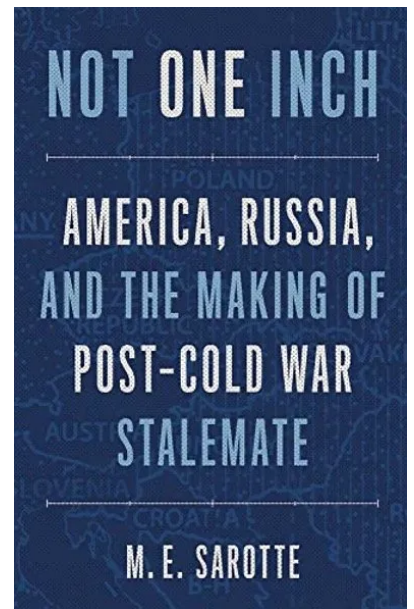


Even before the Russian military crossed into Ukraine, the partisan political polarization that has so characterized recent times reared its head. On one side, NATO's expansion from 12 nations in 1949 to 30 in 2020 was perceived as encircling and endangering Russian security. Acting out of defense against NATO aggression was characterized as Putin's motivation. The Russian leader was portrayed as a patriotic nationalist defending his country's well-being. A polar opposite view developed. Here Putin was a new Russian Tsar. He brutally suppresses internal opposition, sends agents to foreign countries to assassinate dissident Russians, intervening in the domestic politics in the U. S. and France. It was warned that how Putin conducted wars in Chechnya and



[Show More](#)

2. Psychoanalysis and History: Current Issue of the History of the Present Journal

By Ken Fuchsman



"Psychoanalysis and History" is the title and subject matter of the April 2022 issue of *History of the Present: A Journal of Critical History*. My article reports on the contents of this issue. Certainly, the relationship of history and psychoanalysis has been central to psychohistory, and any recent account of this topic outside the usual suspects is newsworthy.

Brian Connolly and Joan Wallach Scott are the Special Issue Editors. She is an emeritus professor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Dr. Connolly is History Department Chair at the University of South Florida. He wrote the introduction to this issue. An interview with him about the journal follows this article.

While this is a collection of diverse essays, thematic strands run through many of these articles: historical writing is examined through a psychoanalytic lens, a post-Freudian psychoanalysis is often featured, it is a politically leftist psychoanalysis, and the politics often centers on race, as well as colonial and post-colonial legacies.

In the introduction, Brian Connolly, begins by declaring that the “relationship between psychoanalysis and history has long been a vexed one.” Analysis itself presented a “a radical revision of personal history” which later deeply impacted on “larger, collective history.” For a while, psychohistory, “which drew primarily on ego psychology,” had its day, but “by the 1980s, psychohistory was on the decline.” However, recently, there is “a revival of sorts at the juncture of psychoanalysis and history.” This issue of *History of the Present* rethinks the complex relationship between the two fields. It does so by pushing “well beyond the strictures of psychohistory,” and does so by “taking the unconscious dimensions of our thinking into account” in “understanding the workings of politics and the ways in which we represent our pasts.”

How psychoanalytic notions help reconceive the discipline of history is addressed in Professor Max Cavitch’s “In the Interest of History.” Cavitch is codirector of the Psychoanalytic Studies Program and associate professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania. He has high praise for psychoanalysis, a field which Cavitch says, provides “many of the best tools with which to live our lives as subjects.” This includes a revision of historical writing to get beyond the “entrenchment of social historians’ empiricist fixations.” For historical works are “subjectively conditioned.” Telling “anyone’s history means telling some version of one’s own.” Each historian has “a specific history of subjectivation,” and he or she needs to recognize “their own defense mechanisms.” Cavitch quotes Joan Wallach Scott in her insisting “on the *necessary interconnection between the theoretical and the empirical.*” As a result of these recognitions, history is changing. Conjecture and speculation “have become at least partially legitimized historical methodologies” as “they are *predicates* of understanding.”

We need to recognize that “all lives” have much in them that are “largely counterfactual. Human beings are engines of irrealities: fantasies, confirmation- biases, psychic defense mechanisms and dissociative states, ideologies and belief systems, states of desire, disgust, ecstasy, optimism and shame, vicissitudes of temperament, genetic predispositions.” To Cavitch, psychoanalysis “helps keep history...*open to the intolerable...of calling into question, of criticism and contestation of what*” seems “established.”

For about a century those who examined the brain found studying internal mental states “seemed intolerable.” Then in neuroscience “unanticipated shifts in perspectives occurred.” Cavitch’s hope that in history instead of “several decades of empirical retrenchment” that “historians might, in the interest of history, embrace a similar shift.” For to him, until history incorporates more of the underside of our human traits and includes more fully our subjectivity and awareness of historian’s own biases, it will not do justice to the historical enterprise.

To Cavitch, history needs to lessen its empiricist fetish, to study more the subjectivity of historical figures, and for historians to become more aware of how their own defenses and biases misshape their historical accounts. In other words, psychoanalytic insight can help the historical discipline overcome its conceptual and psychological limitations.

Carolyn Shapiro, senior lecturer at Falmouth University, in “Vicissitudes and Their Inscriptions” writes about historical narrative and psychoanalysis. The material of both, she writes, are fragments that then are combined into a narrative. Citing French Lacanian Michel de Certeau, Shapiro asserts that it is the psychoanalytic method that enables us to comprehend how history operates. For historical writing to compose a narrative, it has to combine incompatible elements into a story. It then creates the appearance of rationality, but is really full of ambivalences. To de Certeau, history acts as both “the discourse of a law... and as an alibi, a realistic illusion.” It is difficult to separate the production of history from telling stories. This principle of writing an account as a discourse that can be a realistic illusion Shapiro finds in Freud’s first full case study, the Dora narrative.

Shapiro finds that Freud’s narrative contains the same kind of authorial ambivalence as one finds in historical stories. She says Freud acknowledged “his role as inauthentic constructor.” Her own essay here “investigated vicissitudes in relation to writing, particularly, the writing of history.” But she knows that Freud, like other writers of history, puts “himself in a double bind” in seeking to compose “a fragment of authenticity and that of constructor of readable narrative.” She returns to de Certeau who says that narrative hides its own performativity and ambivalence. A psychoanalytic approach to historical writing can show that there are challenges in composing narratives, including inauthenticity, ambivalence, and hiding as much as revealing.

For Shapiro, history is a form of writing that needs to be examined. Historical narratives whether in a Freudian case study or by a trained academic contain often inauthentic constructions. Psychoanalytic approaches to reading history deconstruct the written narratives in ways that help us better understand that historical works are ambivalent narratives with unresolved tensions.

David Eng is the Richard L. Fisher Professor of English and also of Asian Studies, Comparative Literature and Literary Theory as well as Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. His essay is “The History of the Subject and the Subject of History.” His starting point is “the radical shift in our conception of the human being” brought on by the Holocaust and the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Eng approvingly quotes Mary McCarthy’s 1946 response to Hiroshima that the “continuity of life was, for the first time, put into question, and by man.” We have entered into a new developmental stage of horrific trauma. While some may include in these human-made catastrophes, the World War II highly lethal fire bombings of 2 German and 66 Japanese cities, but Eng does not.

Still, there is more than enough to deal with in sorting through the significance of the Nazi extermination of 6 million Jews and the horrors induced by the dropping of nuclear weapons on Japan. Eng believes that “psychoanalysis might offer some critical insights to address this significant historical divide.” This is because to Eng “psychoanalysis is the privileged vocabulary of trauma.” Some scholars writing on the

history, development, and treatment of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder would contest Eng's centering on psychoanalysis as privileged more than other research from other branches of psychology.

His article, though, centers on the "unexamined links between psychic and political theories of trauma." He focuses on the "history of the *traumatized* subject" and maintains that "psychoanalysis provides a vocabulary for analyzing...racial desires and prohibitions."

Eng is concerned with who are the victims and perpetrators of trauma and atrocities. He cites Cathy Caruth's influential thesis of unclaimed experience. Caruth asserts that the severity of trauma may not be immediately accessible and only comes into consciousness later. To Caruth, all of us "are implicated in each other's traumas." Her account raises the question of who is victim and who perpetrator.

Our author then recounts historian Ruth Leys critique of English professor Cathy Caruth. Leys says Caruth is politically and historically a relativist and that her "logic would turn perpetrators into victims." Eng then takes up the thorny question of victim and perpetrators in the legal and moral examinations of accountability for the Holocaust and the American use of nuclear weapons.

While clearly the Allies after World War II considered the extermination of Jewish non-combatants by Hitler's German government to be a crime. The Nuremberg trials convicted many Germans as perpetrators of serious offenses. On the other hand, the American fire bombing and atomic bombings of Japanese civilians met a different fate. As Eng observes, "the deployment of nuclear weapons in Japan has never been legally categorized as a 'crime against humanity' or as 'genocide.'"

Like Nuremberg, the Allies led a Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, which was concerned with the war crimes of the defeated and not the misdeeds of the occupying powers. A dissent in the Tokyo verdicts was by a Justice from India, who insisted Japanese offenses could not fairly be judged without taking into account prior atrocities in Asia and Africa committed by Western nations.

Eng himself maintains that looking at nuclear devastation in the language of universalism leaves out "the Asian origins of 'ground zero.'" To him, this origin "should not be forgotten." For what still needs to be resolved is "the problem of *racial* reparations and the human in the space of the Transpacific." Eng does not favor a strict boundary between victims and perpetrators of trauma, but "a politics of recognition – a politics of individual suffering." To him, we need "to reconfigure repair and redress" separate from issues of sovereignty. The reason for this is to speak on "behalf of those rendered inhuman by their fraught political legacies and loaded psychic dynamics."

For Eng, with the horrors generated during the Second World War humanity has crossed a line. Clearly, to him, the post-war tribunals did not do justice to the traumas experienced. Many victims were not granted justice. Humanity needs to recognize the damages of history; we need to repair these horrendous traumas by a form of reparation outside the paradigm of sovereignty. To Eng, we understand the emotional

ramifications of these terrors through psychoanalysis, we alter their legacies by historically informed political action.

Elizabeth Maddock Dillon is cofounder and codirector of the Early Caribbean Digital Archive and distinguished professor of English at Northeastern University. Her paper is entitled “Anti-Oedipus: Gender and Racial Capitalism in Plantation Modernity.”

To Freud, it is sex that contains the fundamental concept of human difference. Dillon disagrees. She cites literature professor Hortense Spillers, who asserts that psychic and cultural foundation of Western modernity is the Atlantic slave trade. As Dillon relates this position, it is “race rather than sex” that is “the foundational difference that structures modern identity.” For Spillers, “race serves as the *ground* of the theory of psychoanalysis.”

Dillon says gender as Freud formulates it is not a stand-alone category. It is “an aspect of racial capitalism.” For “the white, binary concept of heteronormative gender and sexuality at the heart of Freudian theory is made possible (indeed necessitated) by race slavery, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism.” Freud’s approach “is more symptom than cause of dominant accounts of a binary sex-gender system.” Given the realities of slavery in the Western hemisphere after European conquest, it is not just race that is central. Freud also postulates incest as primary.

Dillon says that as the colonial Caribbean slavery with its sexual violation of female slaves appeared before Freud formulated the Oedipus complex, “then rape appears *prior* to incest as the structuring difference of the psyche and the subject.” She quotes Columbia University literature professor, Gayatri Spivak, “We are – male and female – raped into humanity.” For it is rape that is “unconditionally initiating all human beings.” This occurs before the “conditioned notion of consent and nature.” Dillon adds that rape “is the line between the humanized...and the nonhumanized.” Rape only becomes criminalized when considering “people with agency, which is to say humanized, nonradically-exogamous sex objects/partners.”

Northwestern Professor of French, Doris Garraway is cited by Dillon as showing how rape and concubinage in the Caribbean colonies were routine and viewed as acceptable plantation behavior. Garraway writes the plantation father, instead of protecting against incest “becomes the primary instigator of its violation.”

This common concubinage of white male slave owners also sets up a tension between their wives and female slaves. As Dillon tells it, “white femininity depends on the erasure of the Black female body.” These sexual relations between white male slaveholders and their female slaves occurred not only in the Caribbean. The sexual relationship of founding father Thomas Jefferson and his slave, Sally Hemings, is a primary example of this underside of slavery. Dartmouth English Professor Kimberly Juanita Brown writes of similar patterns of other male slave owners and their female slaves. These she says “are played out on the bodies of black women.” Somehow, if they are “unearthed and deconstructed,” it “would be the back-story

of the construction of a new nation.” Dillon points out for instance that Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson’s wife, Martha, were half-sisters, sharing the same father. Dillon says Sally Hemings might be called “our anagrammatical founding foremother.”

This mixture of rape, incest, slavery, and tension between white female wives of slave owners and their husband’s sexual violation of the female slaves is a more complex and vicious scenario than that proposed in Freud’s Oedipus complex. The lesson preached from this history is that psychoanalysis needs to incorporate rape and race into the basics of its theoretical framework.

Michelle Stephens is founding executive director at Rutgers’ Institute for the Study of Global Racial Injustice, where she is also a professor of English and Latino and Caribbean Studies. In echoes of Norman O. Brown she cites Martinique poet and theorist Edouard Glissant that “our lived history” may well be seen “as a steadily advancing neurosis.” Dr. Stephens describes her own essay here as a “speculative hypothesis” that offers “a different historiography of the Anthropocene in a history of modernity as neurosis.” For there has been a fantasy in “the notion of an objective history of modernity.” The origins of this conception occurred when the West “alone ‘made’ the history of the world.” This was also during the heyday of European colonialism. She asserts that this European account is “that of a neurotic History’s more entangled relationship with European modern, African diasporic” accounts. Not only is history neurotic but it is inseparable from Europe’s colonial exploitations.

Dr. Stephens believes that “we are living in a time of reckoning,” and we need to “reflect on our notions of the human, of history.” For there is “misanthropy at the heart of European colonialism...and a will to dominate those humans as subhuman or other.” The Europeans who colonized the Americas had “a subjectivity...shaped by a specific neurotic complex...that translates into an inability to deal with the world of others.” It turns out “that the Anthropocene and the colonial stories are linked in a shared, destructive notion of the human.” That “fundamental misanthropy” that “undergirds the decolonial, Anthropocene present” necessitates other perspectives. Knowing that “the dark ecologies of the Anthropocene” is “a trauma to the human may be just what the humanities, the human sciences need to see to imagine a way forward.” This would include “history-writing” that encourages “epistemological creativity of hypothesis and speculative experiments, a turning to hidden structures of feeling.” This new history endeavors then may help provide an alternative to the misanthropy that she says has long been part of European colonialism.

To Stephens, using the psychoanalytic concept of the neurotic illuminates the misanthropic history of colonialism and the blindness and will to dominate those who are seen as other. In the crisis of the Anthropocene, psychoanalytic insight can unmask the neurotic exploitations in Western encounters with the colonized. History needs the psychoanalytic unmasking of European mental disorders in this time of reckoning.

“Paranoid Politics” is the title of Princeton University Associate Professor of English Zahid Chaudhary’s contribution to this issue. He mostly focuses on American rightist paranoid politics of the late Trump era. Richard Hofstadter’s landmark 1964 paper on the American paranoid style of politics is relegated solely to a critical footnote. Chaudhary maintains that Hofstadter drew too sharp a distinction between the pathological and non-pathological.

Chaudhary begins by describing the January 6th invasion of the U. S. Capitol as demonstrating “all too spectacularly the damage to democracy that had been ongoing in less visible ways over the last three decades.” He writes, “I want to argue that so-called radicalization took forms of misrecognitions and conjuring – of injury, grievance, and malevolent enemies – that constitute paranoid ideation.” These “collective pathologies” are “a serious business” that help us understand how “the polity” is exposed to “various forms of risk.” He repeatedly returns to QAnon because it has incorporated other conspiracies and is thus a big tent conspiracy. Chaudhary intends “develop the psycho-historical and political economic groundwork for understanding contemporary paranoid politics.”

He focuses in detail on LARP, or Live Action Role Play, which for the right, Chaudhary writes, conjures someone privy to “an existing secret, including “someone pretending to have inside governmental or political information.” For LARPing, he says, feeds “the expansion of paranoid publics.” This includes “psychological features of fascist propaganda” and preparing “the ground for the acceptance of authoritarianism.” For instance, the slogan “Stop the Steal,” Chaudhary proclaims, “is a projective utterance that disavows its own kleptomania” and “marks a libidinal; cathexis.” These projections long to “remake the world in the image of the psychotic illusions it has already deemed to be the truth.” He continues, “QAnon and the militias that have surfaced in recent years seem attached to...fascist utopias.” It is an expression of “fascist apocalypticism.” For to Chaudhary, whether all this “is an orientation toward a dystopian cataclysm or a mirror held up to one already occurring, it is a dystopia that lends politics its charge.” What Chaudhary presents is a grim assessment of what in American politics is putting American democracy at risk, and makes it threatened by fascist authoritarianism.

As many of the essays in this collection are politically leftist and psychoanalytic, Alex Colston’s paper “Left Freudians: The Psychoanalytic Politics of Disobedience” fits into the themes of this volume. Colston writes that “to speak of left Freudians, Freudo-Marxists, and political psychoanalysis is to uncover a hidden dimension within psychoanalytic history.” There were two periods, he says, when psychoanalysis was joined with leftist causes: in the 1920s and early 1930s, and then again in the 1960s and early 1970s. Colston’s piece though focuses as much on Freud himself and Lacan, neither of whom considered themselves as leftist, Marxist, or political radicals. Colston does list the “prominent figures of leftist persuasion in this moment: Frantz Fanon, Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Juliet Mitchell, and Jacqueline Rose.” But he does not discuss how any of them combine leftism

and psychoanalysis. He spends a quarter of his essay on an exchange in 1969 between Lacan and French protesters where the focus is less on radical doctrines and psychoanalysis, and more on Lacan's critique of the radicals. Colston spends about an equal percent of his text on Freud's politics. Early psychoanalytic radicals, Otto Gross, who died in 1920, and the early part of Freud-Marxists Wilhelm Reich's long career are given some explicit treatment.

As Colston spends such little time on the views of the multiple leftist Freudians he identifies, he hardly begins to uncover the hidden dimensions of psychoanalytic history he said were important. Nor does Colston attempt to examine the parameters of the leftism of the 1920s and early 1930s. This essay is about Left Freudians more in name than substance.

Overall, what is striking in this collection of essays is that on one hand, the psychoanalytic lens can turn on history and show the flaws in the discipline's practices. On the other hand, a political, racially aware, history can illuminate where psychoanalysis needs some fundamental reconsiderations. Psychoanalysis, it is claimed, is culturally biased. Its frequent ignoring of the racial, imperialistic history of the West reveals that some of its foundational principles are ethnocentric, biased, and exclusionary at the core.

To find out more about *History of the Present*, to buy the current issue and/or subscribe go to <https://www.dukeupress.edu/history-of-the-present>.

[Show Less](#)

3. INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN CONNOLLY, AN EDITOR OF THE HISTORY OF THE PRESENT

by Ken Fuchsman

KF: How did the idea for the journal come into being? What are the purposes and mission of *History of the Present*?

BC: The idea for the journal came into being approximately 13 or 14 years ago when a group of historians – all of whom became the editorial

collective – started thinking about the ways in which the discipline of history had marginalized critique and

