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The Freudian “Hermeneutics of Suspicion” and Historical Source Critique

Abstract: The article concerns some aspect of the impact which psychoanalysis (depth psychology) had on the research practice of historiography. The author asks in what ways “psychoanalytic thinking” modified the handling of a historical source. He argues that the basis for the modification was a unique “hermeneutics of suspicion,” embedded in depth psychology. At the core of this hermeneutics is the attitude of a psychoanalytic therapist—a search for “a deeper meaning” of a particular psychopathological symptom, a meaning cunningly concealed but at the same time indirectly (and perversely) enacted and communicated by this symptom. The article identifies the main reasons for hermeneutics of suspicion penetrating historians’ way of thinking: “ontological” (connected with the specific view of the historical process adopted by historiographers of psychoanalytic sympathies) and “methodological” (related to the discovery and affirmation of the methodological “kinship” between researching history and practicing psychoanalysis). The author further argues that, contrary to superficial readings, psychoanalytic hermeneutics of suspicion is not just a radicalized version of the critical attitude towards the source, which by default marks scientific historiography in its various forms, but that it goes beyond it in important ways. The article considers also various practical consequences of the presence of this kind of hermeneutics in handling historical sources..

Keywords: “hermeneutics of suspicion,” philosophical criticism, critical attitude, historiography, psychohistory, historical process, historical source, psychoanalysis

The Specificity and Ambiguity of Psychoanalysis

The psychoanalysis created over one hundred years ago by Sigmund Freud has penetrated—and in some cases also decidedly changed—many areas of human existence.¹ It has also influenced many sciences

¹ Regarding the holistic attempt at estimating the global influence of psychoanalysis on the human reality of the last century and the diagnosis of its present condition, see E. Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Knopf, 2004).

on man, including historiography. In this last case, it has also contributed in a decisive way to the rise of a separate research orientation, which programmatically deals with the psychological dimension of the past and is generally called psychohistory.² But it was not just the “broadening” of the field of historical research as a result of the addition of a new area of investigation³ that was the most important: it was the “meeting” of history and depth psychology, leading to various elements of “psychoanalytic thinking” taking root in the methodological awareness and empirical research practices of at least some historians, that turned out to be key. The presence of these elements became visible in various fields. They

Cf. also N. Ginsburg, R. Ginsburg, eds., *Psychoanalysis and Culture at the Millennium* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 1999).

² The definitional quality of psychohistory is its *programmatic* reference to psychological theory as the basis of conducting research or interpreting historical phenomena. Formally speaking, many theoretical “options” may come into play here and many have been tested, but only the psychology of depth has been able to take a clearer and more enduring hold in professional historiography. This is precisely why the term “psychohistory” is commonly understood as a synonym for “psychoanalytic history.” For general information on this subject, see: T. Pawelec, *Dzieje i nieświadomość. Zatożenia teoretyczne i praktyka badawcza psychohistorii* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2004); J. Szaluta, *Psychohistory: Theory and Practice* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); P. Loewenberg, “Psychohistory. An Overview of the Field,” in: P. Loewenberg, *Decoding the Past: The Psychohistorical Approach* (New Brunswick–London: Transaction Publishers, 1996), pp. 14–41. Regarding “non-psychoanalytic alternatives” in the field of psychohistorical investigation, see M. Dymkowski, *Wprowadzenie do psychologii historycznej* (Gdańsk: GWP, 2003); T. Ochowski, “Nie tylko psychoanaliza. Wybrane programy współpracy badawczej historii i psychologii,” *Historyka*, Vol. 32, 2002, pp. 63–88; W. M. Runyan, “Alternatives to Psychoanalytic Psychobiography,” in: *Psychology and Historical Interpretation*, W. M. Runyan, ed. (New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 219–244; W. M. Runyan, “Reconceptualizing the Relations Between History and Psychology,” in: *Psychology and Historical Interpretation*, pp. 247–295.

³ It is worth noting that historians have really always been interested in the psychological aspect of history. This was accented by scholars of such differing prominence as Johann G. Droysen (“Every so-called historical fact [...] is a compound of favorable or unfavorable acts of will”) and Marc Bloch (“Historical facts are, in essence, psychological facts. That is why they are usually the consequences of other psychological facts”). This was connected with the dominance—so characteristic of all varieties of classical historiography, especially—of the perspective of direct anthropomorphization. From such a perspective, the fundamental objects of investigation are the individual and collective decisions and actions of human subjects. Asking about their goals and motives, desires and fears, emotions or passions, in essence, we pose a question (at least implicit) of a psychological nature. In reality, the change consists in the recognition of the autonomy and cognitive specificity of this aspect (or dimension) of historical investigation *vis-à-vis* the remaining types of historical questions addressed by scholars of history. J. G. Droysen, *Zarys historyki*, trans. M. Bonecki, J. Duraj (Bydgoszcz: Epigram, 2012), p. 28 (*Outline of Principles of History* [Boston: Ginn, 1897]; original edition: 1868/1882); M. Bloch, *Pochwała historii, czyli o zawodzie historyka* (Warszawa: PWN, 1958), p. 221. More systematically on the challenges of studying the motivational side of history—D. H. Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (London: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 187–215. More on the epistemological consequences of direct anthropomorphization: W. Wrzosek, *O myśleniu historycznym* (Bydgoszcz: Epigram, 2009), pp. 41–50.

influenced, among other things, the way these scholars understood historical reality (that is, the conceptualization of the area of research), the forms and strategies of the explanations and historical interpretations they constructed, the shape and character of the narrative, and, last but not least, their attitude towards sources as the empirical basis of historiography. The text hereby presented concerns the latter issue. In considering how “psychoanalytical thinking” has modified work with sources in historiography, I argue that the basis of these modifications is a certain “hermeneutics of suspicion,” “built into” depth psychology. I will also attempt to answer the question of whether such hermeneutics successfully took root within the wider historical profession.

I would like to note that in this article I consciously make use of the general term “psychoanalytic thinking,” despite its obvious vagueness. In using it, I would like to accentuate the basic message of my argument—the thesis about the peculiar character of the reasoning that makes up this “thinking”: to reason in a psychoanalytic way means to participate in a very special mental reality that diverges from the one created by the sphere of colloquial thought.

The assimilation of the rules of psychoanalytic reasoning by a given subject (especially by way of analytic training or the experience of psychotherapy, less frequently through the study of the appropriate literature) means *gestalt switch* in regard to more than just the sphere of colloquial experience. The “thought style”⁴ of the advocates of psychoanalysis also seems distinct in regard to the majority of “thought styles” that dominate the field of human sciences. We can even speak of its fundamental incommensurability with them. All reflection on the presence of psychoanalysis in philosophy, historiography, sociology, anthropology, political science, literary studies, etc., means, in essence, study-

⁴ I use this term in the sense proposed by Ludwik Fleck: “[...] directed perception, with corresponding mental and objective assimilation of what has been so perceived. It is characterized by common features in the problems of interest to a thought collective, by the judgement which the thought collective considers evident, and by the methods which it applies as a means of cognition.” L. Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979), p. 99.

ing the effects of depth psychology's intellectual "invasion" of these fields. These investigations belong, on the one hand, to the history of ideas, on the other—to the history of science. This article can be seen as a contribution to both these areas of study, concentrating on (or, better yet, limited to) the problem of empirical references in historiography.⁵

In the beginning, it is worth noting that demonstrating the various dimensions of the uniqueness of the psychoanalytic thought in-depthly and adequately would require an extensive reconstruction of its premises and the resulting perceptions, attitudes, and directives of action in various spheres (from science and therapy to daily life⁶). Such a reconstruction is impossible here due to space constraints, but an interested reader may find such reconstructions without a problem in the extensive secondary literature.⁷ However, it is worth indicating that the essential premise of the psychoanalytical "style of thinking" is the very ambiguity of the phenomenon called psychoanalysis. Above all, it constitutes a certain (not completely homogeneous) type of a *therapeutic approach* in psychiatric and psychological clinical practice, aimed at not only treating psychological disorders, but also at perfecting character. At the same time,

⁵ From the stricter perspective of metahistorical reflection, they belong, on the one hand, to the history of historiography, and on the other hand, to the pragmatic methodology of history.

⁶ A number of popular works intended to promulgate the psychoanalytic approach in the daily life of "average people" are available on the publishing markets world-wide. See, e.g., A. Kokoszka, *Psychoanalityczne ABC* (Kraków: Universitas, 1997); V. Albisetti, *W poszukiwaniu szczęścia. Psychoterapia dla wszystkich* (Kraków: WAM, 2001); original edition: V. Albisetti, *Per essere felici. psicoterapia per tutti* (Milano: Edizioni paoline, 1991).

⁷ In my opinion, the most convenient guide to this literature for Polish readers would be that of Peter Gay—renowned historian of psychoanalysis, and possibly best biographer of Sigmund Freud up to date. See the extensive "Biographical Essay" included in his *opus magnum* titled *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988); Polish edition—P. Gay, *Freud. Życie na miarę epoki* (Poznań: Zysk i S-ka, 2003). Noted there (and usually briefly discussed) are the most significant positions regarding the main issues of psychoanalysis, representative "manifests" and model studies from its particular "schools" or "branches," and, finally, the most important polemical and critical works in the fields of psychology and philosophy. A good juxtaposition of the key texts is also included in P. Kutter's book, *Współczesna psychoanaliza. Psychologia procesów nieświadomych* (Gdańsk: GWP, 1998); original edition: P. Kutter, *Moderne psychoanalyse: eine Einführung in die Psychologie unbewusster Prozesse* (Stuttgart: Verlag Internationale Psychoanalyse, 1989). Among valuable Polish publications, particularly worth mentioning are: Z. Rosińska, *Psychoanalityczne myślenie o sztuce* (Warszawa: PWN, 1985); P. Dybel, *Dialog i represja. Antynomie psychoanalizy Zygmunta Freuda* (Warszawa: IFiS PAN, 1995); P. Dybel, *Okruchy psychoanalizy. Teoria Freuda pomiędzy hermeneutyką a poststrukturalizmem* (Kraków: Universitas, 2009); M. Sokolik, ed., *Problemy współczesnej psychoanalizy* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1992); Z. Rosińska, J. Michalik, P. Bursztyka, eds., *Freud i nowoczesność* (Kraków: Universitas, 2008).

however, it is a particular *method of studying/reconstructing* the contents of unconscious psychological processes and *investigating* the mechanisms that regulate them. Simultaneously, it is accepted that the *cognitive effects* flowing from the use of this method have *therapeutic power*. In other words: the use of this method for examining the unconscious of those who suffer brings these people relief. Thus, therapy becomes cognitive exploration, or vice versa: investigation *is tantamount* to treatment.⁸

In a further understanding, psychoanalysis is also defined—this is already the third view—as a certain *general conception (or theory) of psychology* of man, first formulated by Freud and gradually developed/modified as a generalization or (as some analysts would have it) a “reader’s digest” of the practical experience of successive generations of therapists. In time, this conception became one of the most important theoretical perspectives of twentieth-century psychology. Finally, in the fourth understanding, we can speak about a certain *general conception of human nature*—a particular view of man that aspires to be a *holistic philosophy of man and of culture*. It remains a “superstructure” over psychoanalysis as a theory in the field of psychology. On the one hand, it is present in various fields of philosophical reflection, on the other—it serves some analysts in undertaking “cognitive excursions” into the fields of anthropology, sociology, history, art history, or biography. All of these endeavors are known as *applied psychoanalysis*.⁹

⁸ During a session, the analyst explains the patient’s unconscious meanings of the actions and symbolic messages. The therapist, as Freud formulated it, “makes the unconscious conscious,” and it was precisely this that produced the healing effects.

⁹ The striking impression of the psychology of depth’s ambiguity does not disappear when we limit ourselves only to the scientific and cognitive plane of psychoanalytic activity. It has long been emphasized that psychoanalysis as a paradigm or “research program” (I use this term in Imre Lakatos’ understanding—I. Lakatos, “Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes,” in: I. Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*, vol. 1, [Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980], pp. 8–101) of investigating the human world, demonstrates characteristics inclined both towards the interpretation of humanities, and those that are usually tied with naturalistic and nomologistic natural sciences. Moreover—as a result of the therapeutic “sensitivity” irremovably built into it—it demonstrates traits of a science that is socially (and culturally) engaged, a certain “emancipative discipline” that programmatically undertakes (or is ready to undertake) the challenge of changing the social world “for the better.” In regards to this, see P. Kutter, *Współczesna psychoanaliza...*, pp. 56–64. Cf. E. Zaretsky, *Secrets of the soul...*

“Hermeneutics of Suspicion”: A Cognitive Implication of the Theory of the Unconscious

If I were to indicate a basic element, the most essential component of constitutive importance for the emergence of the unique thought process, proper to psychoanalysis, it would be—not only in my opinion—the idea of a dynamically-understood unconscious. (This idea constitutes the fundamental premise of depth psychology,¹⁰ both in the ontological dimension and beyond). Equally important to indicate would be its implications for the psychoanalytic understanding of the essential nature of human reality (i.e.: for the psychoanalytic “view of the world and of man”). This idea directly conditioned the shape of a unique cognitive approach—an approach constitutive for the activity of psychoanalysts—which I call here the “hermeneutics of suspicion.”¹¹

According to Freud and his followers, the processes inaccessible to consciousness determine the psychological life of man and constitute the main source of his thereto related problems.¹² The unconscious

¹⁰ “If Freud’s discovery had to be summed up in a single word, that word would without doubt have to be ‘unconscious’”—write the authors of the authoritative dictionary of psychoanalysis. J. Laplanche, J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Hogarth Press, 1973), p. 473. For a more extensive definition of this category, see: J. Laplanche, J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, pp. 473–476. Cf. the definitions in other, similar works: S. Fhanér, *Słownik psychoanalizy* (Gdańsk: GWP, 1996), pp. 134–137; original edition: S. Fhanér, *Psychoanalytiskt Lexikon* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1989); B. Moore, B. Fine, eds., *Słownik psychoanalizy. Klasyczne pojęcia, nowe koncepcje* (Warszawa: Jacek Santorski & Co., 1996), pp. 178–179; original edition: B. Moore, B. Fine, eds., *Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

¹¹ It seems that it is already at this point that we must provide an initial explanation to the basic category underlying the reflections presented here. The thesis that psychoanalysis is a type of hermeneutics—the art of interpreting what is “symbolic” (or, in a more cautious formula: what can be perceived/practiced as such) has long been present in the philosophical discourse, as well as in the minds of members of the psychoanalytic environment. We can cite such names as: Paul Ricoeur, Jürgen Habermas, Alfred Lorenzer, Karl Jaspers (on the philosophical plane), or Roy Schafer, Ludwik Binswanger, H. J. Möller, George Klein, Jacques Lacan (within the area of the psychoanalytic movement). More on this subject in: P. Dybel, *Dialog i represja...*, cz. II; P. Dybel, *Okruchy psychoanalizy...*, pp. 153–283, 335–386; K. Pajor, *Psychoanaliza Freuda po stu latach* (Warszawa: Eneteia, 2009), pp. 314–322; A. Pawliszyn, *Skryte podstawy rozumienia. Hermeneutyka a psychoanaliza* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 1993). In connection to the above, it is valid to describe the cognitive approach (and activity) practised by psychoanalysts as “hermeneutics.” I will attempt to demonstrate the validity of using the descriptive term “suspicion” in the further part of the article.

¹² The following presentation of selected theses in psychoanalysis is simplified in the sense that it omits the (often essential) evolution both in terms of understanding certain specific

“never rests”: the contents present within it actively attempt to break through to the sphere of consciousness, which the processes of denial (and other defense mechanism) oppose. Thanks to the so-called function of censorship, this may happen only partially, in a limited and compromised (thus: inadequate) form.¹³ Here, we find the first premise of Freudian hermeneutics: the symptoms grasped on the level of consciousness (such as parapraxes, free association, dreams) should be studied as signs of the processes taking place on deeper levels of the psyche and thus impossible to grasp directly. The point here is something more than the classic indicative (or signal) relation between the “overt” symptom, and “hidden” pathology. The symptoms should be examined by the analyst as “marked by intentionality,” i.e. as messages carrying certain (though, at the given moment, veiled) meanings. In his dissertation on Freudian thought that systemizes the hermeneutic tradition of interpreting psychoanalysis,¹⁴ Paweł Dybel writes:

The oft-returning statement in Freud’s works that pathological psychological phenomena [...] are *meaningful* means that they are not exhausted in their literal sense (commonly perceived as senseless), but rather refer us outside ourselves towards the hidden meaning of a scene from the patient’s childhood. This sense, for unknown reasons, was repressed into the patient’s unconscious, where it has rested since then in disguise awaiting its resumption, ‘awakening,’ and assimilation by the patient’s self-knowledge. Thanks to a similar—present at the level of overt meaning—moment of allusive reference to hidden meaning, pathological psychological phenomena gain [...] a distinguished place against the backdrop of the remaining phenomena. In contrast to those phenomena, they contain some signal, some trace of a traumatic event (or sequence of events) from the past, which is of key significance to understanding the patient’s spiritual biography. [...] This moment of revelation, the hint of a trace, is usually not present at all on the level of overt meaning of normal phenomena.

categories and within the scope of understanding the holistic structure and shape of psychoanalytic theory. Both types of changes were present in the thought of Freud himself (the first and second topographies of the psychological apparatus, for example), and—to an even greater degree—in the thought of his successors (regarding the developmental schemes of human personality or defining of the basic instances of the psyche).

¹³ It is here that the dynamic character of the unconscious manifests itself.

¹⁴ The hermeneutic tradition has developed in opposition to the rivaling “scientific,” “natural,” or “empirico-nomological” traditions. In the writings of the Founding Father, elements legitimizing both of these traditions (each has its own more detailed variants), are present.

[...] The presence of this moment in pathological phenomena does not say much yet about the hidden meaning itself. Nevertheless, it opens some hope for the analyst of reaching—through dialogue with the patient—those layers of his/her psyche in which the sources of his/her illness lie.¹⁵

As this author notes elsewhere in the book,

[...] at the base of Freud's interpretive proceedings lies the assumption that behind the seemingly difficult to accept literally (or completely incomprehensible) meanings of patients' behavior or statements, an additional layer of meaning [intention] is hidden that they are not aware of, and which *takes on a significant form in its senselessness*. This intention is not given directly [...] but makes itself known allusively with the help of various types of empty *signifiant*, whose *signifié* can be found in the wider context of the patient's spiritual biography.¹⁶

In the interpretive strategy of psychoanalysts described by Dybel, the presence of the “biographical moment” is noteworthy. Its key significance is determined by the conviction that though the content of the unconscious is, above all, a psychological manifestation of the biologic-instinctive sphere of human existence (regulated by the principles of the so-called “primary process”), it is also subject to external influences. Within the framework of psychoanalytic concepts, it is accepted that the elements composing the individual's psyche (various “psychological instances”—whether completely immersed in the unconscious or partially conscious/subconscious), as well as the relations between them, are shaped evolutionally as a result of interactions between instincts and psychophysical needs, as well as influences of the social environment in their entirety, beginning with the first external object, the mother. This occurs within the framework of a series of developmental phases that determine the consecutive development of the basic components of the structure of the personality, while the type/specificity of experi-

¹⁵ P. Dybel, *Dialog i represja. Antynomie psychoanalizy Zygmunta Freuda* (Warszawa: IFiS PAN, 1995), pp. 93–94.

¹⁶ P. Dybel, *Dialog i represja...*, p. 98, emphasis—T.P.

ence that the individual takes part in during a given phase would imply the specific developmental variant of a given component of this structure.

Special significance is ascribed here to negative experiences that traumatize the personality of the developing human being. This is an ambiguous and complex issue. The experiences that shape one’s personality do not necessarily have to be of a traumatic character *per se*. Sometimes, they take on such qualities only under the influence of later (i.e.: secondary) injuries. The latter lead to regression—i.e. an unconscious “return” to previously established ways of instinctual and emotional satisfaction, object choice, etc., perpetuated on the basis of those primary (“fixated”) experiences. Next to “external” experiences, a traumatizing and anxiety inducing role can also be played by “internal” experiences, connected with the feeling of impulses and/or desires flowing from unconscious, instinctive layers of the psyche. The famous Freudian idea of “repetition compulsion” refers precisely to this type of situation: when a given subject under the influence of real external stimuli—and/or certain internal experiences—in a given area of his activity or emotional life begins to function inadequately, e.g., as he/she did when he/she was a child. It is in this sense that psychoanalysts maintain that adult behavior may be the expression of an unconscious and symbolic compensation for earlier traumas. Thus, each individual’s unique “personal history,” understood as the specific result of his inborn psychological disposition and (to a large degree culturally-conditioned) experiences that he/she participated in at the successive phases of his/her psyche’s development, determine the shape of the personality of every human individual (including—what remains of key importance for the therapist—the shape of his possible psychological pathologies).

Psychoanalytic investigation—and, at the same time, therapy—would therefore be based on examining the patient’s personal history, which (a) shaped the structure of his/her character in a certain way and “defined” the pathologies proper to him/her, (b) was “written” and “buried” in his/her unconsciousness, and now (c) manifests itself in a distorted and allusive way through “symptoms” that can be grasped on a conscious level

and—possibly—also manifested behaviorally. Insight into this history will allow for the reconstruction of its “proper,” i.e. hidden, meaning and its consequent “healing” inclusion into the patient’s sphere of consciousness (self-knowledge).

As a result, a series of analytic sessions take place, during which—in the course of interaction or dialogue with the patient—the therapist gradually acquires hints and indications that lead him to this meaning.¹⁷ Let us return to Paweł Dybel’s argumentation, in which he accurately captures the presence (and fundamental significance!) of the *suspicious* attitude, a *certain lack of agreement* on the part of the analyst *to accept* the message directly available to him or communicated outright, which leads him to undertake a *persistent effort to “look inward” and reach the deeper, hidden layers*:

The process of psychoanalytic interpretation [...] consists in [...] gradually overcoming the separation of a given phenomenon’s *signifié* from its *signifiant* while extracting subsequent *signifiant* of the unconscious from the patient in the course of dialogue with him. The *signifiant* [...] of pathological psychological phenomena therefore remains in a deeply ambiguous relation (or, to be more precise, dual) to its hidden *signifié*. This relation is composed of [...] the masking intention, as well as the unveiling one. The masking intention attempts to create in the interpreter the impression that the interpreted *signifiant* is its own *signifié*. It wants to reassure him in his conviction that this *signifiant* means only what it means literally, and is therefore completely ‘meaningless.’ He is to come to the conclusion that seeking some hidden meaning beyond this is unnecessary. The unveiling intention, on the other hand, (1) is manifested in an exaggerated (thus, “attention-grabbing”) attempt to cover up the hidden meaning, and (2) by way of the purely structural features of the overt meaning allusively refers to the hidden meaning. An interpreter following it is to come to the conviction that in spite of appearances, behind the overt meaning of the phe-

¹⁷ It is the interactive character of meeting that leads to the production of psychoanalytic data: the genesis of the stream of consciousness communicated in the form of free associations, the appearance of resistance, the shaping and dynamics of the patient’s unconscious emotional attitude towards the therapist (transference) and the therapist’s towards the patient (countertransference). For a good introduction to psychoanalytic work with patients, see B. Killingmo, *Psychoanalityczna metoda leczenia* (Gdańsk: GWP, 1995); original edition—B. Killingmo, *Den psykoanalytiske behandlingsmetode: prinsipper og begreper* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971); A. Leźnicka-Łoś, *Nauczyć się kochać. Terapia psychoanalityczna w teorii i praktyce* (Warszawa: Jacek Santorski & Co, 2002).

nomenon hides a covert meaning, which should be reached by reconstructing the missing intermediate elements. A psychoanalyst [...] *does not allow himself to be deceived by the masking intention* [...]. *In it, he perceives precisely the attempt to hide and distort something completely different*, more essential than what the overt meaning of the phenomenon declares. And it is precisely this attempt that tells him something, that reveals something, though it does so in an unusual way.¹⁸

As we can see, the “hermeneutics of suspicion”—the search for “deeper meaning,” purposefully hidden and, at the same time, perversely present in the message that is available directly—constitutes the foundation of analytic proceedings. In other words, it turns out to be the condition *sine qua non* of successful psychoanalytic practice.¹⁹ Transferred to the sphere of the sciences of man, it would transform and increase—so it says—the possibilities of insight and analyses available to these disciplines.²⁰

“Hermeneutics of Suspicion” and Historiography

The psychoanalytic “hermeneutics of suspicion” appeared within the bounds of historiography thanks to psychohistorians—researchers of history who “believed in Freudism.” We can indicate two premises of its reception in historiography. The first was connected with the ontological dimension of the historian’s thought, the second, with the methodological dimension. The first case concerns the “postulated reality” characteristic of the historians who accepted the theorems of depth psychology. It is evident that in their case, the accepted vision of the histori-

¹⁸ P. Dybel, *Dialog i represja...*, pp. 100–101, emphasis—T.P.

¹⁹ It is noteworthy that the “proper” history of psychoanalysis usually begins with the moment in which S. Freud began treating the often shocking stories of his patients (the sphere of overt meaning) rather as fantasies (let us immediately add—*meaningful fantasies*), than memories of real occurrences; it is precisely then that he stood on the foundation of the “hermeneutics of suspicion.”

²⁰ “The significance of various psychoanalytic theories for individual discipline in the humanities consisted (and consists) in the fact that a certain way of looking at what was usually called the ‘human psyche’ was formed. This view [...] led to a completely different understanding of all man’s actions and his various cultural products. Contact with classical texts in the psychoanalytic tradition [...] teaches us, above all, a certain type of sensitivity. Once acquired, it allows us to turn our attention to a series of seemingly accidental aspects of the investigated phenomena, whose meaning and function had hitherto been rejected.” P. Dybel, *Okruchy psychoanalizy...*, pp. 25–26.

cal process had to more or less directly result from a psychoanalytic view of the world and of man, for which—as we remember—the most constitutive is the conviction about the existence of a sphere of the unconscious that is superior to the human thought and action. Thus, when the ontology of psychohistorians places man in the position of subjectivity and agency—as the creator of culture and of history, who by virtue of his action “creates” the reality of his own existence—it simultaneously accepts that this human subject is, to a large degree, not “his own master.” It assumes that the major part of his psychological activity is unconscious and—remaining the main determinant of the decisions and actions of this subject (both individual and collective)—is located outside of his conscious and “volitional” control.

This unconscious conditioning is fundamentally of a “framework” character, i.e. it is expressed in subject’s tendency to repeat certain patterns of reaction (cognitive and emotional) and behavior that appeared in connection with the necessity of coping with various experiences/traumas. On the level of specific behavior, a more or less developed aspect of conscious thought and realistic action (an element of “rationality”) generally coexists with the above.²¹ However, from the perspective of depth psychology, these patterns stemming from the unconscious are understood as paramount elements within man’s motivational structure.

Ontology based on psychoanalysis imposes a complicated model of the individual and of society on the historian. Human subjects appear as, on the one hand, determined in their actions by a realistic view of reality (i.e.: ones that proceed “rationally”—in accordance with ones’ own knowledge and values), and on the other (more essential), conditioned by the psychological effects of the “sum” of their positive and negative experiences, which, making up the “personal history” of a given individual, shaped the structure of his/her character in a certain way

²¹ Its presence would guarantee the existence in the psyche of every healthy individual (i.e.: free from conflict) a sphere of cognitive and adaptational functions of the “Ego.”

and defined the basic models of referring to others, which are not subject to conscious control.

Though at the base of this last process lie elementary, culturally invariant mechanisms of psychological life, the specific result of their “work” depends on the socio-cultural context, in which man experiences the world and himself. On the other hand, according to the psychoanalytic view of the world and man, society appears not only as a certain structure or network of social interactions, roles, and patterns of behavior. It is also—or rather, *above all*—a certain type of “spiritual” or mental reality. The transformations and evolution of the latter occur “above the heads” (and beyond the consciousness) of the individual subjects entangled in it. It appears in the form of a so-called irrational group process and is characterized by its own specific dynamics,²² within which the action of many key defense mechanisms described in psychoanalytic literature can be grasped and recognized.²³

In light of the described ontology, the fundamental historiographical mechanisms are located in the motivational sphere of man as a conscious (and, to an even greater degree, an *unconscious*) creator of history. This is why psychoanalytically oriented historians state that the core of their cognitive endeavor is studying the “historical motivation,” “inquiries into why people acted in certain ways in history.”²⁴ These inquiries, as is emphasized in their circles, are of a special character—they give

²² Freud and his successors tended to understand these dynamics per analogiam to the psychic processes of individuals, especially to the emotional dependencies characteristic of family life.

²³ Especially those connected with the issue of relations to the object, such as projection or introjection. On the defense mechanisms of the “Ego” see the classic work of S. Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (London: L. & V. Woolf, Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1937). The concept of a collective unconscious was undoubtedly dedicated the most space in the analytic psychology of Carl Gustav Jung—one of the earliest independent “branches” of the psychoanalytic “tree.”

²⁴ See L. deMause, *Niezależność psychohistorii*, in: T. Pawelec, ed., *Psyche i Klio. Historia w oczach psychohistoryków* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2002), pp. 52–53. Cf. the recurring motifs in various definitions of psychohistory as historiography based on psychoanalysis that appear in P. Elovitz, ed., *Applying Psychology to Current Events, History and Society. Essays from the Journal Clío's Psyche* (New York: Psychohistory Forum, 2006), pp. 1–3.

due place to the aggression, sexuality, passions, fantasy, and emotional states the inner world of its subjects. [Scholars seek—T.P.] *the function of the unconscious in human behavior [...] pursue visible traces of the unconscious and its defences.*²⁵

As we can see, the fundamental object of historical inquiry turns out to be precisely what interests psychoanalysts in reference to their patients. The similarity in research objects justifies a similar approach in terms of cognition and research strategy: the “hermeneutics of suspicion” in regard to historical sources (the search for hidden references in the available source information to the sphere of unconscious motivation of historical subjects) in the first case, the “hermeneutics of suspicion” regarding symptoms demonstrated by the patient (the search for the hidden meaning covertly expressed in them) in the second case.

In the context of the methodological dimension of historical thought, the permeation of the “hermeneutics of suspicion” was fostered by certain conclusions that flowed from reflection on nature and the fundamental qualities of historians’ research practice. Namely, certain thinkers (whether connected with the psychology of depth or historiography and the philosophy of history) perceived various similarities and analogies, even a certain methodological “affinity,” between the study of history (especially its classical variant) and psychoanalysis.²⁶ In this context, the latter was called a “a *historical science* concerned with origins and development, thus providing genetic adaptational narrative historical explanation”²⁷ (naturally, in reference to the “personal history” of the patient). The “authority” on psychoanalytic history, Peter Loewenberg, writes:

²⁵ P. Loewenberg, *Psychohistory...*, pp. 15–16, emphasis—T.P.

²⁶ See, e.g., R. de Saussure, *Psychoanalysis and History*, in: *Psychoanalysis and the Social Science*, Vol. 2, G. Roheim, ed. (New York: International Universities Press, 1950), pp. 7–65; H. Meyerhoff, *On Psychoanalysis as History*, in: *Psycho/History: Reading in the Method of Psychology, Psychoanalysis and History*, G. Cocks, T. Crosby, eds. (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 17–29; A. Besançon, “Psychoanalysis: Auxiliary Science or Historical Method?” *Contemporary History* 1968, Vol. 3, pp. 149–153; M. Roth, *Psycho-Analysis as History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

²⁷ P. Loewenberg, “Preface,” in: *Decoding the Past...*, p. XX.

Both history and psychoanalysis rely on the arts of interpretation and communication. Psychoanalysis clinically, and history by ‘immersion’ in the vestiges of the past [...] share the quality of placing the observer in the midst of the field he analyzes and requiring of him a special mixture of identification and detachment as a prerequisite to interpretation.²⁸

As this scholar observed elsewhere,

[...] both disciplines are to the theory of overdetermination. It would be a poor historian who would maintain that a major historical event had only one cause. We must necessarily look to many levels of causation and appraise the significance of each. Freud too insisted upon the overdetermined nature of the affects, dreams, and symptoms of psychic life. Thus both disciplines seek multiple explanations for single phenomena. [...] This distinguishes history and psychoanalysis from the social and the natural sciences that seek to fit or subsume individual events under general covering laws of behavior.²⁹

In connection with this, it has been said that a psychoanalytically thinking researcher of the past,

can remain a historian [...]; he can continue to use traditional historical method and, in doing so, *function in a way that is fundamentally compatible with the way in which the psychoanalyst functions as a clinician.*³⁰

In the context of the examined issue, the meaning of the cited argumentation seems evident: since the “hermeneutics of suspicion” lie at the base of a psychoanalyst’s clinical proceedings, it should also find a proper place in the research practice of the historian. After all, both act (or *should* act) similarly... The assimilation of such a directive seemed all the easier that in its superficial reception, this hermeneutics could appear to be a certain variant or possibly even radicalization

²⁸ P. Loewenberg, *Psychohistory...*, pp. 3–4.

²⁹ P. Loewenberg, *Psychohistory...*, p. 16.

³⁰ T. Kohut, “Psychohistory as History,” *American Historical Review* 1986, Vol. 96, p. 347, emphasis—T.P.

of the skeptic approach characteristic of historiography, and developed in connection with the so-called *critique of the historical source*.

Source Critique and the “Hermeneutics of Suspicion”

Usually, source critique is defined as a series of investigative actions serving to define the origin, authenticity, and credibility of a historical source.³¹ History notes a plethora of debates about the separation or distinction of elements perceived as a “trace” or “remnant” of the past within the source as either authentic, or worthless, or unreliable. Older methodological treatises saw the essence of the scientific historiographical method exactly in critical study of the sources.³² Therefore, detailed sets of rules of external and internal critique³³ (usually communicated by way of a series of examples illustrating specific “model” acts, individual critical solutions) fill the greater part—sometimes even the majority—of works like Marceli Handelsman’s *Historyka* or Charles Langlois and Charles Seignobos’ *Introduction to the Study of History*.³⁴ Since the source is to be an empirical “link” with historical fact sought by the historiographer, we should ascertain whether it really is what it seems to be in the historian’s eyes, and whether it is not deceiving him

³¹ B. Miśkiewicz, *Wstęp do badań historycznych* (Warszawa–Poznań: PWN, 1985), p. 210. See also: J. Topolski, *Metodologia historii* (Warszawa: PWN, 1984), pp. 357–376

³² It is precisely the codification of the “classical” rules of critique of written sources (especially of documents as the most cognitively valuable type of such sources), which occurred in the 17th and 18th century, that is recognized as an essential step from historiography—“writing” to historiography—“science.” Regarding this issue, cf. D.R. Kelley, *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 188–211; A.F. Grabski, *Dzieje historiografii* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2003), pp. 273–289; J. W. Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing*, Vol. 2. (New York: MacMillan & Co., 1942), pp. 3–57.

³³ That is, respectively: (a) establishing the origins of the source, i.e. the place and time it originates from and its authorship, establishing the authenticity of the source; (b) establishing the credibility and cognitive value of the source. Literally speaking, the listed issues refer to sources described as written ones, but in a broader understanding also concern other types of source materials.

³⁴ As for the latter (originally published as Ch. Langlois, Ch. Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques* [Paris: Hachette, 1897]), in the 350-page-length English version of the treatise I have used, (*Introduction to the Study of History* [London: Duckworth, 1898]), the issue of critique takes up almost 140 pages, while the problem of establishing facts on the basis of the results of this critique (i.e. “extracting” them from the source)—less than 20 pages. Thus, from a traditional perspective, this last element clearly seems to be unproblematic.

intentionally or unwittingly.³⁵ Herein lies the essence of the skepticism typical of a classically-understood critical approach regarding historical sources. Here, we also find its limits. “Suspicion” ended in the moment when a source successfully passed the critique.³⁶ From that moment on, the historian was allowed to accept that the information contained within it³⁷ “directly” communicated “what it was really like” in the past. Thus, the *signifiant* merged with its *signifié*, and the researcher of history believed that he had gained full (if not necessarily exhaustive) access to past facts by virtue of source information. As Edward H. Carr wrote in retrospect (and somewhat sarcastically): “The nineteenth-century fetishism of facts was completed and justified by a fetishism of documents. The documents were the Ark of the Covenant in the temple of facts. The reverent historian approached them with bowed head and spoke of them in awed tones. *If you find it in the documents, it is so.*”³⁸

As we can see, it is the point of departure that connects the psychoanalytic “hermeneutics of suspicion” with the classical approach of the historian: this point of departure is an attitude of initial mistrust regarding the data he/she acquired or came across. Further on, however, a fundamental difference appears. In accordance with the position presented

³⁵ I.e., whether the informer—the creator of the source transmission—is not deceiving him. The formula cited in a modern methodological textbook is significant in this context: “As source critique, we consider such acquisition of knowledge about the source that it [i.e the source—T.P.] becomes a source of *ready-to-use* information.” J. Topolski, *Wprowadzenie do historii* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1998), p. 46, emphasis—T.P.

³⁶ It is appropriate to note that this test of critique, in the way it was conducted, was oftentimes very complex. Its results did not have to be unambiguous—when, for example, they showed the place and scope of “falsification” of a given document (“here” it is authentic, “there” it is not) or determined the degree to which the author of a given document was informed or partial (“here” it is credible, “there” it is not). The aforementioned “exemplary” model of presenting the rules of critique served precisely to demonstrate this complexity and ambiguity. Regarding the systematic reconstruction of critical reasoning developed around the source, conducted from the perspective of formal logic and the general methodology of science, see: J. Giedymin, *Z problemów logicznych analizy historycznej* (Poznań: PWN, 1961). Cf. J. Giedymin, *Problemy, założenia, rozstrzygnięcia* (Poznań: PWN, 1964), pp. 105–123.

³⁷ The traditional conception declared that the source essentially contains “ready-made” information about the past, which historians—after conducting critique—later “extract” from it. A systematic juxtaposition of the convictions constituting the classical concept of historical source—J. Kolbuszewska, “Problem źródła w klasycznej XIX-wiecznej historiografii,” in: *Historyk wobec źródeł. Historiografia klasyczna i nowe propozycje metodologiczne*, J. Kolbuszewska, R. Stobiecki, eds. (Łódź: Ibidem, 2010), pp. 13–21.

³⁸ E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 16, emphasis—T.P.

above, the historian wants to discern/ascertain whether he/she can accept the information/data present on the level of the literal meaning of the message (“ready-made” source information); the psychoanalyst, on the other hand, automatically treats the literal meaning of symptoms as a veil or mask, which must be looked underneath. In the first case, there is a readiness to accept (under the conditions defined by the rules of critique) the “overt meaning.” In the second case, the overt meaning, as a rule, is only accepted to the degree that the therapist perceives an allusion in it, a masked reference to the enigmatic covert meaning.

Of course, it is worth noting that the classical concept of the source, 19th-century in origin, as something ready-made and waiting to be used in research,³⁹ does not adequately express the understanding of the nature of historiography’s empirical base as shared by later generations of history scholars (and methodologists of history). During the 20th century in particular, the conviction about the active role of the historian in the process of examining sources became widespread. This role was no longer reduced simply to the act of “pulling in” given material (sources in a potential sense) into the framework of an already undertaken historical study and then critically “reading” the “ready-made” information contained in it.⁴⁰ Rather, it was said that historiographers “interpret sources,” that they “pose questions to them and seek answers to those questions.”⁴¹ In this way, the sphere of the historian’s

³⁹ This is precisely how the traditions of rankism and positivism were summarized in this respect by J. Topolski—*Teoria wiedzy historycznej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1983), p. 255.

⁴⁰ Though the traditional attitude is slowly subsiding, it sometimes “returns” with surprising strength of conviction—also in the thought of historians aware of new trends and innovative in terms of the research they are doing. In this context, see the recent remarks of Marek Cetwiński on the subject of sources/past things as elementary historical facts “in themselves.” M. Cetwiński, “Potężniejszy od Boga? Historyk a granice naukowego poznania przeszłości,” in: *Ad fontes. O naturze źródła historycznego*, S. Rosik, P. Wiszniewski, eds. (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2004), pp. 17–25 (especially pp. 23–25).

⁴¹ A paraphrase of Adam Kersten’s statements from his study, *Na tropach Napierskiego* (Warszawa: PIW, 1970), p. 25. John H. Arnold (among others) wrote thusly regarding this issue: “The sources do not ‘speak for themselves’ and never have done. They speak for others, now dead and forever gone. Sources may have voices—plural—which can suggest directions and prompt questions, leading to further sources. But they lack volition: they *come alive when the historian reanimates them*. And although sources are a beginning, the historian is present before and after, using skills and making choices. Why this document and not another? [...] Which questions

reasoning around (and on the basis of) direct source data, presented now as the area of the historian's *creative* cognitive procedures, was valorized.⁴² The data itself was also increasingly perceived as epistemologically dependent on him/her (in the radical formulation—as *created* by him/her in the course of work with a source within the boundaries of the non-source based knowledge proper to him or her⁴³). In this context, the idea appeared of "transcending the source perspective," reaching its "deeper" or "hidden" layers; then, source information that is more directly "graspable" (let us say: available on the source's "surface," i.e.: created with the minimal participation of the researcher's "non-source based" knowledge) functions as indicative information regarding information that is not directly "graspable."⁴⁴

It is difficult not to notice that such a perception of the historian's work with a source seems to better agree with the stance of the "hermeneutics of suspicion." It is said that a researcher's skepticism does not end the moment he successfully conducts an external and internal critique of the source. The data made available thanks to this critique is only perceived as the point of departure for further cognitive penetration of this source. Penetration founded on the *suspicion* (or rather on the conviction) that the "surface" information can/must lead to others, composing the "hidden reality" of the source message. The latter

to pursue, which paths to take?" J. H. Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 77, emphasis—T. P.

⁴² The attempt at a holistic methodological reconstruction of the interpretive practices developed in reference to historical sources can be found in a series of dissertations by Tadeusz Buksiński. See especially: T. Buksiński, *Zasady i metody interpretacji teksów źródłowych* (Poznań: UAM, 1991); T. Buksiński, *Interpretacja źródeł historycznych pisanych* (Warszawa–Poznań: PWN, 1992). In general, on the interpretation in the humanities, see also W. Wrzosek, "Interpretacja a narracja," in: *Metodologiczne problemy narracji historycznej*, J. Pomorski, ed. (Lublin: UMCS, 1990), pp. 129–156.

⁴³ J. Topolski, *Teoria wiedzy historycznej...*, p. 256ff. This scholar distinguished various informational "layers" that can be created in the source material (of a "surface" "signal," and "indicative" type or character). The most radical position in this context states that the "source-character" of the said materials (not so much the fact of being a source "to," as being a source "in general"—as well as potential source) is established by historians within the boundaries of the culture that they participate in. W. Wrzosek, "Źródło historyczne jako alibi realistyczne historyka," in: *Historyk wobec źródeł...*, J. Kolbuszowska, R. Stobiecki, eds., pp. 23–38.

⁴⁴ On the subject of indicators in the context of work with a historical source, see: T. Buksiński, *Metodologiczne problemy uzasadniania wiedzy historycznej* (Warszawa–Poznań: PWN, 1982), p. 24ff.

may inform us about the deeper levels of the historical process⁴⁵ that are “ungraspable” in direct human perception.⁴⁶ In such proceedings, it turns out that the historian’s creative interpretive effort, that attempts to transcend the perspective of the literal message and see “beyond it,” beginning with questions guided by non-source based knowledge/theory, is key.

However, a fundamental difference remains. The “literal message” of the source is understood here as an indicator or signal of the content contained in its deeper layers, but it is not assumed that it realizes some “masking intention” (requiring hermeneutical “overcoming”) in relation to them, all the less so that within its framework, some dialectics of hiding and simultaneous revealing of these would have to occur, parallel to the dialectics of masking-revealing which the analyst proceeding to study a patient’s symptoms encounters (as a key and an obstacle at the same time). Therefore, though the psychoanalytic “hermeneutics of suspicion” appears as compatible with the standard approach adopted by historians regarding sources, in the end, it noticeably goes beyond them. Thus, it undoubtedly possesses—as a new element within the framework of historical method—the potential to modify the rules of historians’ research proceedings.

“Hermeneutics of Suspicion” in Working with a Historical Source

Let us now take a look at some practical consequences of the “hermeneutics of suspicion’s” existence in the field of source investigations conducted by psychoanalytically-oriented historiographers. To begin with, it is worth noting that the standard source material is made up of memoirs, accounts, letters, autobiographies, administrative documents, photographs, and the like. All of these materials have a sure place

⁴⁵ For a representative of modernist social history, this would be, for example, the structural dimension of reality, for an economic historian—the sphere of “impersonal” economic relations and processes, for an “anthropologizing” historian—cultural patterns or mental equipment proper to given societies of the past.

⁴⁶ And thus inaccessible to the perception of the informer—the “creator” of the source.

in the methodology of the classical (or traditional) historian as documenting the behaviors and statements of historical figures. The uniqueness of the *modus operandi* of authors in whom we are interested manifests itself not so much in their choice of empirical material, as in the way they work with them. They “approach” them with readiness to “seek what is hidden” (thus, they manifest the approach of the “hermeneutics of suspicion”) and equipped with special intellectual “tools”—theoretical premises and interpretive strategies of psychoanalysis. These “hint” to the researchers (and this is the *first step* in work with a source), that they should seek (a) repetitive symbolism of words, images, themes, (b) enduring forms of activity (and their mutual connections) of the studied subject, including (c) such forms of behavior or approaches/stances that can be classified as phobias or peculiarities/eccentricities. These will be the source equivalents of “symptoms” constituting—in light of psychoanalytic theory—the indicative material, on the basis of which (this is the *second step* of the described proceedings) conclusions are formed as to personality traits, elements of psychopathology, emotional conditions, or the causes of the appearance of a given motivation, frequently understood as the result of, on the one hand, a certain dynamics appearing in the psyche of a historical figure, on the other—his/her perception of the “real” world. The point of such investigations is not (at least not only) a “factual” reconstruction of the events in the life of the protagonist or even the “observable” approaches, views, and emotions that this figure demonstrated. Such findings are to be the basis upon which “deeper” conclusions can be drawn regarding the dynamics and structure of the unconscious, but constitutive elements of his/her personality. In other words, historians strive to “decipher”⁴⁷ the psychological and motivational meaning (or possibly formative role) of a given behavior, experience, or stimulus that is documented in the source. The par-

⁴⁷ In the relevant methodological literature, the term “in-depth reading” and “in-depth analysis”—telling testimonies of the search for “hidden meaning”—appear frequently in this context.

allels with the proceedings of psychoanalysts are so far-reaching, that it often ends with a certain “diagnosis” of the studied historical figures.⁴⁸

The “hermeneutics of suspicion” also determine the particular hierarchy of sources, which exists within the framework of psycho-historical research practice. The position of a given type of material within the framework of the entire source base depends on, above all, how “directly” (i.e. “overtly”) emotional states or the dynamics of the human psyche could be manifested in it, and the degree to which it is open to “in-depth reading.” Such a perspective also means putting aside (as irrelevant) the standard distinctions that historians routinely make with relation to their sources (direct-indirect, targeted-not targeted, etc.).

Thus, the first place is generally given to (a) materials directly created by the studied historical figures, therefore possessing the status of products of their—broadly-understood—creative activeness. Materials of this type, so is assumed, allow for the attainment of a particularly deep insight into the historical figure’s ways of experiencing reality, as well as patterns of reacting to this reality proper to him/her—both in the sphere of feelings and emotions, and of action. Among those mentioned above, particularly psychologically essential are attitudes and relationships developed in reference to various significant figures in the life of the protagonist; for this reason, sources that allow for a reconstruction of these are preferred. This explains the high posi-

⁴⁸ Such consequences of operating with a theoretical perspective that appeared in a therapeutic context and is so marked by “suspicion” are difficult to avoid, indeed. For more on the development of psychoanalytic theories from the practices of psychotherapy, see (among others): H. J. Ellenberger, *The History of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), chapters 7 and 10; L. Chertok, R. de Saussure, *The Therapeutic Revolution: From Mesmer to Freud* (New York: Brunner Mazel, 1979); P. Gay, *Freud...*, chapters 3–6; R. Fine, *History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), chapter 3. The diagnostic-therapeutic attitude is visible to this day in many statements of a methodological character formulated by representatives of the psychohistorical paradigm. Of the more interesting examples, see e.g. V. Volkan, “A Methodology for Integrating Information in a Psychoanalytic Biography,” *Mind and Human Interaction* 1997, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 82–100. It is also the object of critical auto-reflection in their circles. On this subject, see my article: T. Pawelec, “Historian as a Social Psychotherapist (Ethical Assumptions of Psychohistorical Writings),” *Historyka* Vol. 34: 2004, pp. 5–21.

tion of (b) such personal materials that allow the researcher to trace the attitudes of the studied figures and their relations to other people important to them in the longest timeframe possible; an example of a source of this kind is correspondence (especially if it is extensive and long-lasting). Highly regarded are also (c) various (third-person) accounts presenting the behavior of the studied figure, especially if they seem to uncover its more enduring attitudes, or cognitive or emotional *gestalts*. Here, the most preferable are those transmissions that contain elements of a psychological interpretation (even if intuitive). Even if the interpretation of the attitudes and behavior proposed by the informer is fragmentary and based on "common-sense" or "vulgar" psychology, it often turns out to be a good point of departure for an in-depth, "scientific" interpretation worked out by the psychohistorian.

Another important category of sources (and one which is particularly highly valued) can be described as: (d) materials documenting the most important experiences/formative events for a given historical figure that occurred in the early phases of his or her life (in practice, this often means their childhood years). The point is to have, on the one hand, materials directly concerning those events and as chronologically close to them as possible, on the other, all others that could be potentially useful thanks to the application of the procedure of so-called retrodiction.⁴⁹

Transmissions and artifacts of popular culture (e) are also considered essential sources (especially in the field of psychohistorical studies

⁴⁹ This procedure may be considered an interesting form of practicing the "hermeneutics of suspicion" in a situation of a lack of relevant source materials. In short, it consists in the attempt at establishing what real events of a formative character had to have taken place in an earlier period of the studied figure's life for him/her to later exhibit particular behavioral patterns and personality traits. The reasoning's major premise is constituted by the appropriate part of theory (supported by the modern clinical experience of psychoanalysis), which declares the existence of causal relationships between the given type of childhood experience and character qualities and/or the psychopathological type. The minor premise, on the other hand, is constituted by a statement or series of statements that constitute a personality characterization (holistically or in the dimension of certain qualities of "symptoms") in the investigated, adult period of life of this figure. In the case of retrodiction, the researcher depends above all on theory (I would almost like to say: "suspects on the basis of theory"), because either he does not have any independent empirical evidence regarding the "earlier" occurrences of certain events, or for some reason (for example, the evidence is fragmentary or not credible) he considers it no more than a second-rate confirmative element.

of groups and mass phenomena. These are considered figures of societal discourse, i.e.: an expression of emotional and existential concerns/dreams not so much of individual people (the authors of the respective textual, visual, or film messages⁵⁰), as of the collective, to which these authors belong and which “consumes” these messages. The psychoanalytic procedures of “in-depth reading” such materials are based on “fishing out” repetitive motifs, images, perceptions, and associations, and strive to find meaning for them that cannot be grasped on the level of a single, separately considered transmission, but which turns out to be readable when such creative output is considered as a whole—as created by the group. “Soft” (based on empathic “understanding”) strategies of finding this type of hidden collective meaning are sometimes supplemented by attempts at quantitative analyses of those motives/contents of a verbal and/or visual nature that are deemed particularly significant.⁵¹

A special place in the context of the psychohistorical ranking of standard historical sources presented above is held by the “nonstandard” sources characteristic of psychoanalytic history. These are materials created by unconscious processes and, thus, directly correspond to the clinical data in analytic therapy. These sources include accounts of dreams, obsessive actions and parapraxes, as well as stream of consciousness records of the given historical figure (a “substitute” of psychoanalytic free association). From the perspective of the “hermeneutics of suspicion” it is precisely these sources that would be the most cognitively valuable and by definition psychohistorians “officially” treat them as excep-

⁵⁰ Here, most frequently taken into account are artistic output (literary, film, and in the fine arts), mass-media and multi-media transmissions, and even such collective emanation of human creativity as philosophical thought or scientific works (rather their socio-moral implications).

⁵¹ On the website of the International Psychohistorical Association, we can find special statistical tools that serve to analyze “group fantasy,” i.e. regressive feelings and emotions shared by members of a given group, on the basis of the frequency and distribution of “sensitive” words or visual symbols present in mass-media discourse. Methodological literature dedicated to these issues exists. See, e.g. P. Elovitz, H. Lawton, G. Luhrman, “On Doing Fantasy Analysis,” *The Journal of Psychohistory* Vol. 13: 1985, no. 2, pp. 207–228; J. Hartman, “Evidential Basis of Psychohistory in Group,” in: *Applying Psychology...*, P. Elovitz, ed., pp. 34–37; H. Lawton, *The Psychohistorian's Handbook* (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1988), pp. 185–192.

tionally valuable.⁵² In reality of their research practice, the significance of such materials turns out to be moderate, most often due to their limited and insufficient availability and/or size. Usually, the research cannot count on more than on the auxiliary and supplementary dimension of the source information acquired on their basis.⁵³

The issue of data of a clinical type is part of a wider problem—the programmatic emulation in studies on historical sources of methods and techniques present in clinical situations. What is important here are the cognitive functions of transference reactions. In clinical work, the therapist (programmatically “suspicious,” as we remember) analyzes and uses as an important source for investigative insight both transference (the dynamics of the patient’s unconscious emotional attitude towards himself), and countertransference (his own simultaneously developing attitude towards the patient).⁵⁴ Of course, it is impossible to speak of the transference of—often deceased—historical subjects in the relation of those historiographers who study them years later,⁵⁵ but psychohistorians of a clinical “sensitivity” (a derivative of their therapeutic attitude and possible competence⁵⁶) indeed sometimes try to recognize and analyze their subjective, often unconscious attitudes towards the phenomena and historical figures they study. This is undoubtedly a significant

⁵² In contrast to classical (traditional) historians, who place them on the lowest level of significance, if it is not omit entirely as cognitively unimportant.

⁵³ In other words, the source material of a clinical (or quasi-clinical) nature can only possibly acquire a confirmative valor in the context of existing data that could suggest, for example, a given pattern in the protagonist’s emotional life. Not having at his/her disposal the richness of clinical material that a psychoanalyst gathers in his weeks, months, and years of practice (in psychoanalysis the “explanatory power” of this material correlates with its extensiveness), a researcher is forced to treat the available data of this sort as derivative and supplementary. “Receiving from” a historical figure under investigation only a fragment of what a clinical psychoanalyst learns from a patient, a psychohistorian will have a more fragmentary and less exhaustive insight into his/her “psychological reality.” However, in studying the more standard source materials, he gains the ability (perhaps completely unavailable in the case of therapy) of testing his conclusions flowing from this insight in light of “external” information. In short, the lack of clinical materials is (or can be) compensated for by historical data.

⁵⁴ For more on the idea of transference and counter-transference, see J. Laplanche, J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis...*, pp. 455–462 and 92–93; B. Moore, B. Fine, *Słownik psychoanalizy...*, pp. 224–226 and 222–223.

⁵⁵ Apart from the essential exception of investigations carried out in the form of oral history.

⁵⁶ The postulate was often formulated that a psychoanalytical historian have the fullest possible clinical training.

area of the “hermeneutics of suspicion’s” presence in historical research. The cognitive value of the above-mentioned procedures was emphasized: the recognition and uncovering of transference reactions can serve as a tool of “fishing out” the essential elements within the content of the source that have hitherto not been perceived (for psychological reasons on the part of the researcher).⁵⁷ Within the framework of psychohistorical research practice (especially in psychobiography), a solution has been tried out—not without interesting results—that consists in running psychoanalytic monitoring (conducted by a professional psychoanalyst) of the historian’s research activity in terms of recognizing his unconscious attitudes that block/facilitate given moves—not only in the sphere of source investigation, but also in the area of conceptualization, interpretation, and explanation.⁵⁸

Efforts in this direction have done the most in leading towards the direct adaptation of a psychoanalytic interview procedure *tout-court* (i.e. a clinical session) for the needs of historical research, which resulted in the appearance of a unique, psychohistorical form of *oral history*. Robert Lifton, a pioneer of this endeavor has developed a special interview style: “It remains probing, encouraging the widest range of associations, and includes detailed life histories and explorations of dreams. But it focuses on the specific situation responsible for bringing interviewee and interviewer together [...] and takes the form of something close to an open dialogue [...]”⁵⁹. Regardless of the change of objective from therapeutic to historico-cognitive, in essence, these conversations retain the fundamental qualities of the special interaction in psychoanalysis that is the clinical session: “Such psychological conversations aim to identify relevant images and themes that

⁵⁷ See P. Loewenberg, *Psychoanalytic Models of History: Freud and After*, in: *Psychology and Historical Interpretation*, W. Mc Kinley Runyan, ed. (New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 145–151; P. Loewenberg, “Historical Method, the Subjectivity of the Researcher, and Psychohistory,” *Psychohistory Review* Vol. 14: 1985, no. 1, pp. 30–35; C. Pletsch, “A Note on the Adaptation of the Psychoanalytic Method to the Study of Historical Personalities: Psychoanalysts on Schreber,” *Psychohistory Review* Vol. 8: 1979, no. 3, pp. 46–50; E. Schepeler, “The Biographer’s Transference: A Chapter in Psychobiographical Epistemology,” *Biography* Vol. 13: 1990, No. 2, pp. 111–129.

⁵⁸ See especially: S.H. Baron, C. Pletsch, eds., *Introspection in Biography: The Biographer’s Quest for Self-Awareness* (Hillsdale–London: Analytic Press, 1985).

⁵⁹ R. J. Lifton, Ch. Strozier, “Psychology and History,” in: *Psychology and Its Allied Disciplines*, M. Borstein, ed., (New York–London: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1984), p. 172.

can emerge in this narrative form. It is *a search for meaning in a life history*, in a whole self, whose history is still unfolding. The conversation is process oriented and, though carefully structured by means of a protocol, moves with the respondent in terms of thoughts, fantasies, feelings, even dreams."⁶⁰

The challenges which accompany the forms of work with a source described above led to the formulation in these circles of postulates and directives in relation to archival institutions, under whose protection lie the majority of materials historians use as empirical bases. An appeal for special care in regards to materials that "uncover emotions rather than facts" was the key.⁶¹ Losses in this area are rather harmless from the perspective of classical historians; for psychohistorians, however, these losses can sometimes be irreparable. Another challenge directly resulted from this—to store (and *make available*) *all* collected archivalia in their entirety. The selection and disposal of "insignificant" drafts, sketched notes, or outlines, restrictions in access to "sensitive" medical information or materials concerning "minor" "private" cases—all of these things can deprive a psychohistorian of fundamentally significant information from the perspective of the questions and research needs proper to him. Often, it is these materials, which seem "the least essential from the perspective of conventional history" (as William Saffady, archivist/psychohistorian, wrote), that turn out to be the most useful for psychohistorical research, based on psychoanalytic "sensitivity."⁶² Without them, that special search for hidden meaning that grows out of the "hermeneutics of suspicion," becomes impossible.

It behooves me to end with the question of how all of these procedures and the empirical data acquired/analyzed thanks to them, founded

⁶⁰ C. Strozier, *Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 23, emphasis—T.P.

⁶¹ For example, an emotional tone of voice will be lost when studying transcripts instead of recorded statements; the change in handwriting visible in handwritten records (sometimes an essential sign of internal state) is lost when printed editions replace handwritten ones. Similarly, the rough draft of a typed document with all its errors, corrections, and notes shows more than the final version.

⁶² W. Saffady, "Manuscripts and Psychohistory," *The American Archivist* Vol. 37: 1974, No. 4, pp. 551–564.

on the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” appear from the perspective of other models of history. The entangled and never-ending in complete success process of the “growth” of psychoanalytic history in academic historiography shows that they were often received as grossly diverging from what can and should be done in “Clio’s garden.” The long list of controversies, reservations, and dilemmas formulated by skeptical historians⁶³ can be reduced to the following issue: the psychoanalytical “in-depth reading” of source materials presented above (both *quasi*-clinical, and more standard; with the direct use of clinical techniques, or not) requires the acceptance of premises too radically different from those that the classical (and non-classical) historian typically acknowledges. In effect, the source information created/gained in reference to them is often treated as debatable at the least, and is frequently directly labeled as “fantasy,” and/or groundless speculation. Thus, we can conclude that the attempt to import the “hermeneutics of suspicion” more widely into the historical profession did not end in success, and its more enduring presence has been limited to the niche paradigm of psychoanalytic history. However, we must note that the problem for historians seems to be not the “hermeneutics of suspicion” itself, *per se* (understood as the expression of a special type of critical sensitivity), but its practical implications that appear in the context of the theoretical presumptions of psychoanalytic historiography in the form of the necessity of acknowledging (or at least being open to)

⁶³ A synthetic juxtaposition of this debate can be found in: T. Pawelec, “Psychohistorycy w debacie z historią,” in: *Światooglądy historiograficzne*, J. Pomorski, ed. (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2002), pp. 157–187. A bibliography of the works that take up this issue—on the one hand, written by critics (both the friendly ones seeking a methodological compromise, and those who are irreconcilably skeptical), on the other, by representatives of psychoanalytic historiography itself (defending and developing their standpoint) is extensive. Only some of them have been cited above *explicitely*. A more extensive list can be found in the mentioned monograph T. Pawelec, *Dzieje i nieświadomość...* The works listed show that the representatives of psychohistory and their opponents shared the conviction as to the innovative character present in the model of work with a source proper to this orientation, though they valorized it differently. Of newer works on this subject in Poland, we note the texts of D. A. Sikorski, “Miejsce i rola źródeł w psychohistorii,” in: *Ad fontes...*, pp. 73–81 (investigating the problem from the perspective of medievalists’ research needs and reservations) and T. Ochowski, T. Pawelec, “Historia psychologiczna a problematyka źródeł,” in: *Historyk wobec źródeł...*, p. 39–78 (inscribing the issue into a wider context of methodological “loans” from the field of psychology; some of the perceptions formulated there have been used in this publication).

the cognitive value of various psychoanalytic concepts serving as the foundation for an “in-depth reading” of the sources. This is met with opposition from many scholars of the past, so frequently skeptical about depth psychology. From here we can conclude that the “hermeneutics of suspicion” would gain greater possibilities of “coming into existence” within the historians’ “applied methodology” if we were able to disentangle it from its overly close relation to the psychohistorical paradigm immersed in psychoanalysis, and if it could be practiced within the frameworks of other, so to say, “theoretical planes.” It seems that at least some trends in currently-practiced non-classical history—especially *oral history*, microhistory, or historical anthropology—open up such possibilities.

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Tomasz Pawelec

Freudowska „hermeneutyka podejrzeń” a krytyka źródła historycznego

Streszczenie: Artykuł poświęcony jest niektórym aspektom wpływu, jaki psychoanaliza (psychologia głębi) wywarła na praktykę badawczą dziejopisarstwa. Autor zastanawia się w jaki sposób „psychoanalityczne myślenie” zmodyfikowało pracę ze źródłem historycznym. Argumentuje, iż podstawą tych modyfikacji stała się „wbudowana” w psychologię głębi szczególnie „hermeneutyka podejrzeń”. Istotą tejże hermeneutyki jest postawa—znamionująca psychoanalitycznego terapeute—poszukiwania „głębszego znaczenia” danego psychopatologicznego objawu, znaczenia przemyślnie ukrywanego przez ten objaw, ale zarazem pośrednio (i przewrotnie) przezeń uobecnianego oraz komunikowanego. W tekście identyfikowane są zasadnicze przesłanki przenikania „hermeneutyki podejrzeń” w obręb myślenia historyków: „ontologiczna” (związana ze szczególną wizją procesu historycznego, jaką przyjmowali psychoanalitycznie nastawieni dziejopisarze) oraz „metodologiczna” (związana z dostrzeżeniem i afirmacją metodologicznego „powinowactwa” pomiędzy uprawianiem nauki historii oraz praktykowaniem psychoanalizy). Autor argumentuje następnie, że—wbrew powierzchownym jej odczytaniom—psychoanalityczna „hermeneutyka podejrzeń” nie stanowi po prostu zradykalizowanej wersji postawy krytycznej względem źródła, standardowo znamionującej naukowe dziejopisarstwo w różnych jego odmianach, ale w istotny sposób poza nią wykracza. W tekście rozważone są również rozmaite praktyczne konsekwencje obecności takiej hermeneutyki w sferze pracy ze źródłem historycznym.

Słowa kluczowe: „hermeneutyka podejrzeń”, krytycyzm filozoficzny, postawa krytyczna, historiografia, psychohistoria, proces historyczny, źródło historyczne, psychoanaliza