-disciplinary permutations

⁷ Pietikainen & Ihanus (2003).

⁸ Binion (2000), pp. 133, 138.

⁹ Elms (1994).

¹⁰ McAdams & Ochberg (1988).

¹¹ Runyan (1982) and Runyan (1988).

¹² Binion (2001).

(within the neurosciences, the social sciences and evolutionary psychology, for example) that are projected as potentialities-for-being into the future. Psychohistory, while dealing with experiential temporality, is itself immersed in temporal desirousness. It is based on human passions and their repression and projection. Its quest is for the emotional-motivational "why" of history, for the effects of crucial developmental interactions and interdependencies on history and historical settings. Psychohistorians use their own emotions, desires, fantasies, identifications, symptoms, defenses and transferences as working tools in order to recognize what is "out there" ("Da-sein") on the basis of what is "in here" ("Drinnen-sein").

The research transferences of a psychohistorian should be open to detecting blind alleys and spots in one's own and others' previous research. Such transformative endeavors include tolerating multiversities of co-existing visions, co-operating in and co-constructing fruitful research projects.¹³ Resistance to psychohistory and psychohistorical research is not restricted to its "opponents": it is also manifested among psychohistorians themselves, in both individual and group fantasies and processes. Different forms of resistance and transference in the psychically disturbing research field of psychohistory can be identified.

Psychohistory itself deals with psychically threatening issues. David Beisel¹⁴ identified five sources of resistance to applying psychological principles in Holocaust scholarship. The first is the denial of psychology in an anti-psychological society. The second has to do with the real weaknesses in psychohistorical scholarship. Third, the distressing nature of such research produces defensive reactions. The fourth is the encounter with existential meaninglessness that has previously been part of psychological torture. Fifth and last is the denunciation of psychology, psychoanalysis and psychohistory that allows the denouncers to avoid psychological statements of their own. John Fanton¹⁵ has recategorized Beisel's five sources of resistance in the context of psychohistory. The first and fourth refer to large groups of people, to "psychoclasses". The second concerns psychohistorians themselves, and the third and fifth show that the subject matter of psychohistory has intense emotional content, inflicting upon individuals great psychological turmoil and strong, often quite inflexible defenses against it.

Fear (of depression, for example) is the starting point of diagnosing the enemy as altogether absurd and bad, someone to be (manic-victoriously) excluded and finally eliminated – so that one need never again feel and face one's own murderous intolerance. Exclusions pave the way for intolerant and arrogant doctrinal swaddling: "Shut your mouth! You must not disturb us (the righteous ones) any longer with your nonsense and heretical conceptions." The "rational" judge of false absurdities is already swathed in his/her judgment, bound by his/her truth conviction. Binding and leading theories, dogmas and ideologies substitute critical thinking and reciprocal tolerance, alleviating anxieties through the narcissistic satisfaction and fulfillment that comes "from having conquered or won the love object, annihilating that person's separateness and replacing it with a fantasy 'twin-

¹³ Ihanus (2001), p. 45.

¹⁴ Beisel (1999), p. 133.

¹⁵ Fanton (2001), pp. 128-129.

ship"¹⁶. Narcissistic scholarly heroes are continuously monitoring and seeking victims "who will reflect back their importance and who can also be the receptacle for their off-loaded shame and envy."¹⁷

The phases or cycles (of history, abuse, group-fantasy) that psychohistorians intend to study are not solely "out there", but are also discernible among themselves and in their internal temporality. To be prospective is to be inventive and imaginative in temporality, to experiment with futurity and transform the "fated" future (the depressed and narcoleptic futility state, with a short time perspective and short-range plans) into a more open and potential "destiny"¹⁸: I am thinking here of the "flourishing" profusion state with a long time perspective and long-range plans.

The potential (actual), the playful, the proleptic and the positively projective and prospective in the psychohistorical discipline are not reached without recognizing manifestations of the repressed and of highly narcissistic group protectiveness under severe and prolonged stress. These protective maneuvers include the pursuit of dissent, strict polarization between the in-group and the out-group (accentuating the positive characteristics of the in-group), the safeguarding of disciplinary blocks, and social control over group members (ranging from subtle group pressures to fierce penalism against violators).

Infantile Attractors and the Futural

Psychohistorians may also turn to repressions of criticism, to the pursuit of the enemy and subsequent retaliation, and to unfounded projections of purification and salvation fantasies. Psychohistorical knowledge can be both liberating and illusory, and includes sequences of insights and fabrications. Both workings-through and aporias form the landscape of psychohistorical research. A psychohistorical research "object" can serve as a target for several projections. Even the psychohistorical endeavor can be burdened, made to carry burdens of our "madness", aggression, depression, anxiety, humiliation, submissiveness and narcissistic wounds.

Psychohistory has often been "beaten", reviled and neglected, the object of anger and rage. It has been shamed and ridiculed. Tradition (the past) and invention (the present) prepare for the becoming of the other (the future(s)). Even in psychohistory, interpretation terrorism may become a secure sanctuary behind the walls of which bitter eliminatory rhetoric attacks the imagined enemies. Destructive urges invalidate, through the act of self-defense, such enemies, taking vengeance on them, humiliating and subjugating them. A more loving (non-possessive) reception of the other is hard to develop, but it would make mutual relations more constructive, thus improving the understanding of oneself and the other.

In psychohistorians, as in all human subjects, various flows of new information are often drawn into unconscious, repressed "infantile attractors"¹⁹ (childhood

¹⁶ Hotchkiss (2002), p. 109.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ cf. Bollas (1991).

¹⁹ Palombo (1999), pp. 182-184.

feelings, object representations, memories, associations and fantasies). These act as filters (and capturers) of current conscious adult experience (mental contents), "narrowing down the band width of its input",²⁰ and encompassing ever larger areas of a psychohistorian's experience.²¹ Psychohistorians are in a position to explore the attractors' mode of operation, in the outer world and among themselves, in individuals, in small and large groups, in social, political, cultural, economic and technological contexts. It is through psychohistorical interpretations, or "perturbations",²² that the attractors acquire complexity, dimensionality and differentiation.

Thus, behaviors (representations, associations, memories, fantasies) become less stale and less rigidly determined, and the "grammars", or rule sets of the attractors are more flexibly extended. This process of flexible exploration also applies to theoretical and methodological patterns of research. Thus, psychohistorians will no longer stubbornly stick to a single definitive theory, exclaiming, "Show me your 'facts' and 'theory', and I will show you my better facts and more extensive (more penetrating-into-truth, more legitimate) theory." By reaching out for reciprocal and fertile cross-disciplinary relations, psychohistorians can make trans-theoretical and trans-methodological advances, not as purveyors of the truth, but as promoters of knowledge and understanding in action, caught in the act of forming and transforming, semantically, somatically, intellectually and emotionally.

As long as the past with its transformed living on in present relations and future perspectives remains unacknowledged, transferences and countertransferences remain fixed in endless and compulsive reiteration of the past. On the other hand, reappraisals and workings-through are accompanied by transformative transferences and countertransferences that break the "should" of the past in favor of the affirmation of change. The "ecstasy" ("Ekstase" in Heidegger, not stasis) of disciplinary change and invention is related to the rediscovery of a futurity that is intrinsic to human passions. The present tense of "theory" is always its terminal state out of which one has to steer toward anticipation that makes existence "authentically futural"²³.

The "futural" in psychohistory also has to do with the latest advances in the fields of evolutionary and cultural studies, of neuroscientific and various kinds of psychological research focusing on developmental life-cycle processes, attachment, parenting, coping, and co-adaptive strategies in relation to physical, psychical and socio-cultural environments. Trauma research (concerning the impact of trauma on the psyche, on history, on politics) has long been one of the main issues in psychohistory. In fact, developmental determinism within the traditional psychoanalytic frame of reference does not, to any large extent, encompass present-day psychohistory or even many psychoanalytic fields.

²⁰ Palombo (1999), p. 194.

²¹ cf. *ibid.*, p. 205.

²² Moran (1991).

²³ Heidegger (1927), p. 373.

Criticisms and New Directions

This is not to advocate the exclusion of well-argued criticism of psychohistory, of which there is some measure in recent German scholarship, for example in *Kritik der Psychohistorie* edited by Nyssen and Jüngst.²⁴ Any critical work that is not totally hostile, and that purports to add to the co-construction of psychohistorical endeavors, deserves keen attention among psychohistorians. Criticism may add to their self-reflection and self-understanding, and help to safeguard them against complacency, deep-rooted belief systems and simplified reductionism. They should certainly be more informed about approaches other than the psychoanalytic and the psychodynamic: about current research on family history, on gender history, on social and cultural history, on the history of mentalities, and on microhistory. Still, for psychohistorians, history is never a totally external force: it is not just something that happens to people.²⁵

There are undoubtedly simplifications, poorly nuanced socio-cultural contexts, temptations to pathologize, theoretical and interpretive fixations and rhetorical seductions inherent in psychohistorical studies. Still, the matrix of psychohistory is stratified and many-splendored. Analyzing the lack of love (or the lack of sensitivity and mutuality), as reflected in history, politics and economics, is not an easy task. It demands recognition of its effects on the psychohistorians themselves – in their transference to research "objects", and in their countertransference to other researchers' interpretations.

Independence should not mean isolationism from other fields of research. Psychohistorians need to embark on inter- and cross-disciplinary projects that, at their best, build bridges, transform strict disciplinary identities and fertilize co-constructive research development. Some may perceive this move as a threat in terms of losing one's distinct specialty, one's uniqueness. Neither does independence mean indifference to other voices: it rather fosters empathy. There will, of course, be mutual projective identifications on "both sides", which could lead to fragmentation. If insightfully analyzed, however, they may also lead to more integration.

German critics of psychohistory in the work edited by Nyssen and Jüngst tend to use socio-psychological cultural criticism as a secure basis for explaining irrational flights from freedom. DeMause, on the other hand, conceives of such flights as reflecting the inability to cope with individual freedom that is too threatening and full of dangerous emotions – salvation from fears of "maternal engulfment" is a manic flight from internal reality to external action.²⁶ Problems and traumas associated with developmental social affective-cognitive processes in the separation-individuation process are bypassed by the critics. For example, Nyssen suggests "political consciousness" and the mentality of "rationality and greed", rather than the unconscious emotional motivations of politics, economics and technology, as explanatory premises.²⁷ Is this not the very drive-based "perpetual

²⁴ Nyssen & Jüngst (2003).

²⁵ cf. Stein (1994), p. 131.

²⁶ for example, deMause (2002), Chapter 5.

²⁷ Nyssen (2003a), pp. 52-68.

abstraction"²⁸ of which he accuses deMause? Through the genuine act of rationalization, Nyssen evaluates the "risk society"²⁹ as an equally important area as "traumatized childhood".³⁰ Is this not a flight from the inner emotional source of social institutions and actions to institutional external reality?

The German work as a whole raises the question of where, and in what directions, psychohistorians should seek sources of renewal for their research and theories. Its authors show signs of moving toward the social and cultural sciences. Bruce Mazlish has lately spoken in favor of "the possibility of a psychohistorically oriented social psychology".³¹ The "Next Assignment" as conceived by Mazlish is to construct "a theoretically strong and integrated psychohistorical social psychology" and to implement it "in detailed, diverse studies."³² (Historical social psychology was suggested already by Kenneth Gergen in 1973³³.) There are other possibilities, however, and not only among psychoanalytic reformulations. I am referring here to the connections between psychohistory and the natural sciences, evolutionary theory and the neurosciences. We may witness in the future the emergence of new fields such as evolutionary psychohistory and neuropsychology (with the cumulative support of already existing evolutionary psychology, neuro-psychoanalysis and cognitive neuroscience).

Back in 1989 in his article "The Role of Adaptation and Selection in Psychohistorical Evolution" Lloyd deMause sketched a "robust" theory of psychohistorical evolution, with its six central hypotheses: "(1) that the individual, not the culture, is the locus of evolution; (2) that childhood adaptations provide the source of all variations; (3) that adult adaptations furnish the occasion for group and environmental selection; (4) that the selected personality types and therefore cultural practices are highly dependent upon the peculiar evolutionary history of the group; (5) that cultural traits and historical movements contain shared defenses constructed to handle the abandonment depression resulting from lack of parental love; and (6) that these defenses have periodically moved from rage directed outwards to self-destructiveness directed inward, from intergroup belligerence to sacrifice, from war to economic depression."³⁴ He linked this theoretical perspective to Gerald M. Edelman's "neural Darwinism",³⁵ which focuses on the evolution of the brain as a selective process, thus discarding vitalist concepts (such as "will" and "desire").

Thus, the initiative toward combining evolutionary psychohistory and neuropsychology has already been taken. This emergent field will help in alleviating

²⁸ Nyssen (2003b).

²⁹ Beck (1986).

³⁰ Nyssen (2003a), p. 54.

³¹ Mazlish (2003), p. 256.

³² *ibid.*, p. 261.

³³ Gergen (1973); see also Gergen & Gergen (1984).

³⁴ deMause (1989), pp. 359-360.

³⁵ Edelman (1987). – Mazlish has stressed the continuum between Darwin and Freud: "Within the overall context of Darwinian, Freudian, and subsequent thinking along their lines, we must pursue the intersection of the two forces, the physical and the cultural 'vestiges' of human evolution. In undertaking parts of this task, psychohistory, whatever its other limitations, has already done valuable service to humanity." Mazlish (2003), p. 257.

the sterility of social and cultural theory that is visible in huge piles of historical research, and also partly in the theoretical perspectives presented in the German work edited by Nyssen and Jüngst. Biological or psychological evolution is not conceived of by deMause as something teleological, as parents emotionally instilling into their children "preparations" for adult life. According to deMause³⁶, improvements in childrearing do not depend on a kind of "progressive" teleology, on the belief in evolutionary progress (the rule of the empathic), of which he is often accused. Neither does the evolutionary tendency of organisms toward complexity and flexible co-adaptation depend on inevitable teleology. Nevertheless, the absence of progressive teleology is no reason to pull out of actions and programs that are planned to improve parenting and the living conditions of children.

Psychohistory includes basic areas such as the psychogenic history of childhood, the psychogenic theory of history and the anthropology of "homo relatens" (as opposed to the anthropology of economic or political man). German critics have accused deMausean psychohistory of a "lack of complexity", of giving priority solely to the psychological determinants (individual motivations) of the historical and political scenario, and thus of dismissing concepts such as "society", "social class", "social structure", and "social institution", and even "culture" and "power", as sociological "myths" and "holistic" constructs. According to Nyssen, this abandonment of "social and cultural facts", while psychohistory is striving to become an "exact science", is the great fallacy of independent psychohistory.³⁷

Social dynamics (the dialectics of individual and social dynamics) is at least favored by the German critics (over psychodynamics), and social and cultural studies are presented as relevant guiding disciplines for psychohistory. In the spirit of the dialectics of Enlightenment and the critical theory of the Frankfurt school, authors steer psychohistory in the direction of social-psychological psychohistory, socialization theory and institutional and ideological criticism. The critics do not reject the psychohistorical project, however. They consider it necessary – not as an independent and isolationist field, but as an area for questioning and researching, together with other disciplines, the relations of human development, emotions and motivations to historical and current social action. This assessment is in itself, of course, an area for further questioning and research in terms of the independence of psychohistory.

Good Enough Futures

The interdisciplinary dialogue may still be in its infancy among many scientists, and also among many psychohistorians. But the emergence and unfolding of an autonomous self is based on emotional, relational and communicative capacities developed in diverse attachment relationships and interactions.³⁸ Stubborn insistence on disciplinary independence can hide the traumatic failure to relate creatively to

³⁶ deMause (2002), *passim*.

³⁷ Nyssen (2003a,b).

³⁸ cf., for example, Schore (1994, 2003).

others, and to negotiate about meanings while making sense of the stratified research field.

Opening up new vistas may sometimes require intuitive fantasies and unconfirmed but exciting constructions. To discuss the implications of these personal equations and immersions would require more attention and critical awareness than has been hitherto the practice in scientific evaluation. Psychohistorians do not possess any magical divining rods or predictive skills.

Psychohistory has to depend on relevant documents, consistent concepts, the parsimony and coverage of theories, and empirically testable hypotheses. Psychohistorians have to build on careful observations and to make clear assumptions about the "order of things". They have to be keenly aware of, and to pull together, the relevant materials, and to search for general principles, models or paradigms. They have to accept the possible biases and errors and the tentative nature of their conclusions. They also have to be ready to participate in public and social self-criticism and re-evaluation of their research results.

Besides logical-epistemological criteria, there are subjective criteria (emotional and intellectual conviction) for the validation of a psychohistorical thesis. Binion has also proposed that a psychohistorical thesis is confirmed if "the known evidence all runs its way", if that thesis "could potentially be refuted by new evidence", and if finally any piece of what that thesis purports to explain "cannot very well be explained otherwise".³⁹

It may be that, nowadays, psychohistorical research has heuristic value and functional applicability while pointing to historical and current issues concerning the self and others (loss of identity, fragmentation, regression, transition) at the crossroads of psychological development, personality formation, political behavior and cultural transformation. The leap from intrapsychic to intra- and inter-group processes is, however, a tedious one, and it has not been unproblematic in many psychohistorical studies. The individual-psychological conceptions do not easily lend themselves to being linked to large historical and societal vistas.

Disciplinary purity crusades manifest urges to split and departmentalize, for example along the lines of C. P. Snow's "two cultures".⁴⁰ Thus, William McKinley Runyan has asked whether psychology departments should be divided into "Science A (cognitive neuroscience)" and "Science B (human and historical science)".⁴¹ Those who want to preserve the clear lines of demarcation hardly ever argue like Runyan does: "Is psychology about cognitive neuroscience? Or about human behavior and experience in social, cultural, and historical contexts? Clearly both."⁴² Within the framework provided by complex systems theory, there is neither such an urgent "need to adjudicate between the respective claims"⁴³ of, say, genetic, neuroscientific, psychoanalytic, object-relational, cognitive, humanistic and socio-cultural

³⁹ Binion (2001).

⁴⁰ Snow (1959).

⁴¹ Runyan (2003), p. 129.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 130.

⁴³ Carroll et al. (2003), p. 4.

approaches. Each approach and its interrelation with other approaches can be given its due.

The interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary futures of the psychohistorical project call for changing transmigratory and transitory identities, for facing and interfacing the uncompletable (not perfect) excitement of reciprocal time-bound disciplines, the mobile of interconnected memories, perceptions and anticipations, coming toward the ever transient present. There will be new emergent structures (intrinsic to the structures of human passions, and to the mind-brain of the psychohistorians) built at higher levels of self-organization in the psychohistorical process. Undoubtedly, there will also be new "narratives" and "metanarratives"⁴⁴ in storying the selves of psychohistorians, and in minding psychohistory.

To put it bluntly, projection refers to future plans and projects. On the other hand, in its psychological meaning, it refers to the projection not only of the unconscious, repressed "bad self" -representations, but also of the unconscious, repressed "good self" -representations, onto the outside world, onto the other's faces that reflect one's own unknown faces. However, you can never leave the past so far behind that you cannot stumble over it – even at the height of your bright future dreams.

I hope this prolusion of mine has not caused too much confusion – that it has infused you with the courage to seek, through interlocution, some potential in the psychohistorical endeavor. This is one of the wished-for futures of psychohistory. I, as a prolocutor, argue that it is not so bad – that it is good enough.

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⁴⁴ Bruner (1998).

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