

Cultural Theory and Psychoanalytic Tradition

David James Fisher

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David James Fisher

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 1991 by Transaction Publishers

Published 2017 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

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Library of Congress Catalog Number: 90-23582

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication

Cultural theory and psychoanalytic tradition / David James Fisher.

p. cm. -- (History of ideas series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-88738-387-4

1. Psychoanalysis and culture. 2. Psychoanalysis--History. 3. Psychohistory. I. Title. II. Series: History of ideas series (New Brunswick, N.J.)

BF175.4.C84F57 1991

150.19'5--dc20

CIP

90-23582

ISBN 13: 978-1-4128-0859-0 (pbk)

Dedicated to my loving and beloved wife, Karen L. Fund



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Introduction

I

In September of 1973, I defended my doctoral thesis in the field of European cultural history. I was two months shy of my twenty-seventh birthday. My doctoral defense was hardly of the nightmarish quality, the rumors of which circulate as graduate students move toward the end of their studies. My jury was composed of three inspiring teachers; I knew in advance that they would all show up, read my extremely lengthy manuscript, and that they genuinely wished me well. The trio was composed of George L. Mosse, my major professor and gracious host, the French social historian Harvey Goldberg, and the French literary critic, Germaine Brée. The setting was Mosse's living room in Madison, a comfortable and familiar ambiance to me because my former wife and I had lived downstairs in the Mosse residence for one year and a half during an earlier phase of my training.

I had affectionate, relatively intimate relations with the professors on the committee; each one had influenced me deeply and, as it turns out, permanently. Mosse and Brée were Europeans, although markedly different in cultural training, sensibility, style of intellectual life, teaching methods, and in relating to their favorite students. Goldberg, it should be noted, was from New Jersey, but he lived half the time in Paris and was so knowledgeable about and enamored of French socialist and radical political movements that he had adopted a Parisian

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persona. Mosse was a German-Jewish refugee from fascism, highly educated and erudite, a powerful public speaker with a booming, trumpet-like voice and beautiful diction; through his example and his pedagogy, he encouraged his students to learn about the cultural legacy of the past. He emphasized the convergences of “high” cultural life with politics, social movements, and popular forms of culture, which he seldom denigrated as “vulgar.” He expected, rather demanded, that we conduct our research and theorizing as competent scholars, with respect for the empirical data and primary sources of history. “Facts and documents!” George would bellow.

The antifascist, liberal Mosse was enlivened by his dialogue with mostly left-wing male Jewish graduate students in and around the University of Wisconsin; he had a more difficult time with female graduate students, quite unlike Brée. He loved to argue and to disagree, challenging us, teasing us, exhorting us to sharpen our critical viewpoints. Critical analysis was not just an ideal; in his lectures and discussions with us, he demonstrated it, took pleasure in it. Most importantly, he was a presence, a vital and vitalizing presence, someone who listened to us attentively, someone who forced us to reexamine our facile assumptions and sweeping conclusions. If he opposed sloganeering and posturing, he also showed us how to pose tough, nonsentimental questions about historical reality. Mosse stressed the ambiguities of historical choice, the finite possibilities of action in specific historical contexts; his perspective was particularly salutary in the late 1960s and early 1970s when utopian thinking was prevalent, when the thought that everything was possible widely proliferated. He urged us to be skeptical of the moral zeal and revolutionary ardor fueling the politics, theorizing, and theatrics of the New Left in precisely the period of my graduate studies.

As soon as it became clear to me that my doctoral defense was designed to be a conversation about transforming my thesis, *Romain Rolland and the Question of the Intellectual*, into a book, that no one wished to trip me up or humiliate me, I relaxed; I even enjoyed myself. Here I was with three gifted individuals having a civilized, impassioned, relatively high-powered discussion about a European intellectual of another era. Not a trial at all, the dialogue was conducted with verve, with receptivity to the issues I raised, acknowledging that they were worth investigating, that something valuable,

namely a scholarly book and articles might emerge out of this. That book, it should be noted, was published, but not quickly and certainly not without much anguish as to its significance to a post-1960s audience—to a changed environment that I perceived as indifferent to and nonaffirming of my work.

I had developed a powerful, primarily positive unconscious transference to Mosse and to his variety of doing history. He practiced a form of European cultural history which eludes generalizations or distinct categories. It was fundamentally European in that he had inherited an imaginative, learned version of examining how cultural activity converged with politics. He handled ideas and abstractions adeptly, though he preferred to link theoretical developments to more specific historical and cultural contexts; he did not engage in speculation for the love of speculation. He exercised a vast power over me. He exuded a self-assurance, a verbal facility, and a knowledge of what questions really mattered. Some exceptionally bright students found him irremediably arrogant and pompous; I found him stimulating and fascinating; I identified with his outrageousness; I resonated to his intuitions. Mosse was bored by lengthy discussions of historical methodology and historiography, believing that such concerns disguised a loss of creativity on the part of the working historian.

His method was both simple and hard to emulate. Cultural history had to enlighten and to provoke thinking on the part of its audience—whether it was lecturing to undergraduates in a large hall, reflecting on issues in small seminars of pipe smokers, or communicating to one's scholarly readership. When Mosse practiced it, it could also be compelling, entertaining, contentious, even if it was always directed toward the rethinking of established pieties and received opinion. Mosse's cultural history probed the motivations, conscious and unconscious, of historical choice in concrete moments; it also investigated symbolic or emotional modes of thinking, including the impact of the irrational on the historical development of nationalism, fascism, and modern cultural movements.

It was critical in that cultural history went together with critiques, with sophisticated methods of analyzing texts, documents, and a wide variety of cultural artifacts. To engage in a critique implied a capacity to understand relationships and processes. Cultural critique also meant being suspicious of one's self and of one's own assumptions, methods

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of inquiry, prejudices, and theoretical inclination, especially those which overly estimated the dominance of reason. Mosse's approach was never antitheoretical or anti-intellectual, but theory was subordinated to an inquiry into its uses and abuses, its application and misapplication by particular individuals or groups in particular circumstances. Cultural history was elevated into more than a sterile academic discipline, not some peripheral subspecialty of European history. He practiced it as if it were a legitimate way of life, advocating it as an authentic way of being, a dynamic way of interacting with and making sense out of the world. Mosse, it should be noted, tempered his seriousness with a playfulness and an ironic view of himself; he avoided a spirit of intellectual heaviness and was rarely pedantic, quite capable of laughing at himself.

I was catalyzed by this heady notion of European cultural history and cultural critique, especially by the European dimension of it. I developed a naive, messianic belief in its mission. In the politicized and radicalized atmosphere of Madison, Wisconsin, I, too, had acquired a political and radical consciousness, jettisoning my own family's allegiance to a comfortable liberalism of the FDR and Adlai Stevenson variety. I became convinced that the study of history was not some antiquarian activity involving the exploration of dead issues about dead people from the dead and distant past. Contemporary history, say from the Paris Commune of 1871, or from the First World War, remained close to the anxieties of the present, that is, my own concerns.

Fantasy also played a major role in my "convictions" about history. I had spent a year in Paris in the early 1970s and I immersed myself in the study of French intellectual and cultural life. I resonated to the controversies and I craved the esteem that writers exercised over their public. I desired one day to be a voice heard on the Left Bank of Paris, imagining that I might enter this universe, master its discourses and secret codes, even speak French with an impeccable Parisian accent. In short, I fantasized that I would become warmly welcomed, perhaps find a home, a community, a new family, as well as a sophisticated mode of thinking and articulating myself.

This wishful fantasy was not fulfilled. But it took me several years to recognize it. Meanwhile just weeks after graduating with my doctorate, I returned to Paris in the fall of 1973 for another two years of

advanced studies at the Sixième Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, now known as the Research Institute for Higher Studies in the Social Sciences. There, under the generous tutelage of Georges Haupt, an astute scholar of socialism and communism of Romanian origin who had trained in the Soviet Union, I entered a post-doctoral seminar. It was conceived of as the “Geography of Marxism,” investigating the penetration and diffusion of Marxism into the “space” of Europe and the world since the 1880s. At first it was an intimidating then a marvelous learning experience.

Haupt brought together a colorful rogues gallery of international post-1960s Marxist types, ranging from Gramscians, Lukacsians, Karl Kautskians, dissident French Communists, Austro-Marxists, Althusserians, critical theorists, anarcho-Marxists, worker self-management Marxists, dissident Catholic Marxists, academic Marxists, independent scholars of Marxism, porno-Marxists—a kitchen sink of Marxists. Many of these scholars had completed the prestigious state doctoral thesis in France, usually consisting of a minimum of ten years of work and the production of a tome of over one thousand pages; several had published numerous books on Marxist themes or had contributed to the history of Marxism.

Haupt gathered these diverse thinkers together. Besides his considerable charm and knowledge, the glue was the seminar meetings every second week, usually to explore work in progress. And what discussions they were: incisive, contentious, well-informed, rigorous, partisan, unsparing. After two years of serious debate and contestation, very little consensus emerged. In fact, the seminar could not even agree on a definition of Marxism, except to acknowledge that Marxism was a dialectical method of analysis and a variety of social movements that developed in Europe during the 1880s that had something to do with a commitment to reason and to the understanding of the class nature of society and history. I mention this absence of consensus within Parisian Marxist circles in the period 1973 to 1975, shortly before the crisis and perhaps total collapse of Marxist inspired regimes, prior to the demoralization and defeatism among those committed to forms of Marxism analysis.

The absence of agreement did not then trouble me for I was uninterested in consensus; I embraced conflict. It was exhilarating to be in the company of these historians and theorists; I was awed by their

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command of the literature, envious of their abundant skills with an abstract and ideologically loaded French language. I tried to emulate their ease in expressing brilliant perceptions about the past as well as their articulation of insightful, often stinging parallels with the present. What I failed to notice was that the 1960s was over, at least in the United States, and that a discouraging and lengthy period of depoliticization was underway. I had to think about the unpleasant prospect of earning a living.

Living as an outsider in Paris, feeling marginalized in terms of my relationship to French circles, either academic or avant-garde, freed me up to lead an exciting, semi-bohemian life. I became a consumer in a city specially designed for cultural consumption. I became a cultural *flâneur*, frequenting concerts, plays, museums, galleries, cafes, walking the streets and parks of Paris, reading *Le Monde* and *Le Nouvel Observateur* as if it were required. I took in all I could. Meanwhile, I was very much unaware of significant changes in the American academic marketplace, including the steep decline in any jobs for historians, and the dramatic shift from intellectual history in favor of social history.

I was oblivious. I was in a state of denial. I did not care. I cared too much. I was happily and romantically alienated from America. I regarded myself an unappreciated outcast, a neglected man of talent. I equated a certain form of personal misery with authenticity; those who were successful I automatically saw as opportunists or sellouts. I was unaware of my own considerable envy for them. I was identified with a distinctly French cultural attitude that saw things American, above all American cultural products and the American political system, as distinctly mediocre and shallow. I simultaneously overestimated all things French, from the drinking water of Paris, to the aesthetics of everyday life, to French cuisine, to French movies and literature. I eroticized an already erotic civilization, dramatized a society that already thrived on its own tradition of dramatization; my language became inflated and grandiose, a bad imitation of French rhetoric. The irritations of French society, the backwardness of its bureaucracy, the formality, rigidity, and anachronistic codes of ordinary French life, I recognized but minimized or discounted. I hated French nationalism and ethnocentrism, while espousing all things French. Being committed to being committed, or at least to transmitting and perpetuating a

French style of engaged intellectual life, I lost contact with a number of sober realities about the American scene and about myself.

When I returned to the States in the late summer of 1975 with my seemingly high level of consciousness, I was rudely awakened. Jobs in modern European history were few and far between. Competition for the small number of positions was keen. The old club network that I had scorned and never belonged to reasserted itself. Social historians increasingly enjoyed a privileged position in history departments and in the profession at large. They were aggressively attacking old-fashioned methods in the history of ideas and intellectual history, including traditions and research strategies that I still found legitimate.

Actually I was ill prepared to be a "professional" historian in that professionalization was anathema to me. My graduate training at Wisconsin and post-doctoral studies in Paris had failed to professionalize me; I unfairly equated professionalization with careerism, typified by a memorable aphorism from my Madison days: "A 'colleague' is not a person but a disease." Without seeing how harsh and foolish that dismissal was, I considered myself immune to this bourgeois disease, I thought. Disdain for American academics, contempt for American culture and materialism, a need to devalue prevailing American values, particularly American patriotism and militarism, a summary dismissal of political opinions local and national, a tendency to blur the distinction between conservative and liberal, a pleasure in pontificating about third parties and third ways in America, all converged with a number of deeply ingrained personality problems to produce a terribly lonely situation and an impasse in my career.

I became the proverbial gypsy scholar, wandering from university position to position, employed for six consecutive one-year jobs. My dispersion began in Paris and shifted from the midwest to the east coast to the west coast. My persistent anxieties and ambivalence about the university caused my scholarly productivity to suffer; I was not always able to maintain the highest levels of competent teaching in the classroom, even though I valued teaching and found it a highly rewarding activity.

My character problems, an outspoken argumentative style, an apparent arrogance and self-confidence masking persistent uncertainty and a need to be loved and admired, a recurring tendency to attack the personalities that I wanted to like and respect me, a need to dismantle

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the ideas and methods of older authorities in the field (usually tenured professors or influential up and comers) did not easily lend itself to job renewals or to the continuity of employment. It seemed that I scorned the esteem of the colleagues; in truth, I valued their estimation too much. Nor did the yearly academic ruptures work to heal my unanalyzed inner turmoil nor my ideological hostility to America. A visceral conflict emerged toward that peculiarly medieval institution, the university and centers of higher learning.

I became a gypsy scholar without much taste or aptitude for the gypsy side of life. I developed grave doubts about my scholarship, given my chronic employment anxieties and deep-seated worries about how I would support myself. I became obsessed with finding some job stability and continuity, as if an external structure might center me. As I doubted the value of my own research, my confidence in my writing became shaken; after all, if my scholarship was any good, I would have landed a tenure-track job. I blamed myself. I blamed the profession. I was caught up in a vicious cycle of blame and self-blame. I became angry and disillusioned with intellectual history, resenting some of my former professors, wondering why they could not intervene and make a job happen for me, as if they were capable of making miracles. When the negative transference kicked in, it did so with a vengeance, leaving me feeling terribly weakened and vulnerable.

I moved from one-year position to one-year position. Job would actually be a more accurate description. I would start teaching in September of an academic year, usually responsible for a large load of courses. By October of that same semester, I would have to gear up for the shame-inducing and almost always frustrating job search. My messianic thoughts about European cultural history, alternating with a residue of bitterness at the profession and anger at myself, my presumption about bringing "culture," "reason," and a "critical perspective" to the American campuses were doubly out of touch with the anti-intellectual and increasingly specialized and conservative climate in and around university campuses in the middle and late 1970s.

I judged the people evaluating me to be uncultivated and mediocre; I was unable to disguise signals of contempt for them. I was terrible at academic politics; I never acquired the skills of becoming deferential and of making the correct alliances. I was too honest. I was ambitious

and unable to take a process oriented view of university life. I was aggressive. I was tactless, abrupt, insensitive, abrasive; I used my awareness of the narcissistic investments and wounds of my fellow academics to attack or undermine them. I hid a friendly, accessible, caring, and charming part of my personality. I used my knowledge and understanding for destructive purposes. In short, I engaged in repeated acts of self-sabotage.

Furthermore, one of my fantasies of bridging the specialties of intellectual and social history, of maintaining a respectful dialogue, proved to be a wrong-headed illusion, a swindle. Perhaps I was unprepared for the dialogue; perhaps the climate was not ripe for it. Upon returning to America in 1975, I discovered that social historians dominated most history departments and that they exercised an increasing hegemonic influence on employment searches, determining the direction that the discipline was moving. For the most part—obviously there were some exceptions—social history positioned itself against intellectual history. Whatever their methodological orientation and whatever their watchwords were, social historians sharply dichotomized history into black and white categories, expressing a sharp hostility toward those doing intellectual history. In my experience, there was no dialogue in those years, only isolation and a feeling of beleaguerment if one practiced any version of intellectual history. When a given department was able to secure a tenure line in history, it almost always went to a “new” social historian.

This professional impasse ended for me during the academic year 1978-79, while teaching at UCLA. I had moved to Los Angeles from Brooklyn Heights for a one year replacement job with the expectation that a tenure track position in my field would open; I was assured that I would be a serious candidate for such a job. A tenured position in Modern European intellectual history did, in fact, open, and a national search was conducted. After a promising beginning, I was abruptly eliminated from consideration. I was devastated. Wounded. Deeply humiliated. And depressed.

During the early months of that search and under the influence of Peter Loewenberg, a historian and practicing psychoanalyst, who incidentally had been on the original committee recruiting me to UCLA, I applied to the two psychoanalytic institutes in Los Angeles for full psychoanalytic training. This was not the first time I had considered

analytic training. My appetite had been whetted after I had organized a seminar on psychoanalytic theory (actually to study Freud's texts) and on the psychoanalytic application to literature and history while still in graduate school. During the previous year in New York City I applied and had been accepted by the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis (NPAP), originally founded by Theodor Reik. I had made an overture to the prestigious New York Psychoanalytic Institute as well, but had been advised that they did not train individuals with nonmedical backgrounds.

Loewenberg gently persuaded me to apply to the two psychoanalytic institutes in Los Angeles, urging me to begin therapy. I was hesitant, frightened, "resistant." I figured I would be leaving Los Angeles in August, on to my next academic job, who knows where. In a caring voice he told me that no one would be able to take away from me the insights I gained, even after only a short period of therapy. I had been given the names of two psychoanalysts in Los Angeles by a trusted New York analyst. I asked Loewenberg for his recommendations. Of the three names he provided, one was identical to my New York source. I made the plunge, not without trepidation. I called for an appointment.

The psychoanalyst, Rudolf Ekstein, had some time available for me, especially if I could be flexible about the scheduling of our appointments; he had been informed in a letter that a "candidate" might be contacting him for a possible training analysis by my friend in New York. At that first appointment I brought with me, needing to impress him and hoping to receive some reassurance from him, an essay I had published on Freud. I also began to tell him the story of my life, beginning with my current mess. He was an older Central European with a distinct Viennese accent, then in his middle sixties. I was struck by three things about him: his decency, in agreeing to work with me for a rather low hourly fee; his excellent and subtle listening skills; and his ability to combine an astute intelligence with kindness. We began our work together, first meeting twice a week, gradually shifting to four times a week for a full analysis.

I did not then realize that this relationship would last for another nine years, nor how essential and powerful an instrument it would become in learning about myself and in learning how to be a psychoanalyst. I was somewhat astonished that he permitted himself, despite

a comfortable reserve, to be warm, charming, and fully engaged in the process from our first meeting; this contrasted with a caricatured image I had of the psychoanalyst as cold and detached, distant and scientific, a blank screen or surgical instrument.

I mention this article on Freud. Actually it addressed the relationship and debates of Freud with Romain Rolland. It had been written in my last months in Paris, the spring and early summer of 1975. Retrospectively, I was moving not exactly from Marx to Freud, but from Romain Rolland to Freud; that is, from an immersion in a French intellectual tradition of idealism, vitalism, mysticism, and of political engagement to one more firmly grounded in Freudian psychoanalytic practice. As a graduate student and in my post-graduate seminar on Marxism, I had read Marx mediated through the perspectives of Sartre, Marcuse, Lukacs, and George Lichtheim. This was a humanistic, anthropological Marx interpreted in a distinctly New Left flavor; it was one that rejected Marxist dogma, the economistic Marx, and which utterly refused the Soviet style or Leninistic Marx.

In uncovering rare and beautiful letters from Freud to Romain Rolland in the Archives Romain Rolland in Paris, I became intrigued with the nature and depth of their friendship. I endeavored to understand how two intellectual figures who were so different could have established such a profound bond. Actually, the essay articulated my own developing convictions about the interpretive power of psychoanalysis as a method of inquiry. At the university I had discovered Freud, where he was situated as one of the seminal thinkers of twentieth-century intellectual history. Freud was depicted as the revolutionary who had synthesized then surpassed the medical, psychiatric, and cultural approach to mental illness as conceived in the nineteenth century. If he invented a new discipline, he also created a subversive approach to modern man's anxious and depressed state.

My first contact with Freud—once again in Mosse's lectures on European cultural history—came through reading *The New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933) and with the magisterial *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). In the sixties I encountered Freud through the lenses of Norman O. Brown, R. D. Laing, Herbert Marcuse, and Erich Fromm; I had also been influenced by Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1966), which questioned psychoanalytic universalism. I first encountered Freud suspicious of psycho-

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analytic reductionism and determinism, open to psychoanalytic metaphor and its theory driven methodology, receptive to its utopian and liberating possibilities. The early experience of reading Freud disturbed me, despite the clarity and eloquence of his writing. To discover his mordant insights into defenses, into the power of early childhood, into the conflictual realm of the subjective world, into the psychological modalities of the mind was like opening up vistas about my family, my self-protective maneuvers, my inner world.

Scholarship, I subsequently learned, often disguises autobiographical quests. What I uncovered in the Freud-Rolland relationship, incidentally, became core themes in my own analytic relationship with Dr. Ekstein. Having daringly analyzed Freud's psychodynamics, I now needed to turn to my own both to work them through and to transform them into instruments of understanding others.

II

I was accepted by the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Institute for full psychoanalytic training approximately nine months after I had applied. It seemed like an interminable wait. I was beginning my education in psychoanalytic time, which is slow, laborious, needlessly bureaucratic, and not particularly attuned to the desires and anxieties of the novice.

My formal psychoanalytic training occurred between 1980 and 1988. It was an incomparable adventure. In *A Movable Feast*, Hemingway aptly described his youthful experiences in Paris as an unending, slightly perilous quest in search of creativity, above all in finding his own self-confidence and distinct voice. For me, Paris had represented a blend of sensual experience and high powered intellectual inquiry; my youth in Paris mingled the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of France with the unusual and original characters of the city. If I imagined that nothing could compare to my expedition to Paris, my foray into psychoanalysis proved to be an equally fabulous source of discovery and self-discovery. It also placed a high value on memory and the return of affectively charged memories.

There were a number of external difficulties that made training a hardship: it required the sacrifice of time; it was expensive (above all, the cost of a long and comprehensive training analysis); it exposed one to a series of seemingly endless scrutiny by local and national commit-

tees; and it opened one to the relative miscomprehension of others, many of whom had strong opinions about psychoanalysis as a profession, to biases about it as a therapy.

Psychoanalytic training at the analytic institute is structured to provide the candidates with a heightened emotional and intellectual immersion into psychoanalytic ways of thinking and of doing therapy. Candidates are required to begin their training analysis at least one year before formal seminars begin; they are allowed to select the analyst of their choice from a list of accredited training analysts; this particular analyst must be certified a training analyst and he may not already have three or more candidates in analysis. I later learned that these "rules" were not always strictly enforced. Rule was one of those slippery notions that depended on one's perspective; rule almost always meant guiding principle.

After one year of his own analysis, the candidate usually began seminars; between six months and one year into seminars, the candidate was encouraged to begin analytic work with a patient, for not less than four hours a week, with one hour a week with a seasoned supervisor to discuss difficulties with the case. After another six months, one was eligible to begin a second analytic case with a second supervisor. Candidates were free to select from a pool of available supervisors. The same guidelines operated for the third analytic control case and for the third supervisor.

By the end of the second year or beginning of the third year of seminars, the analytic candidate would be somewhere in the middle of his own psychoanalysis as a patient; he would be well along in his first control case as an analyst. Simultaneously, he would be working with supervisors and thinking about significant psychoanalytic texts on theory and technique. For most candidates it is an all-encompassing undertaking; one receives a powerful dosage of psychoanalysis; in terms of time, energy, intellectual and emotional involvement, the training has a built-in geometric progression. Regression is also built in.

The training analysis slowly transformed itself into an in-depth experience about the psychoanalytic process in practice. Here one explored, inquired, probed, doubted, projected, resisted, and reflected upon buried psychic meanings as they emerged in a strange, undefinable dialogue structured around the free flow of associations. Even

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though the training analyst was an integral senior member of the psychoanalytic institute, appointed because of his knowledge, experience, and clinical acumen, he would not be reporting to institute committees on any aspect of the analysis. This non-reporting guaranteed confidentiality, helped to promote trust, and thus allowed the candidate to delve into forbidden aspects of his psychic life and fantasy world. These areas might remain hidden if they were to be exposed and scrutinized by some formal committee with a nontherapeutic agenda.

In my experience at the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Institute, most training analysts conducted their analyses with tact and restraint so as to maximize its therapeutic efficacy; they carefully attempted to avoid leakages, gossip, and injurious casual remarks about a given candidate. Despite the efforts to be abstinent, I learned that there could be no “purity” in such a training program, for one might meet one’s analyst at a scientific gathering, a committee meeting, or even at the annual Christmas party. Such encounters, usually quite charged, were grist for the analytic mill. For many and at moments for me, the training analysis also served a safety valve function; I used many sessions to take up complaints, some imaginary, some real, about the formal aspects of psychoanalytic education—whether about instructors, supervisors, advisor, committees and so on.

Candidates were obliged to take four years of seminars consisting of two courses meeting four hours a week. After the fourth year, the seminars continued in the form of electives, typically clinically oriented, for two hours a week until graduation. The seminars were taught by the faculty of graduate analysts. The faculty was composed essentially of unpaid, nonprofessional instructors, who primarily had expertise in the clinical applications of psychoanalysis; in my experience the quality of teaching varied widely, as did communication skills, scholarship, and knowledge of the literature. Seminars were either theoretical or clinical in orientation; only rarely were the two blended. In terms of pedagogical orientation, the curriculum was designed to lay the clinical and theoretical foundations of Freudian psychoanalysis by thoroughly familiarizing the students with key texts by Freud and subsequently by a selected canon of his heirs. The concept “heir to Freud” frequently became a battleground of contending theories.

In the first two years of seminars, candidates studied a number of converging aspects of Freud's thinking: his fundamental hypotheses about the mind and his assumptions about a psychology of unconscious mental process; his revolutionary approach to dreams; his emphasis on early childhood development; his thinking about psychic energy and sexuality; his contribution to the understanding of resistance and transference; his case history method; his metapsychology and his structural model; his formulations about character, psychopathology, and anxiety. In the seminars, we encountered Freud as he was discovering, elaborating, then revising the psychoanalytic paradigm. As we were experiencing the difficulties and pleasures of overcoming internal resistances in our own psychoanalyses, the candidate's seminars promoted a historical, critical, and clinical overview of Freud's trajectory over forty-five years of theorizing and fine-tuning his new discipline.

Psychoanalytic seminars also alerted the candidate to contemporary forms of psychoanalytic thinking; here he could ruminate on certain post-Freudian texts and modes of working with more disturbed patients and extreme forms of psychopathology. At the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Institute, we studied the contributions of the English object relations school and the writings of Melanie Klein and her followers with a number of analysts who were committed "Kleinians." Some of my teachers were trained in England and were knowledgeable practitioners of Kleinian techniques.

Kleinian psychoanalysis revised classical Freudian and ego psychology by placing great emphasis on innate, murderous aggression and on the earliest phases of infant development. Their technique returned to an early stage of development marked by the infant's relationship with his mother, or parts of his mother's body, dominated by severe splitting of the personality. This splitting was caused by primitive defenses against deep-seated aggressive urges. The Kleinians are persuasive in understanding borderline and psychotic personalities and extremely disturbed children; they also subtly grasped the early and primal role of the superego and of severe self-punishing forces in the personality organization. Since the Kleinians placed so much emphasis on destructiveness and self-destructiveness, I observed that their theories angered people, often provoking extreme agreement or disagreement; many Kleinians were themselves transparently angry

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and envious individuals, incapable of genuine dialogue, unwilling to tolerate opposing points of view. In the name of “science” they claimed a privileged access to the primary process, as if they alone were capable of offering deep insights into the unconscious.

My training began in the years immediately following acrimony and a serious threat of a breach between the Kleinians and the classical psychoanalysts at the Institute. Such a split never occurred. Nevertheless, there were some scars and much resentment underneath an atmosphere of rhetorical tolerance and respect for differing points of view. I soon discovered the power of transference to a school of thought or method of inquiry: it almost inevitably happened that the candidates became loyal to the psychoanalytic school of their training analyst and favorite supervisors. Unconscious identification proved more powerful than independence of thought, more persistent than the mature cogitating on clinical and theoretical issues.

Furthermore, certain charismatic teachers and public speakers rallied their followers and generated excitement, zeal, and sometimes faith among the young, less experienced analysts. Having studied debates and ruptures within the European left and within the Socialist and Communist internationals, I now reexperienced some of the same tensions within my local psychoanalytic domain—all conducted ostensibly in the name of science, clinical efficacy, and “true” psychoanalysis. If it was at first disheartening, then deidealizing, to see that psychoanalysts could posture, distort, misrepresent, and overvalue the claims of their own theory while belittling the theories of their competitors, it subsequently humanized my view of analytic practitioners. I eventually learned that analysts were imperfect and fallible, subjected to the same uncertainties as the rest of the population. They mollified their anxieties by attaching themselves to some all-encompassing theory. I slowly began to modify my grandiose expectations about psychoanalytic theory and practice.

Besides the classical Freudian-ego psychological theory and the Kleinian approach, the 1980s brought the emergence of self-psychology, a form of psychoanalysis associated with Heinz Kohut and his followers. Self-psychology seemed particularly resonant to the narcissism and consumerism of America in the late 1970s and 1980s, to what Christopher Lasch felicitously called “the culture of narcissism.” Kohut’s psychoanalysis captivated therapists because it was clinically

grounded and because it elevated empathic understanding and the emotional attunement of the therapist into fundamental “rules,” guiding principles of clinical work. Self-psychologists offered a way of grasping the subjective world of narcissistic personalities, of individuals suffering from a variety of disorders of the self, ranging from fragile self-esteem, to repeated feelings of depletion, to loss of meaning in their lives, to fantasies of omnipotence and grandiosity accompanied by emotional coldness and inaccessibility.

My seminars on narcissism and on the self-psychological perspective were highly significant to me, assisting me to feel my way into the mental and emotional world of the patient; it also helped me to grasp the dynamics of transference of severely disturbed patients, whose ways of relating and whose psychopathology did not seem to fit the classical theory. When practiced sensitively self-psychology permitted the therapist to gain close access to the subjective world of the patient, without presuming to read the mind of the other in the light of superior scientific or objective knowledge. It was respectful and caring toward the other and it was experience near, that is, positioned as closely as possible to the perceptions, sensations, fantasies, and affects of the subject himself.

What I find off-putting about self-psychology is its messianic spirit and its own exaggerated claims of therapeutic success. The theory tends to be soft and lacking in rigor. Self-psychologists often misrepresent and polemicize against earlier psychoanalytic thinkers—in short, to distort the history of psychoanalysis to give their stance a preeminent place. There was an irony that many former Kleinian analysts had converted to self-psychology; it was paradoxical that they underwent such a dramatic theoretical reorientation, as if they stood their previous theory of technique on its head.

Such was the diverse theoretical climate at the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Institute during the 1980s. Without getting caught up in any of the vituperative sides of these controversies and without being invested in one theory over another, I found the atmosphere to be remarkably alive and stimulating. Being a research candidate also permitted me to hear out all sides, to maintain some impartiality, to be critical toward all, to distance myself from the parochial spokesmen, and to cut through the cant while incorporating what was valid in each perspective. This might be called an eclectic and pluralist approach; I

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found it to be well-suited to learning, an antidote to orthodoxy or counterorthodoxies.

I was uninterested in party-line partisanship, in dogma of any variety, realizing that most of these disputes disguised personal or economic motives in the name of alleged scientific disagreements; sometimes they were simply about control of turf, about power. I, like many others, found myself skeptical toward the official position of the American Psychoanalytic Association, which prided itself on representing and bearing the standard of classical Freudian psychoanalysis. Through selected contact with instructors and supervisors, I came to respect all three theoretical positions, recognizing that there were astute, decent, and committed practitioners in each school.

If the curriculum compartmentalized seminars into four distinct categories of metapsychological theory, psychosexual development, psychopathology, and technique, it also offered explicitly clinical opportunities—the continuous case seminars. At the continuous case presentations, a candidate would report detailed process material, sometimes verbatim notes, from an ongoing psychoanalytic case in the presence of the other candidates and a senior instructor. These were demystifying learning experiences, at first because of my nonclinical background. One finally saw how other people worked and approached the material; I observed what was actually said and not said. I learned how my fellow seminarians processed the data and responded to their patients. I watched how a seasoned analyst listened to and assigned meaning to the same material. These continuous case seminars, while anxiety-provoking for the presenter, opened up fascinating discussions on the intricacies of the psychoanalytic process, from the various dimensions of understanding the transference and countertransference, to ways of addressing the resistance in terms of grasping defensive maneuvers. It underscored strategies of phrasing and timing interpretations, refining tools to develop insight and to remove barriers interfering with the free flow of associations.

I was struck by a number of features in every continuous case seminar: how incredibly intricate and elusive each case history was; how, even after years of diligent work, one only scratched the surface in exploring the intra-psychic realm; how impossible it was to pin down a personality; how every session contained multiple possibilities for interventions, that there was not necessarily one “correct” way; how

providing a safe and nonthreatening atmosphere was a significant aspect of the therapeutic process; how vital the therapeutic alliance was with each patient and how it needed to be maintained and strengthened; how analytic listening tapped into the analyst's emotional and fantasy world more powerfully than it did into his intellectual and cognitive faculties. These converging factors could make analysis an exhausting experience until one developed self-discipline and technique.

The continuous case seminars made me aware of the endless possibilities of psychoanalytic clinical method, especially if the rules of free association and interpretation were carefully followed and if the process were left open-ended. The most textured form of analysis was oriented toward the exploration of clusters of meaning about a life history as they unfolded in the analytic relationship. If I began naively and enthusiastically, and if I entered training without clinical experience, I soon realized that no definitive truth or scientific consensus existed regarding what was happening in any hour, or in a particular case, despite the years of experience of a given clinician.

Not surprisingly, those from different theoretical schools had widely divergent ways of assessing, accenting, interpreting, and integrating the material. There were distinct views on what constituted a genuine psychoanalytic therapy, although most analysts agreed that it had something to do with an analysis of the transference, with an introspective dialogue, and with the creation of a fantasy-driven, evocative, and shifting relationship between two individuals. Similarly, analysts disagreed if psychoanalytic therapy was a science, an art, a humanistic discipline, or something entirely distinct from science, art, and the human sciences. Psychoanalysis was impossible to objectify in words.

I discovered that there was a relative atmosphere of acceptance of different languages and theory, although on occasion that ambience of mutual respect could be disrupted. At moments, expressions of faith might be expressed; at times, parochial notions would be asserted as scientific or empirical truth; old-fashioned formulations would be reiterated with an authoritarian tone. And, on occasion, new and fashionable ways of thinking might stir an ardor not unlike those in religious cults or political sects. For the most part, however, the psychoanalytic institute encouraged freedom of thought and relative freedom of

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expression; it was structured democratically if a bit hierarchically. It tended to be generous and tolerant toward non-“main-stream” positions. It was paternalistic in the best and worst sense.

In general, the optimal learning of psychoanalysis takes place in one’s own training analysis and secondarily in the years of supervision; most analysts regard the knowledge gained in formal seminars to be peripheral and vicarious, something akin to an intellectual superstructure built on the infrastructure of the analysis and controlled supervisory work. Thus, psychoanalytic training sharply contrasts with graduate school and is closer to the educational structures of art institutes, where one works intimately and for long-term periods with one or more masters. Freud argued that the most reliable way to learn about psychoanalysis was not through reading theory, but rather through undergoing an analysis (or through interpreting one’s own dreams). There is a potential danger of anti-intellectualism if this approach is abused; much of contemporary psychoanalytic education tends to denigrate the acquisition of an authentically philosophical approach by the practitioner in favor of creating a training environment more akin to a technical school. Psychoanalytic education at its best combines the heart and mind, lived experience and the capacity to cogitate on it, the expression of affectively charged memories and the ability to express coherently one’s lived history.

After undergoing analytic training, I came to realize that only intuitive and exceptional individuals can grasp the subtlety and magnificent explanatory power of the psychoanalytic instrument, if they have not had analysis. At times philosophers and literary critics comprehend core psychoanalytic ideas and insights by immersing themselves in psychoanalytic theory without the practical experience of training or of undergoing an analysis. Even with the most distinguished of them, with a Marcuse, Adorno, Habermas, or Ricoeur, their writing about psychoanalysis always seems distant from the actual give and take, the dramas and plateaus, of the clinical hour; their writing remains detached from the emotional and fantasy-driven aspects of the work; they are inclined toward overestimating the intellectual aspects of analysis to the detriment of other features. Most high-powered theorists without training failed to emphasize the features of the analytic relationship itself, the nonverbal factors, the

role of affects, the predominant significance of fantasies in the subjective lives of individuals.

I slowly realized that interpreting was not some dazzling intellectual operation revealing the mastery and brilliance of the interpreter. Rather it was a small but crucial step in an ongoing, laborious process. Deft interpretations worked when they illuminated internal conflict, when they permitted the analysand to realize his own defensiveness, to understand the underlying, unconscious forces causing the defenses.

For me, supervision became a unique learning experience, situated somewhere between a tutorial and an analytic therapy session. I was permitted to select all of my supervisors. Because of an old psychoanalytic ethic about providing service to the community, my supervisors agreed to work with me for sharply reduced fees. For those cases screened by the psychoanalytic clinic and approved for analysis, the supervisors pooled the clinic fees. To be sure the hourly fee for such supervision could be reduced as much as one fifth of their usual fee. This piece of generosity set the tone for the supervisory process. For me the experience began and ended as a collaborative venture; it was not structured around an imitative process of learning what to say or do as if one were mimicking a great master. Supervision evolved into a highly focused, richly textured clinical conversation about specific clinical issues.

I chose supervisors who were invested in disseminating relatively sophisticated psychoanalytic modes of thinking about the clinical material. None wished to develop a coterie of disciples or loyal apprentices who did analysis exactly as they did. I began by meeting with a supervisor once a week. These relationships often lasted years and became quite intimate. Styles of supervision were markedly different. Emphases were not the same.

In my first supervision, the primary focus was on recognizing and interpreting the defenses. Defenses were to be understood within the framework of a life history and with particular attention to early childhood and to patterns of upbringing in the family. Great stress was placed on the interpretations of transference, how older self-protective patterns were reenacted in the patient's relationship with me, often reexperienced in feelings, fantasies, desires, and thoughts about me. In the relative safety of the supervision, I explored not only problems in

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understanding the patient's dynamics, but my own anxieties, resistances, disappointments, and unrealistic desires in dealing with my analytic patients. I realized that my own reactions and feelings were legitimate, profoundly real, and not necessarily neurotic or beside the point; my supervisors encouraged me to trust my own subjective reactions to patients and various situations, to use myself as a reliable instrument of understanding the psychoanalytic process. This opened up many alleys for me. It also prompted me to develop my own style of doing analysis, one which enabled me to be myself, to be spontaneous, and not to be bound by a rigid externally superimposed set of rules.

I mention the term "relative" safety. It was relative because my supervisors were evaluating me, writing reports on my progress; their assessment of my work was crucial in graduating from the local institute and in gaining certification from the American Psychoanalytic Association. I learned bit by bit to be candid within a framework of reserve; I was free within a well-defined structure. Sustained self-disclosure and self-analysis most appropriately took place in the training analysis. Furthermore, too much honesty with one's supervisors, including too much affection for them, was often considered inappropriate. At analytic institutes, pedagogy and supervision easily cross over into presumptuous attempts to psychoanalyze rather than assess the educational growth of the candidates; thus, one risked being labeled diagnostically, even pejoratively, as loose, labile, metaphorical, flamboyant, or exuberant. These labels, if thrown in your direction, could be hurtful; they often inhibited creativity and efforts to forge one's own analytic style. I was fortunate. Labels used to describe me were noninjurious and not without merit.

Other invaluable aspects of supervision were the importance placed on clinical empathy and emotional sensitivity; both were highlighted in the theoretical orientations of the English object relations school and in self-psychology. Before beginning my training and personal analysis, I mistakenly believed that psychoanalysis cured through the analyst's incisive interpretations, his heroic efforts to transform the unconscious into consciousness. I was determined to emerge as an imaginative and razor-sharp interpreter. In practice, however, the ana-

lytic process required great patience, tact, and restraint; it was oriented toward allowing the analysand to arrive at insight himself or herself, toward forging a mode of self-analysis. It was not a pedagogical or pedantic enterprise; and it was not about impressing patients with the interpreter's virtuosity.

More significantly, I learned that sensitivity to the patient required a new mode of listening and of feeling oneself into the inner world of individuals who appeared very different from my self. I quickly discovered how similar I was to many patients, how easily blurred the spectrum of mental illness could be and was. Craziness was not easily demarcated; it was a question of degree and of intensity and of adaptational capacity. Normality became a mythical construct.

One of my supervisors pressed me to discuss my emotions toward my analysand with him, to consider my affective responses as valid ways of understanding the dialogue; through affects one entered into the patient's intra-psychic world. He urged me to imagine what it would be like to be my patient at a very young age, what it might feel like to be helpless and dependent, to permit myself to be attuned to the effects of repeated traumatic events; he, at first, jolted me in order to break through my defenses, to alert me to the terrors of this patient. He advised me to abandon my interpretive position of safe distance and authority, of apparent objectivity and impartiality, to feel myself intimately into the actual inner universe and psychic struggles of this suffering individual. To relate affectively to patients was to resonate to their conflicts and deficiencies respectfully and without condescension, without manipulation, and without presuming to know one's conclusions in advance; it transformed the analytic process into one of open-ended discovery and mutual recognition.

This mode of supervision was surprising, irritating, and immensely rewarding. It pushed against some of my own most stubborn defenses and rigidities; it opened me up. I found that working analytically with close attention to affects—both my patients' and my own—radically expanded the psychoanalytic process, while intensifying and clarifying the dialogue. It also enabled me to experience and learn things about myself from my patients that proved invaluable; it became an indispensable way of being helpful to them.

III

The thirteen chapters comprising this book do not claim to synthesize nor disseminate the results of scholarship in its three overlapping areas: the history of psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic culture criticism, and the psychoanalytic application to history. I prefer to think of these writings as starting points, touching on significant themes and ambiguities in various arenas of psychoanalytic tradition. The culture of psychoanalysis has many traditions, multiple perspectives. The most penetrating method still seems to be a historical and critical one; here my training in psychoanalysis complements my prior formation as a cultural historian. I do not offer a tightly-knit or unified conceptual approach to psychoanalytic theory and practice, in part because such unity has not existed since the 1950s. Furthermore, I have not elaborated that coherent unity, in part because of my doubts about the legitimacy of such a totalizing stance.

I have attempted to provide balanced evaluations of various representative authors and themes in the psychoanalytic literature; my perceptions are based on a broad understanding of the psychoanalytic movement and its complex history, including its interaction with the wider context of European cultural and political history. By tapping into my knowledge of the philosophical and clinical origins of psychoanalysis, I try to map out and assess its subsequent evolution. I have tried to maintain a sensible and critical point of view throughout without flooding my reader with an overabundance of detail and without asserting the primacy of theory. I have resisted the temptation to tilt the book toward philosophy or philosophizing; therein lies my former bias and my current ambivalence toward increasingly abstract discourses not grounded in clinical experience. If these essays serve as thought experiments, if they serve as reliable introductions, if they become springboards for subsequent reflection and research by interested readers, then they will have served their purpose.

In Part One, I explore the history of psychoanalysis with a number of assumptions about this legacy and its importance. Most analysts do not know their own history, either locally or internationally; the educated public has only recently begun to develop a historical perspective on the ninety-five year history of the analytic movement. I view psychoanalysis as part of the larger cultural, political, and social