

## PSYCHOSOCIAL HISTORIES OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

Stephen Frosh (\*) y Belinda Mandelbaum (\*\*)

(\*) Department of Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX, UK.  
s.frosh@bbk.ac.uk

(\*\*) Laboratório de Estudos da Família, Relações de Gênero e Sexualidade, Departamento de Psicologia Social e do Trabalho,  
Instituto de Psicologia, Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil.  
belmande@usp.br

### Abstract:

This paper approaches the history of psychoanalysis through the emphasis that psychosocial studies places on reflexivity and ethics. It argues that psychoanalysis has a strong and specific ethic based on the importance of developing and being allowed to use the capacity to understand one's internal and external situation clearly, without constraint and – to the degree that it is possible – truthfully, and to make that the basis for the relationships one forms with others. This is the case for individuals but also for organizations, including the institutions of psychoanalysis. When psychoanalysis acts in accord with this perception, it is pursuing its own ethical position; when it contradicts it – for example, through aligning itself with socially repressive practices or obscuring the truth – then it loses its integrity. The paper suggests that some of the institutional history of psychoanalysis can be understood as a backing-away from this ethic in contexts of authoritarianism and a defensive denial of this process. Countering this denial by uncovering this history is necessary for reinstating psychoanalysis as an ethical domain. A case illustration is briefly outlined, that of Brazilian psychoanalysis during the civil-military dictatorship of the 1960s to 1980s, focusing on how these events have been obscured or opened up to scrutiny.

**Key words:** Psychoanalysis; history; psychosocial studies; ethics.

## PSYCHOSOCIAL HISTORY:

This article is not an attempt at writing history, which requires socialisation into a discipline that immerses itself in the archive, and that has its own traditions of argument and its own philosophy of knowledge bearing on what counts as an appropriate method for engaging with the uncertainties of the past. Instead, the current paper is an intervention into the history of psychoanalysis from the point of view of psychosocial studies; which means to say, it is concerned with the processes of construction of psychoanalysis and with understanding the stories it tells itself about that construction. As has been noted and debated several times now (Frosh, 2010, 2018; Rustin, 2008), the emergent 'discipline' of psychosocial studies owes a lot to psychoanalysis and is sometimes even confused with psychoanalytic studies. This is because it draws heavily on psychoanalysis for a transdisciplinary understanding of the manner in which the 'social' and the 'psychological' – those twin peaks of twentieth century academic differentiation – are entwined with each other, indissolubly linked, 'imbricated' as poststructuralists like to say, or like recto and verso, as others have described. Psychoanalysis offers a vocabulary and set of concepts that allows leverage on the question of how what is apparently 'inside' gets 'out' and conversely how our apparently 'inner worlds' are saturated by the conditions of sociality, so we come to believe what our surrounding culture will have us believe, and live our lives in the shadow of those 'objects' that define our material as well as intersubjective world.

This argument applies as much to the analysis of institutional life as to that of persons. What psychoanalysis has demonstrated powerfully is that institutions have ways of organising themselves that reflect 'unconscious' dynamics, even if what is meant by 'unconscious' here is somewhat different from what is meant by the

term when applying it to individuals. Fundamentally, as generations of researchers in the 'Tavistock' open-systems traditions (Obholzer y Roberts, 1994) have shown, organisations can and do construct remarkably inventive mechanisms to defend themselves against anxiety, and these can especially take the form of modes of denial, ways of 'not knowing' that may range between conscious cover-ups and less conscious refusals to acknowledge the truth of the past, or indeed of present day infelicities. Psychoanalysis consequently offers an entry-point to understand the apparent irrationalities (which can be all too rational) of organisational life, and this includes the organisation of psychoanalysis itself. That is, just as the mental space of psychoanalysts is infiltrated and impacted upon by unconscious features, so is the social space of psychoanalytic organisations. Fear, pressure, egotism, competitiveness, professional ambition, stupidity: these are mobilised in the service of unconscious wishes, by people and by the institutional structures psychoanalysts (just like anyone else) use to manage their lives.

Psychosocial studies tightens the focus of this by means of its own concern with ethics and reflexivity. On the former, the claim is that all the knowledge professions – all academic disciplines and the practices with which they are connected – need to be understood in the context of the ethical claims that they make, understood as statements about the 'good life' to which they are committed, or more precisely, their foundational notions about 'how one should live in relation to peculiar human possibility' (Lear, 2006, p. 7). Psychoanalysis participates in this ethical project, providing a set of important ideas on what it might mean to live well in the contexts in which we find ourselves, the 'human possibility' to which Jonathan Lear refers. It has various sometimes

contradictory takes on this, but also a clear ethical position: a good life involves developing and being allowed to use the capacity to understand one's internal and external situation without constraint and, to the degree that it is possible, truthfully; and to make that the basis for the relationships one forms with others. When psychoanalysis acts in accord with this perception, it is pursuing its own ethical position; when it contradicts it – for example, through aligning itself with socially repressive practices or obscuring the truth – then it loses its integrity.

Reflexivity, the other element of psychosocial studies' distinctive practice, refers to a variety of feedback loops whereby people are affected by, and influence, knowledge practices; but also whereby the disciplines that give rise to those knowledge practices are themselves liable to subjection to them. This sounds more complicated than it really is. In relation to psychoanalysis we would argue that analytic ideas are massively significant in the cultures into which they have roamed, primarily but not exclusively those of the European and North American 'west' and the Latin American 'south'. They offer a set of perceptions that have in some ways become the unquestioned norms by which people understand themselves. These include the assumptions that we can only know ourselves partially, because of the operations of the unconscious; that we might hide things from ourselves as well as from others; that we might observe defensive behaviour in other people and feel the effects of it in ourselves; and so on. Perhaps most of all, that we might need to be 'critical' in our hermeneutics, in the sense that Ricoeur (1981) wrote of it, roughly meaning that we subject ourselves and others to an interpretive process that allows for discrepancies between what is seen and what is (claimed to be) known. Institutionally, it also means that psychoanalysis itself

needs to be alert to how its own assumptions and core ideas infiltrate its practices. The most obvious example here is that of transference. Applied to what happens in the psychoanalytic consulting room, which is its proper sphere of operation, transference refers to the relation that develops between patient and analyst and the peculiar unconscious investment the former has in the latter. Left unanalysed, transference often reveals itself in various forms of enactment, and this is perhaps the commonest way in which it is felt in institutional dynamics as well. That is, group and organisational relations are infused with the transferences enacted by the members of the organisation and also by something that operates 'at the level' of the group itself, as in Freud's original work on mass psychology (Freud, 1921).

As already noted, there is a strong psychoanalytic tradition of organisational studies that could in principle be used 'reflexively' to map the dynamics of psychoanalytic societies. Intriguingly, this does not seem to have been done very often. This contrasts with the situation in relation to individual psychoanalysts, Freud included, who have been subjected to various psychoanalytically-informed biographical readings, some of them convincing or at least productive (Grosskurth, 1986; Roudinesco, 1997; Phillips, 2016), some of them less so. Institutional studies have been few and far between and have usually been relatively straightforward histories. An exception is the major recent study of the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute by Kate Schechter (2014), which successfully combines archival work and ethnography to paint a revealing picture of tensions within the Chicago Institute and their relationship to broader issues of marketisation and mental health care in the United States, focusing especially on the issue of the 'real relationship' that emerges (or does not emerge) in the psychoanalytic encounter. This is one instance of a



theoretically and empirically sophisticated examination of psychoanalysis that uses some of psychoanalysis' own conceptual armoury. However, most of the methodology that Schechter draws on derives its critical force from cognate disciplines, especially anthropology and social history. More generally, whilst some excellent histories of psychoanalysis have been written, even the best of them, such as Mario Ben Plotkin's (2001) study of psychoanalysis in Argentina, have made relatively little use of psychoanalysis 'against itself' to help understand the dynamics of its organisational activity. Plotkin's study is an excellent example of how a nuanced use of political, social and cultural history can throw light on the conditions of development of psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, its account of the internal dynamics of these organisations is restricted by caution over interpretation. To a considerable extent this caution is justified, as from Freud's (1910) warnings about 'wild analysis' onwards there has been concern amongst both psychoanalysts and their critics to be careful about exporting psychoanalytic interpretive practices in an ungrounded way 'outside the clinic' (Frosh, 2010). But given the points made earlier concerning the importance of considering the ethics of psychoanalytic practice in the context of its own traditions of understanding, there is also room for a stronger psychosocial analysis of historical moments in which psychoanalysis' 'organisational unconscious' comes to the fore.

#### TRAUMATIC MOMENTS:

Freud's 'just so' story of the origins of civilisation, as laid out in *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and then reworked in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), has many critics, for good reason given its speculative historical narrative and reductionist approach to social theory. Despite this,

it makes some powerful analytic points. Amongst the most significant of these is recognition of a particularly modern understanding of how traumatic events can 'fix' development in individuals and cultures as a whole, as a kind of melancholic process whereby unrecognised aspects of the past are left undigested, ungrieved and hence unmourned, and so are condemned to be 'repeated' rather than worked through. The ghostly effects of such pasts on cultures have been written about extensively (Gordon, 1997; Frosh, 2013) and have been picked up not only in contemporary trauma studies but also in postcolonial writings that are focused at the level of whole societies (Khanna, 2004). The intriguing point here is that notions that began in the psychoanalytic consulting room – melancholia and working through, for instance – are being used by cultural critics to understand how societies might be characterised by affective states that are founded in, or at least heavily impacted by, different kinds of trauma (e.g. colonialism). The argument is that without fully recognising these trauma, or 'working through' them in the sense of acknowledging them and trying to understand what they are about, the unprocessed psychosocial elements connected to them continue to haunt contemporary societies, restricting their freedom to develop and making it likely that defensive features related to the trauma will recur. In an important formulation by a psychoanalytically-influenced historian, Dominick LaCapra (2001, p. 45) comments, 'A crucial issue with respect to traumatic historical events is whether attempts to work through problems, including rituals of mourning, can viably come to terms with (without fully healing or overcoming) the divided legacies, open wounds, and unspeakable losses of a dire past.' This is the case for organisations as it is for whole societies: without acknowledgement of what has happened and genuine attempts to confront

the 'trauma', it is likely that the 'divided legacies, open wounds, and unspeakable losses' will continue to make themselves felt.

Psychoanalysis has had several traumatic moments with which to contend, including Freud's relinquishment of his 'seduction theory' (Freud, 1897); the breaks with Adler, Jung and others in the early history of psychoanalysis (Makari, 2008); the corruption of German psychoanalysis during the Nazi period (Frosh, 2005); and the 'Controversial Discussions' in the British Psychoanalytical Society in the early 1940s (King and Steiner, 1992). All of these can be argued to have had lasting impacts on the psychoanalytic movement, not always fully acknowledged or worked through (see Frosh (2012) for an example concerned with the situation of German psychoanalysis after the Second World War). In the remainder of this paper, we consider another such traumatic moment in relation to the institutional history of psychoanalysis, not as well known in the English-speaking community. This is the legacy of Brazilian psychoanalysis' involvement with the dictatorship in that country in the second half of the twentieth century. We have written about this at greater length elsewhere (Rubin et al, 2015; Frosh and Mandelbaum, 2017). Here, we provide an outline of the issues and try to show how psychosocial and psychoanalytic concepts can contribute to understanding their source and impact.

#### **CONFORMITY AND CRITICALITY IN BRAZIL:**

The troubling history of psychoanalysis in Brazil during the period of the civilian-military dictatorship (1964-1985) has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years as an instance of institutional complicity with authoritarian rule (Russo, 2012; Rubin et al, 2015). Psychoanalysis had expanded rapidly in the country

from the early 1950s onwards, becoming fashionable amongst the wealthy and participating actively on the cultural stage. This expansion continued during the dictatorship, one of the worst periods of modern Brazilian history. Russo (2012, p. 167) comments, 'The psychoanalytic boom of the 1970s coincided with the darkest and most repressive period of the Brazilian military dictatorship — the so-called *anos de chumbo* (years of lead).' There is plenty of evidence that the social permeation of psychoanalytic ideas was of service to the regime, and that the approach of psychoanalytic institutions and of many psychoanalysts was 'conservative' in the sense of being aligned with the reactionary politics of the time as well as being focused on the wealthy who were benefiting from the regime's economic policies (Montechi, 2017). From the point of view that takes psychoanalysis to be an inherently progressive and ethical discipline, there was a strikingly limited opposition from 'official' psychoanalysis to an authoritarian political regime that made use of violence and repression to maintain the social order. The IPA-recognised Societies took no stand against political repression, and the widening inequalities of the Brazilian 'economic miracle' in that period led to rising patterns of middle class consumption in big cities, with directly beneficial results for private psychoanalytic practice (Coimbra, 1995; Russo, 2012).

Elsewhere, we have published some accounts of the conservatism of the psychoanalytic societies, particularly in São Paulo (Frosh and Mandelbaum, 2017), and rehearsed a now well-known episode of the involvement of a Brazilian psychoanalyst in Rio de Janeiro with the torture squads (Rubin et al, 2015). We have also documented the previously unremarked involvement of a São Paulo psychoanalyst with the prison and torture system (Mandelbaum et al, 2018), showing how the published ideas of this psychoanalyst deployed psychoanalysis



reductively to understand political resistance as a reflection of psychological deficiencies. This work, alongside that of other researchers, can leave little doubt about the historical complicity of some elements of psychoanalysis – actually, some of its official elements – with the dictatorship, and has also dramatised specific episodes of silencing, violent coercion, authoritarian threat and suppression of historical data (Vianna, 1994). Numerous issues arise from this, including those of the effect of authoritarian rule on the development of psychoanalysis; the relationship between individualistic work practices such as private therapy and the social conditions that surround them; the appropriation of psychoanalytic discourses on family and individual pathology by reactionary regimes; the tension between theoretical models that include social critique and political practices that silence these; and questions about what happens in post-dictatorship periods in relation to demands to acknowledge, or silence the memory of, complicity. Psychological issues of blame and recrimination are as important here as social issues of fear and terror, and these are not confined to psychoanalysis – though they may be exemplary in this context.

It is perhaps not surprising that, during the dictatorship, work on the history of psychoanalysis was uncritical and tended to idealise the founders of the movement in Brazil generally and São Paulo specifically. Indeed, historiographical writing of this period is filled with texts describing the trajectory of the pioneers in heroic terms, such as this from Luz (1976) in an article in *Revista Brasileira de Psicanálise* celebrating two of the key originators of the São Paulo Society on the occasion of its silver jubilee :

Durval Marcondes, a 'bandeirante', pioneer, tireless fighter, and Adelheid Koch, battler, teacher, mother, sister, friend and companion of the early analysts and

many of us – admirable men and women whose fire and capacity for love and generosity have not been extinguished or reduced with the passing of time – deserving tributes from us, psychoanalysts who have found the paths open, almost without stones, softened and flattened. (Luz, 1976, p. 509).

Marcondes' self-styling as a 'bandeirante' – a Brazilian explorer or expeditionary – is taken up in this piece in a remarkable way, similar to some of the worst excesses of the presentation of Freud as a kind of 'conquistador' of the unconscious. Historiographical texts in this model, idealizing the dominant characters of Brazilian psychoanalysis, remain until the early 1980s in official psychoanalytic publications. This historiographic method was defined by Oliveira (2005) as descriptive analysis, reducing historical research to an oral tradition, the construction of a narrative of development displaced from its sociocultural context<sup>1</sup>.

But let us take just one moment after the end of the dictatorship, in the 1990s, in which psychoanalysis was invited to reflect on its history, in order to consider whether the approach shifted once the political pressure was reduced. An official book documenting the history of the São Paulo society, *Álbum de família: imagens, fontes e ideias da Psicanálise em São Paulo* was published by the Sociedade Brasileira de Psicanálise in 1994. This is a very attractive volume, still available over twenty years later. However, the 'history' it provides is neither analytic nor critical; rather, it is of a suggestive and evocative, even elusive, kind. The book in fact consists almost entirely of photographs tracing the history of the Society through the figures who dominated it, ranging from its early founders (including photographs of Freud himself, even though he never ventured to Brazil) through to the

<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank Aline Rubin for alerting us to this material.



later days, with one highlight being pictures of Wilfred Bion on his visits to Brazil in the 1970s. Whilst unexceptionable and touchingly nostalgic in itself, in the context of a psychoanalytic society (as well as a wider sociality and an emerging and fragile democracy) disentangling itself from the violent dictatorship that had ended a decade before and facing the need to take stock and evaluate its participation in, and response to, that dictatorship, this seems like a dereliction of historical duty.

The situation is compounded by the few written texts that are included in the *Álbum de família*, which studiously avoid any discussion of the social and political meaning of the photographs themselves, or of the Society's actual history. Indeed, the introduction to the book links it with Jorge Luis Borges' story *Funes*, the memorious, which is in many ways about the importance of forgetting, as Funes suffers from an inability to forget anything and a consequent block on his capacity to live in the present. The same principle is applied here to the São Paulo Psychoanalytic Society: the book is described as 'A summary of images, with very little explanatory text. An iconography merely as the raw material for dreams' (p. 12). Perhaps ironically, but without any indication of how a reader might act on it, the introduction goes on to hint that these images and dreams could obscure the truth: 'We know how much is hidden in family pictures. They are not true, although not properly lies per se.' This passage ends with a provocation that again is enticing, but hardly registers as historical – or even psychoanalytic – analysis: the texts and photographs in the book are 'suggestions to be taken as remains of the day for us to dream our psychoanalysis, our environment, our history, and finally, our identity' (*ibid.*; our translation).

This piece is illustrative of a way of conceptualizing psychoanalysis that had and continues to have a marked

presence in the psychoanalytic community, at least in Brazil and possibly elsewhere. The history of the institution was not investigated; that might have shown up numerous issues that would require serious confrontation. In place of the stringent work of memory and reconstruction or working through of history, readers are invited to view prettily tinted images and to dream the history of psychoanalysis in São Paulo. What seems to happen here is that psychoanalysis is presented as an ideology that masks and relativises instead of pursuing the truth. This means that all the aspects of psychoanalytic history in the region that really demand examination – its high prices, its elitism, its promotion of conservative family values, its complicity in at least two cases, and possibly more, with a militarised and torturing regime – and that can be viewed as clear breaches of the psychoanalytic ethic, are covered over and lost in the mist of dreams. Why and how is this? Perhaps we should go back to the earliest Freudian understanding of dreams as wish fulfilments: if we can dream away the violence of psychoanalysis' institutional history, we can also fantasise that dreams of its purity and of the removal of any requirement for a reckoning with its past, might come true. Simply put, we regard this book as one symptom of a pervasive denial in the Brazilian psychoanalytic movement of how vulnerable it was and continues to be – alongside other professional organisations, of course – to compromise with corrupt regimes.

It seems apparent that there is a growing willingness amongst Brazilian psychoanalysts to recognise the past events we have briefly described here, perhaps reflected in the original invitation to us as university-based researchers to contribute a Portuguese-language version of this article to the *Revista Brasileira de Psicanálise*, which declares itself to be an 'official publication



of the Brazilian Federation of Psychoanalysis and linked to the International Psychoanalytic Association groupings' (Revista Brasileira de Psicanálise 2018). We understood this as part of the gradual emergence within Brazilian society of a willingness to explore the events of the dictatorship, supported by the establishment of the National Truth Commission (2012) and several Truth Commissions in states, cities and Brazilian universities, and by increasingly open documentation of the oppression of that time. Nevertheless, these gains are fragile, both in Brazilian society as a whole and in the psychoanalytic movement. The history of this article illustrates this. Following the commissioning of it and its acceptance by the commissioning editor of the Revista as a 'very important article' with the additional comment that 'It's indispensable that we get contact within history and not only good memories<sup>2</sup>, the paper was translated into Portuguese and readied for publication. At that point one of us received a phone call from the overall editor of the journal, who said that she had thought about the article for a week and had decided, on her own, that it could not be published. This was not because of any concerns about quality or accuracy – she had no suggestions to make for alterations and no arguments against the content – but because the Brazilian psychoanalytic societies are 'not ready' for what we were saying. We could interpret this as censorship, but perhaps should more generously understand it as ambivalence towards psychoanalysis' local history and its ethical task.

In our own research on the period<sup>3</sup>, in which we

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<sup>2</sup> Email of 8th March 2018.

<sup>3</sup> The project is *Psicanálise e Contexto Social no Brasil: Fluxos Transnacionais, Impacto Cultural e Regime Autoritário* (Psychoanalysis and Social Context in Brazil: Transnational Fluxes, Cultural Impact and Authoritarian Regime).

have interviewed several Brazilian psychoanalysts, we have heard accounts of critics within the psychoanalytic societies in Rio and São Paulo being silenced during the dictatorship. But we have also observed how some of our respondents are still wary now of being quoted, with injunctions such as 'That's a secret, you cannot put that there' being imposed on us despite them previously having signed consent forms stating that their material could be used. In one instance, we have had to withdraw an article from publication because of the anxieties of a psychoanalyst about dissemination of the information he had freely given us. We have also encountered obstructions when exploring archives. For instance, following a claim by one of our interviewees about the activities of Durval Marcondes, one of the most influential and distinguished founders of the Brazilian Psychoanalytic Society of São Paulo, we tried to trace a letter from Marcondes held in the Memory and Documentation Centre of the Society. We were told that this would not be possible and indeed that we could not gain access to any material in the Centre. This was because only documentation that has been organised and catalogued is open to researchers, and the documents we were interested in had not been processed – and there was no timescale for that happening. A year or so later, we were informed that Marcondes' documents were now organized and open for research, although it seems that they had been closed for decades, as is still the case for most of the rest of the archives. It is possible that it was our request that generated the activity on Marcondes' documents; or this might be another promising sign of a liberalising move in Brazilian psychoanalysis.<sup>4</sup> Outside

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We are grateful for the support of the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo in carrying out this research.

<sup>4</sup> At the time of our first inquiry, the website of the Memory and Documentation Centre stated that it was open for researchers. Afterwards, this an-



the psychoanalytic movement, when looking for additional documentation on the São Paulo psychoanalyst mentioned earlier in the archives of the Department of Political and Social Order (DEOPS), which was the main centre of investigation and also imprisonment in São Paulo during the dictatorship, we learnt about a systematic destruction of material that might have compromised individuals involved with the regime. One of the archivists told us, 'truckloads of documents have been burned.' The parallels between the practices of the psychoanalytic societies and this government organisation may not be exact, but they are rather too close for comfort. Recovering memory through historical investigation is a fraught and precarious affair, threatening to disrupt both the idealised visions of the discipline and its capacity for moving on into a new era. On the other hand, denial and disruption of this memory process is a recipe for social melancholia and also for destructive returns. In the case of Brazilian psychoanalysis, there is clearly more openness now than previously, as several of our interviewees told us; but in the face of continuing political volatility in Brazilian society as a whole, it is important to shore up this openness and willingness to confront the past in order to promote the psychoanalytic ethic of facing inner and outer reality as truthfully as possible.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

We have suggested that psychoanalysis reveals in some of its institutional history how it can develop conforming tendencies that are at odds with its more progressive aspects. We take these 'progressive' parts of psychoanalysis to be true to the psychoanalytic mis-

sion as a whole, as they derive from its conditions of formation in the social revolution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and also reflect its potential – mimicking that of the unconscious – to disturb the comfort of the status quo. In any event, the psychoanalytic ethic of encouraging a richer life through open and (self-)critical thinking seems at odds with authoritarianism. Nevertheless, the pull of an intergenerational collusion with repression that is based on silence and denial is very strong, especially when – as in the Brazilian case – it is tied to a social orthodoxy of normalisation and a history of colonial deference. When tested to the extreme, it can produce behaviour that might be termed 'symptomatic' of the presence of something not fully worked through; in this case, the corruption of the psychoanalytic ethic.

In trying to understand what it is that produces the particular directions of psychoanalytic practice that have been described, there is something to note in the way the 'official' IPA-recognised societies in Brazil operated in the troubled times to which this paper refers. What is 'official' is institutionalised and bureaucratised, and becomes dependent on, and fascinated by, wider social acceptance and approval by the centres of power in any society. This might even be more strongly true of a discipline like psychoanalysis, always in danger of being marginalised and seen as both sordid and subversive (for instance, because of its fascination with sexuality) than it is of other more 'respectable' disciplines like medicine or law. Being 'official' in this way leaves it pulled towards subservience, as if the more explosive the unconscious material with which it deals, the more careful it might have to be to contain this and to be a 'normal' element in the society. If this is what dominates, if 'official' acceptability and influence is the goal, then the danger is that psychoanalysis becomes

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nouncement was removed. At the time of writing (July, 2018), there is only a text on Bion where the description of the Centre used to be. See <http://www.sbbsp.org.br/div-de-documentacao.html>.

identified with social and political conformism, which under the right conditions can lead to the reactionary responses sketched here. When psychoanalysis began in the 1890s with Freud, it was a marginal discipline and practice; this was never a comfortable situation to be in, but perhaps this kind of discomfort can inoculate it to some degree against the danger that when times are troubled, as they quite often are, it will lose its bearings and its ethical standing.

Our contention is that unpicking the history of psychoanalysis in relation to these ethical concerns benefits not only from historical documentation of events, which of course is of great importance, but also the application of some psychosocial methods of analysis. In this instance, we have foregrounded the reflexive capacity of psychoanalysis to offer concepts that are relevant to its own organisational situation. We have argued that psychoanalysis has a very particular ethic that puts it at odds with authoritarian politics, but that it struggles at times to maintain this ethic when faced either with existential threats (as was the case in Nazi Germany – see Frosh, 2005) or with pressure to conform to repressive social norms in situations of political tension (as in Brazil, and indeed elsewhere during the ‘cold war’ – see Herzog, 2016). Acknowledging when the struggle fails and the ethic is traduced is also difficult, and in our case example the theme of silencing dissent or failing to admit historical collusion has loomed large. There are many levels of explanation of these phenomena, for example in relation to political infighting within the psychoanalytic movement or the understandable anxiety felt by people exposed to immense social violence. But amongst the explanations are some which benefit from the reflexive application of psychoanalytic concepts themselves. We have mostly used the language of ‘denial’ in this paper; elsewhere, we have drawn atten-

tion to the way the ‘return of the repressed’ can operate within psychoanalytic institutions, for example in the recurrence of antisemitism (Frosh, 2012). We have also been interested in the prejudicial impact of silencing and how it creates a kind of ‘melancholic’ object within the psychoanalytic movement, a historical ‘trauma’ or at least an unworked-through culpability that continues to cause shame and consequently to block acknowledgement. Psychoanalysis is not of course unique in this respect; but given its ethic and its conceptual and practical armoury, one might hope for it to develop an exemplary approach to its own history, in which silence and denial can be overcome.

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