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Tragic ways of thinking the political. Some considerations beyond the work of Nicole Loraux

The heading refers to the title of a book written by the French historian of ancient Greece, Nicole Loraux: *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*. I would like to present her contribution to political thought and history, not only of classical Athens, but also of contemporary times in order to pass over an outline for a theory about politics and conflict, which I have been working constantly on for several years.

In the centre of this relationship between theatre and the political sphere, I would like to situate the terms of conflict and stasis. Stasis is the Greek term for civil war, but can also be used to describe the middle of a family or of the soul. I build this bridge between polis and soul not only because it was part of the philosophical imaginary in ancient time, for example in Plato, but also because I am interested in political psychology.ⁱ

Martha Nussbaum entitled her book about Hellenic love *The Therapy of Love* in order to show how the tragic

i For the discussion concerning Cornfords thesis about Thukydides as tragic author see (among others), Loraux' Teacher and Colleague Vidal-Naquet 2000, p. 107.

conception of archaic and classical Eros is replaced by a therapeutic view. Whereas the tragic perspective, the one we encounter in Homer, and even more in Sappho, underlines the relationship between Eros and Thanatos in representing the catastrophic end to which love can lead. But “tragic perspective” would be an anachronism insofar as the tragic way of thinking realized in classical tragedy concerns the fatal conflict for the individuals, the *genos* or the *polis*.

But first of all I would like to return to the work of Nicole Loraux. Her major contributions are written in a tragic perspective on politics, and here I say “tragic perspective” in the literal as well as in the above mentioned secondary sense. There is, first of all, her already mentioned book *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* (1991, *Façons tragiques de tuer une femme*, 1985) about how women usually die in tragedies; her book *Le deuil des mères* (1988) about the role of mourning mothers during Athenian funerals and the removal of this mourning period during the democratic era in order to maintain order; by the way this book was inspired by Argentinian mothers of the Plaza the mayo; furthermore, in 1988 she wrote the introduction for the special issue of the review, *Le genre humain*, entitled *Politiques de l’oubli* (*Politics of oblivion*). The name of this introduction is “Pour quel consensus?”. Loraux begins her article with a quotation from the French newspaper *Le*

Monde reporting that NASA had decided to reunite specialists in child psychology in order to build up a program which is able to eliminate or at least lighten the traumas children are supposed to have undergone after having seen the live transmission of the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger. Loraux deciphers this action as a specific American way of the very common refusal of public memory. She goes on to begin her analysis of some of the political techniques of dissipating collective memory, of “Operating Oblivion”, (“*opérer l’oubli*”) as she calls it. Amnesia was to her the most important technique of this kind, not only in classical Athens; it is at the same time a practice which—at least by its name—continues to call into memory its explicit intention to let us forget.

Finally, in 1997, three years after her cerebral accident which left her imprisoned in her own body, just like the description she gave us of Socrates in her commentary on *Phaedon*, she published the book *La cité divisée* (2006) (*The Divided City*). It is a book about stasis in classical Athens which states conflict as the central motor of Athenian politics underlying the ideology of consensus and reconciliation (with the central article “Le lien de la division”).

In her introduction to *Politics of Oblivion* she quoted Sophocles' *Antigone* 150-151: "The battle is done—let us strive now to forget".

It is imperative to forget, in order to save the unity of the polis, the nation or the Republic: this seems to be the fundamental supposition.

If we come to present times and consider the sense of remembering the Nazi terror and the Shoah we know that this can not help to elucidate the political. We know, not only in Austria and Germany, that the underlying conflict beneath so many political conflicts concerns exactly this imperative and the necessity to resist it in order to escape from the eternal repetition of the same kind of war.

Linking psychoanalysis and historiography in the "controlled use of anachronism"

Nicole Loraux chose a contested path by declaring herself a partisan of a certain kind of anachronism; one that she called controlled anachronism. Something similar is true of her use of psychoanalysis as an instrument in historiography. Before I go deeper into the field where these two "methods" intersect, I must be more precise, as in a first attempt we can hardly speak of methods in a strict epistemological sense; instead, the term should be

understood in a more general, etymological sense as an approach. Some intuitive notions only slowly become concepts through reflection and logical precision, step by step, new paths become marked ways for more systematic investigation; but in historiography and historical anthropology they never lead to final scientific precision of any kind (and, as we have known since Gödel, Heisenberg or Schrödinger, in mathematics and physics, too, the case is often the same). This does not mean that systematic and precise investigation has been superseded or should be neglected, on the contrary! Philological, even lexical precision; a certain, new kind of “positivism” regarding the words and their composition in a text, its layers and structures; a systematic view of relations between different structures, kinds or genres of texts is even more important in the midst of what is, at times; the scarce determinability we encounter in the field of history, ancient as well as modern. If we neglect this work as philosophers we risk falling back into idealistic hermeneutics, and for historians of philosophy the risk is even greater: we are well aware of how crucial it was to critique their religious and ideological leanings, especially in the interpretation of Plato.ⁱ

The (social) imaginary, as it was called by many historians of the “school of Paris” in ancient history, is first

i For a rather radical critique of the political-ideological kind of hermeneutic “freedom of interpretation,” see Orozco 1995.

of all what the Greek-French philosopher and psychoanalyst, Castoriadis first conceived of as the human representations and phantasms that, through the process of institution, became (and are still becoming) our rather effective world of significations within which everything makes sense to us and without which there is neither sense nor signification. This concept, together with the concept of magma, opens an ontological as well as gnoseological “space” and mode of being in which peras and apeiron are always- more or less symmetrically - intertwined. By adopting and developing this imaginary concept from the field of ancient history (but also from medieval history, for example, as Duby and Le Goff), French historians became more inclined to delve deeper into the psyche, especially the unconscious dimensions of historic phenomena. As Herbart and Freud first pointed out, the psyche is multilayered, *geschichtet*, from a genetic or diachronic as well as a structural perspective.

According to Freud, time does not exist in or for the unconscious. From a philosophical perspective, this is not at all certain. What can be conceded is that the “ordinary” time of our waking consciousness (*Wachbewusstsein*) has no validity in the unconscious, especially in the dimension known as the “id” (Es). Taking this into consideration, Nicole Loraux’s use of anachronism is entirely appropriate for elucidating the ancient world and imaginary (rather than

intrinsically reproducing the inherited hermeneutics of both). Moreover, what she has called a “controlled use” includes all of these conceptual instruments of historiography.

“Anachronism,” is also “to be used” methodologically (rather than occurring without contemplation or intelligible and methodological planning. The limit between righteous and less righteous historiography is accordingly to be found between the use and the abuse of anachronism; between practicing and not practicing anachronism at all. But it could also be interesting in which ways this *limes / peras* (and at the same time *topos*) between a historiography that is “righteous” and one that is not with all its psychic implications, is part of the social and cultural imaginary of academic historians. The mainstream academic “psychological” approach leaves out the psychic dimension of the investigator in her encounter with the text/author/s. Her field of investigation is supposed to be separate and her logos investigates and “talks” about and over the psyche (as the supposed traces or condensations of affects) in the textual/cultural/structural. A psychoanalytic approach is meant to take this encounter into account. It is an encounter that can be treated, not only in the register of transference and counter-transference, but also epistemologically in terms of a constitutive uncertainty principle in cultural and anthropological studies. In this

way, it can be seen as a larger imaginary space of sensitive as well as intuitive meditation: reflection, transference, conflict and – last but not least – ana/logical analysis. A merely theoretical use of psychoanalytical concepts and topoi can be very fruitful, but such uses remain psychological in the former sense, without becoming themselves, psychoanalytical; they lack the experience, *Er-fahrung* of the effects of affect – and of psychoanalysis, in oneself and in the others to whom we may listen, to whom we “lend an ear”.ⁱ Loraux was in-between, *metaxu*, as she was working and perceiving in a transversal way, crossing the limits of *dihairêsis* without ever falling into fixed dichotomy (not to sever, *trancher*, was one of her main epistemological maxims, which some may have criticized as too radical a scepticism). Since she, herself, underwent psychoanalysis and worked together with clinicians,ⁱ her use of psychoanalytical concepts was not limited to theory. The same is true of her active participation in theatre and in philosophy. Not only by analysing Plato and Aristotle (whom she considered a better, less ideological historian than Thucydides), she herself entered into philosophy (rather than just being married to a philosopher, Patrice Loraux).

i Gaudillière 2005.

By choosing the path of heterodoxy, even of paradox, in a discipline like Hellenic Studies, one has to display even greater courage. Not only because of academic pressure and arrogance, which in the words of Devereux, concern the specific social and cultural aspects of “anxiety and method”.ⁱ In terms of the psyche as the other crucial dimension of methodology and one's attitude towards the limits and constraints of the discipline, I would go as far as to say that an attraction to anxiety is necessary to gather the courage to affront the walls of such disciplines. Courage not only comes through external occasions: the *kairos* has to be perceived as such, by ourselves, insofar as we participate in the creation of a *kairos* as the decisive moment or occasion for our decision (or for a change in our health, like in Hippocrates, political world like in Aristotle, perception etc.). It is an effect as well as a condition of the attitude of taking a risk; *à nos propres risques et périls* – to put it in French – we speak, we write and we transgress limits, which too often are still valid for the simple reason that nobody has had either the courage or the will to question them.

i Georges Devereux 1967. His rather poor ancient “historiography” and psychoanalysis applied upon Sappho as his patient (with depressive anxiety) does not necessarily invalidate his psychoanalytical insights into methodology.

As a philosopher, I should be used to this kind of experience, as the “method” of philosophy is exactly that of not having one determinate method; it is, instead, a somehow systematic creation of new approaches, *methodoi*, and concepts in order to find answers for new questions or for some very old questions that appear from new perspectives. The new fields of investigation and questioning opened up by philosophy always go together with new approaches, even concerning the principles of something apparently stable such as rational understanding, or *Verstand* in a Kantian sense. (In academic philosophy this attitude is, in many ways, repressed.) This re/figuration and re/questioning of and through philosophy can be found as a central motivation in the work of Nicole Loraux, not only in her Tiresias-book (Loraux 1998). This makes her a Hellenist and historian of Greek antiquity as well as a philosopher of history, much more so than many philosophers who believe themselves able to conceive history through ideas alone, without studying the phenomena, institutions and other “details” constituting history.

I remember the first Nicole Loraux seminar I attended at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS). It was in 1988. At the beginning of the seminar she proposed a “methodological” lecture from a text not common among historians and philologists at the time (and even now): Freud’s *The Man Moses and*

Monotheism, an early text that Freud did not publish for many years fearing it might further harm his fellow Jews who were already the victims of a reinforced anti-semitism propagated by Viennese mayor, Karl Lueger. This text became his work in progress par excellence, a perpetual construction site. Freud published it only shortly before his death, in exile in London, on the brink of World War II, which was also the war against the Jews.

What Nicole Loraux wanted us to be aware of was the way in which Freud used his speculative thoughts, transforming them into historiographical hypothesis from a psychoanalytical perspective. This reading could not succeed without understanding the risks; after all, we are meant to be well aware that after Herodot and onward from Thucydides, legends were banned from serious historiography. But the story of Moses told by Freud was indeed a *mythos*; a legend or an invented story, like theatre plays or fantasy novels, like Plato's approaches to the "not (yet) intelligible." Well, it was exactly the legend, like the dream of the theatre, in short, the fantasizing or imagining capacity that had to be at the core of our interest. Nicole Loraux did not render every didactic intention explicitly, but in this case I suppose that she wanted us to include this dimension into our thinking and theorizing in order to be more resistant to the ideologies of the polis, in order to better understand the imaginary of the Athenians or the

Greeks – Greek males to be precise. But, in light of the diploma of advanced studies (DEA) she inaugurated at the school under the title “Modern Uses of Antiquity,” resisting means not only “resisting the ideologies of the polis” but also, simultaneously, “resisting the ideologies of the contemporary city, and scientific community.”

Here is the moment for a closer look at the relation between psychoanalysis, politics and historiography. For this purpose, I will open up the semantic field of *theatron*. In a first step I should revisit Aristotle’s theory of theatre (where *theorein* is to be understood in its polysemic, not only in its epistemic or even its logical sense). It is well known that one of the central concepts in this theory is *catharsis*, which is a kind of affective purification or purgation. This mainly medical metaphor is, for its part, related to Aristotle’s specific concept of *mimêsis*, differing from Plato’s (see also Papadopoulou 2006). We can find both in the first forms of psychoanalytic cure and its theory of the *kathartische Methode*. It meant a certain kind of repeating (“repeating and elaborating,” “*Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten*”). Returning to theatre and Poetics, the spectator not only perceives the drama, he enters into it through a triple *mimêsis* (at least...): the drama itself as a double *mimêsis*, that is the performance on stage of a story that is already the specific *mimêsis* of a chain of possibly lived events, and through the spectators’ mimetic effort to

re-present, that is also to mime the drama through his *aisthêsis* and *phantasia* (and implicitly also through his memory). This *mimêsis* by the spectator, which leads to the *catharsis*, is first of all an emotional one and only on a second level an intellectual one.ⁱ The spectator becomes the actors and the drama (*pros ti*, in a certain regard or to a certain extent). I would even say that Aristotle sees the spectator becoming/re-enacting the entire *mise-en-scène* (not only the *opseôs kosmos* as Aristotle also calls the optical *mise-en-scène* but the whole representation of the drama). We could admit a kind of etymological ground for such a view in the extensive sense of *theatron* (spectators, rather than theatre as a specific space in the polis and the whole spectacle; throughout the epochs and languages: in German, and especially in Viennese German, we say “to make a theatre” for “making a mess”). This complex *mimêsis* should enable the spectators not only to empathize, but also to re-enact. Only both aspects lead into *catharsis* of effects such as pity and anxiety (or fear): *eleos kai phobos*. Such a release is not necessary to dissolve resolve? private

i The artificial and probably much too superficial debate over the correct translation of *phobos* and *eleos* as affects (anxiety and misery, *Jammer*) or as emotions (fear and pity) is irresolvable for the simple reason that the whole experience of the drama as an anachronistic event *par excellence* must be seen as the oscillation between affect in the strong and invasive sense of *pathos* on the one hand, and emotion in the sense of a mediated and minimally reflected *pathos* on the other.

symptoms (e.g., of hysterical conversion), but in order to clear minds, also – so I would hypothesize – for better political deliberation in the ecclesia. Rather than saying – like Nicole Loraux – that Aristotle failed to see the political element in the Tragedy,ⁱ I would like to recall that in *Politics* (1341b) he not only mentions the “word” *catharsis*, but he refers to his whole concept as exposed in *Poetics*. If he thought the role of *catharsis* (and the meaning he gave to it in *Poetics*) worthy of mention in the eighth book of *Politics*, we can hardly maintain his presumed disinterest in the political dimensions of the tragedy. I would even say that Aristotle knew quite well about the political function of the tragic *catharsis* and probably also of *mimêsis*. He thereby opened his gaze to the deeper sense of political deliberation and to the inhibiting effects of certain states of affectivity in this specific kind of human praxis (one which is related strongly to passion and affectivity in general).

Now, whereas the deliberation in the ecclesia is a purely male affair, purified of “feminine” emotions (such as pity and fear, etc.), these traits, which are to be re-enacted by the spectators, are affects of women and men, written by men and “enacted” by male actors for men (mostly or

i Loraux 1973: 913. Since the catharsis is not only an emotion but the negativity of an affect (discharge through acting out), I would even say that it is, instead, the contrary, but on a very subtle, almost group analytic level.

exclusively). At the other end of the spectrum, psychoanalytic catharsis *in actu* was the invention of a woman, Anna O. (Bertha Pappenheim), who felt the associative discharge into Freud's ears as liberation of enchained affects. She designated this discharge herself with the English words "chimney sweeping". The words only (and not the melody or the *opseôs kosmos*) are central in this created "scene" in which the entire phenomenon took form in Freud's spirit: precisely as catharsis.ⁱ The cathartic method thus became the core of psychoanalytic technique.

In order to be certain that it was not merely by chance that Freud called his method first by the name of an Aristotelian concept, we should first reread *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where Freud considers several "archaic" metaphysical and categorical questions: What is a dream? In which ways does it come into being? By which means does it come to representation? What is the logic in, between and behind the manifest content of a dream? And it was also in reference to Aristotelian metaphysics that Freud called his own theoretical enterprise "metapsychology." Last but not least, and in order to render explicit Freud's

i It is known and attested by Freud himself that his education in classical studies at secondary school (the *Wasergymnasium* in Vienna) was a main foundation for his discovery of psychoanalysis. Aristotle was rarely an explicit source (unlike Plato), but very often an implicit one, and we know how much attention Freud gave to these latter sources and influences on his thoughts.

reference to Aristotle, we can read again the short text on the “Psychopathic Person on Stage,” an unpublished text that Freud wrote in 1905/6.ⁱ

The relating of the psychopathic and the dramatic scene of this text begins with a reference to the concept of *catharsis* in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. The term *mimêsis* or its (platonic) translation in German, *Nachahmung*, does not occur, but in describing the affectation of the spectators through “*Identifikation*” he refers to a specific sense of *mimêsis*. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* and throughout the entire Freudian work, we repeatedly read how greatly identification in its psychoanalytic sense and *mimêsis* in the Aristotelian sense are intertwined, sometimes even synonymous.

In order to look more closely at the affective dimensions in or related to the imaginary, I will discuss in greater detail the temporality of the *mise-en-scène* of the social imaginary. I will do this by looking at the “*télescope*” between ancient and modern catharsis. *Télescope* (literally bumper-to-bumper crash) is a concept Aulagnier forged in order to understand the phenomenon of psychotic actualization and through which an event in the present gives rise with an almost limitless force to an affective catastrophe (or fiasco) of the past, that may have

i Freud 1942. It was published only posthumously, in English, in 1942 and the *Gesammelte Werke* still does not include this text.

been hitherto encased, “encysted”.ⁱ This actualization of a catastrophe sets the ego (*Ich, je*) in deep crisis; this ever precarious formation is even more precarious in people who have an effective disposition for psychosis. It is a kind of uncontrolled anachronism *in actu*.

The technique of “controlled anachronism” proposed by Nicole Loraux (Loraux:2006) can be approached through the phenomenon Walter Benjamin attempted to describe (or better to illustrate) as “dialectical image” (Benjamin 1983). This image is thought to represent the historical dialectics (especially in the sense of class-antagonism) but in a kind of immobilized state, which in some aspects is reminiscent of stasis. Contemplation of the image, remembering (and remembrance) can possibly lead to reflection. This can be one method or way to remobilize the situation, to create an issue that goes beyond mere intellectualism. Controlled re-enactment of *télescopage*, of uncontrolled anachronism in the sense of an invasion of past affects, can be another one, in our specific context it is the relation of the tragic and the psychoanalytical concept of catharsis. The paroxysm in these encounters or *télescopages* can be found at the core of both, the tragic situation and the psychoanalytic one. But beyond this actualization, my hypothesis is that Nicole Loraux saw the

i Aulagnier 1983.

practice of psychoanalysis in a more general sense as one form of modern tragic re/mise-en-scène of conflicts (on the couch) that is able to bring some elucidation into the universe of historical and literal mise-en-scène (in the theatre but also in other spheres of the polis, in other textual genres). I see this possible re/mise-en-scène even more greatly at work in analytical groups where collectively shared affects and collective imaginary are reenacted and symbolized in new ways.ⁱⁱ

On the other hand, like psychotic *téléscopage*, *stasis* is another form of nearly uncontrolled acting out/reenacting in which past conflicts reemerge with an almost unmediated force suddenly opposing two parts that had formed one and which were supposed to become one by some mythic or real proximity or even identity. In her above mentioned text about Korkyra and the Commune of Paris, Nicole Loraux works out the standstill of the parts in *stasis*, but also - and this is the crucial point misunderstood by the editing committee that refused the text - the standing still of time: very similar structures and modes of acting out the conflict as if no time had passed; crystallization of time in the conflict and extraction of time between two conflicts, which are so far removed from one another in time. Time is reduced as though through shock, the past is condensed into one explosive moment that immobilizes everything and everybody. At their core, neurotic (not psychotic) dreams

and tragedies as Freud, or Aristotle, first theorized them, are some kind of controlled or attenuated *remise-en-scène* of such conflicts that otherwise would be reenacted in a more catastrophic, surreal or psychotic way. Controlled anachronism and controlled catharsis are, therefore, intertwined. The analytical setting is, like the theatre, the place and time for the reemergence of formerly lived affects. It occurs through a kind of artificial evocation that Aristotle called *mimêsis*. (The artificially produced effects arising from constructing an attraction, as Eisenstein describes for film and which - for Aristotle - would mainly be part of the *opseôs kosmos*, are therefore not the same.)

We can say that theatre as a whole, not only the myth, was one of the conditions for the invention of psychoanalysis. Freud put a Sophoclean Drama at the centre of his discovery and in Shakespeare's Hamlet, he reenounters another form of it, giving the oedipal scene an almost trans-historical signification. He conceived what he had called the *Urszene*, the primordial scene that he describes in The Wolf Man. Insofar as psychoanalysis brought to our perception and thought a radical new conception of the soul, it also elucidates new aspects of theatre itself. This is especially valid for:

The multilayered structures of the *mise-en-scène*

The deviation or canalization of affects by speech acts and their representational effects (in the polysemic sense of representation)

The role of catharsis in the oscillation between analysis and reconstitution of links (between affect/s, representation/s and desire/s in a given collectivity etc...)

Poetic, creative mimesis enables us to support and contain the conflict. When we continue this rather Aristotelian thought with Freud, it enables us to find new solutions of old and repetitive conflicts that by persisting, become obsessive and sterile, generating machine-like acting out. So we come to another relation between psychoanalysis and historiography (of the polis and “her” theatre). I mean the passage from acting out or “enactment”(*ausagieren*) to deliberative and transformative action (*handeln*). Taking into consideration this passage should contribute to a better understanding of the support psychoanalysis brings to the historiography of the “feminine” in the Greek world (and beyond it). To be precise, I should speak about the male feminine, because it came to us from a male dominated world and through an almost exclusively male tradition. Male authors of the feminine for male recipients occupy the scene in the theatre, the writings and the surrounding or corresponding institutions. Is it a closed circuit? Not

completely, because – a few – women are authors and because women are impregnated by this (male) world.

The exclusion of women, not only from the ecclesia, but from the whole sphere of politics, is a well known fact. To see the theatre only as a compensatory reintegration of this excluded other would be reductive, but I stated it as an implicit hypothesis among others in Nicole Loraux' work; one that seemed worthy of investigation.

What I tried to conceptualize as the “screen imaginary” of femininity (*imaginaire-écran de la féminité*), is a specific phenomenon organizing the asymmetric gender relations of power and representation. *Ecran*, screen, is to be understood in the double sense of, first, projection screen (for the “Other” of the male “One”), and, second, of obstacle (for women trying to penetrate the male spheres of dominance).ⁱ It is part of what can be called the transcendent imaginary. The strangeness of the femininity in these male constructions has some characteristics of the Parmenidian Aion. The screen imaginary of femininity transcends actual living women, their social lives in a process of change. As part and parcel of the “transcendent imaginary”, it corresponds more with the naturalization of asymmetric gender relations that have been analyzed by a number of feminist epistemologists. But one mechanism in

i Pechriggl 2000.

the constitution of this layer in the Greek and occidental imaginary is certainly projection or “projective identification” (M. Klein). Freud used the term projection to conceive a defense mechanism in the register of splitting, which Melanie Klein further developed.ⁱ In this conception, the rejected part of one’s self (or the ego) is projected onto another, who is no longer perceived as the other for and as him/herself, but who appears only in the function of the other as a rejected part of the self/ego. This aggressive rejection/projection is often articulated in the form of reproach (*Vorwurf*, another word for “pro-jection”). The other side of this phenomenon is idealization: the other whom the ego must reproach so greatly becomes dangerous, susceptible of fighting back and must, therefore, be reestablished via idealization (which also misconceives the other as other).

At a social level, splitting and projection are at work in many kinds of conflict, most intensively in wars, staseis, ethnic conflicts and catastrophes in which an entire, large group is affected in very invasive ways.

From a perspective of temporality and historiography, the transcendent, and even more so the screen imaginary of the other or of femininity (as other of the paradigmatic male), is portrayed as outside of time and change. Feminine bodies

i Klein 1946.

add an allegoric body to this abstraction, which becomes, by the way, an allegorically incorporated femininity. In the previously mentioned moments or irruption in history, such as stasis, revolution, war or catastrophe, such figures are put onto the stage of the collective imaginary and can function like a psychic container in the above mentioned sense. They can function not only as container of eruptive affects, but also as screen for persecutory affects that are supposed to be acted out onto those who are subjectified by these projections. Group analysis and research about inter/ethnic conflicts have shown the immense force of such defense mechanisms, once a large group bases their actions on them.

There is no question that each and every one of us is capable of such regression in situations of acute crisis. Regression is not only something sick; on the contrary, as a clinical term it signifies, first, a resource in the moment of sudden crisis and psychic catastrophe in which secondary defense mechanisms are not yet powerful enough to guarantee a minimal psychic integrity. The problem is the fixation and the inhibition of reflexive, differentiating forms of representation during the prevalence of the primary splitting. This means a fixation on a primary, splitting form of un/linking affects, un/lust, representation. As long as the fixation lasts it inhibits the work of secondary processes, such as mourning, realistic and ultimately self reflexive

elaboration. The fixation of this “state of the soul” implies that on each “occasion” the telescoping irruption is possible. These occasions are representations of analogous affective conflicts that begin to repeat themselves once the facilitation (Bahnung) is created. As Vamik Volkan has shown, these kinds of collective repetitions of acting out inscribe and fix themselves into the unconscious of the members of a group but also into the official memory of a lasting group.ⁱ The catastrophic *téléscopage* is at work in the individuals of the group, but contributes to their dis/cohesion. Nevertheless, unlike the “normal” compulsory repetition, *téléscopage* is a more total and collectively resented affect of annihilation or at least anxious invasion of the egos. The total character of this phenomenon is crucial in order to understand the urge of a total response in the form of rejection (splitting and not “repression,” *Verdrängung*).

Epistemological and methodological considerations

Psychoanalysis has forged concepts that enable us to better elucidate such moments in the past and re-actualize

i Volkan 2006.

them in the present (or a past closer to us). I am not defending the application of psychoanalysis as it is practiced on people in terms of past events or in literary or philosophical texts, but I think that psychoanalysis and even more group analysis still have a great deal to teach social sciences. The structure of their conceptual web is the only one existing that in a somehow systematic way renders intelligible the complex communication of intertwined layers containing the psychic, the unconscious and psychosomatic, the socio-cultural and the historical (not only in their psychic dimensions).

Our entire philosophical, historic and anthropologic creativity is called on to invent and systematize the transfer of concepts into other fields of knowledge (I prefer not to say disciplines). This work of translatio, of metapherein, has to lean on a new kind of positivism that respects the heterogeneity of being, of sources, of approaches, but also on the speculative work of forging new concepts, new hypothesis, new connections etc. Therefore, the chiasm is important: inventing and transferring within a positivist attitude in Hans Kelsen's sense, that is, in the sense of taking into account fully and realistically what is given and settled, *gesetzt* in German or *posé* in French, and which imposes itself. It does not matter whether we work on literary, philosophical or juridical texts, on images, tropes, words or concepts, we ought to treat them (and their

authors) as seriously as possible. Only then are we able to do justice to them and to change them, if possible and wanted. Nicole Loraux constantly reminded us, especially concerning Plato, that words are not where they are by chance. She always assumed that the authors with whom she worked knew what they were doing. Only on this foundation does conceptual speculation make sense, and become capable of being systematic without the help of transcendent and sclerotic dogmata.

There will always be some who will denounce as anachronism, the use in classical studies of concepts forged in order to understand modern psychic (and other) phenomena. This objection, however, can be rejected for several reasons, one of which is that Freud himself used a number of Greek elements for his own discoveries and metapsychology. And one of the most interesting and fruitful concepts for historiography that Freud forged is the concept of *nachträglich* (après-coup, differed). When Walter Benjamin conceived of the dialectical image in order to better elucidate some moments of the past through specific, “corresponding” windows of perception of the present (or of a past closer to the present), he certainly thought about a phenomenon known as the “Aha experience.” It marks the moment of recognition in which “The scales fell from his eyes.” It is the moment in which the resistance against a complete change of perspective

resolves itself; opening, suddenly and finally, the way to re/cognition.

There are thus several factors that make plausible the use of anachronism, in conjunction with psychoanalytical concepts, in historiography. These concepts are even more valid when they are used in order to elucidate phenomena belonging to the transcendent imaginary, which, as though dissociated from self, transforms socio-historical actuality. In so far as the figurations belonging to this imaginary are projections emerging in situations of crisis and effervescence of affects – in particular, massive anxiety capable of affecting an entire community - under certain conditions the psychoanalytical approach helps us to better understand such processes of figuration and fixation.

Although it may be true that we can no longer feel the way people felt in ancient Greece, it is likewise true that we cannot persist in ignoring that imaginary and philosophical figurations as well as institutions contain, in different manners, affective conflicts, and how they do so.

**Back to tragic ways... Forgiving, forgetting,
obscuring**

The Austrian constitution stems from the republican and democratic revolution after World War I and is built on several principles: a democratic principle, a republican principle, a federal principle, a legislative principle, a liberal principle and the principle of the division of powers. The republican principle led to a constitutional article stating that no member of the house of Habsburg can be a candidate for the office of President, the highest (not exactly the most powerful) office in the State. Another interdiction concerns all kinds of Nazi-re-enactment. These interdictions are valid as long as the memory of imperial hybris and the catastrophic implications of imperial war policies on one hand, of the extermination of jews and others by the Nazi-regime on the other is vivid. Those who regularly want to forgive and to forget, especially the latter crimes, are the same groups who want to abolish the interdictions.

The tragic view on politics is calling to commemoration, it is the view which Walter Benjamin described after World War I, and before the Nazi crimes began during World War II, when he describes Klees Angel in his famous Thesis about history (Zit.). (Benjamins last book was about Baroque Tragedy).

I would now like to finish by returning to political psychology in order to bring some elements which could help us to understand the tendency to, and also the implications of this kind of political oblivion. Freud was trying to understand the analogies and the relation between particular psyche and collective psychological phenomena. He did this in several speculative theories about history f.ex in *The Man Moise* and *Monotheism*, in *the Malaise in Civilization* and in *Mass Psychology and Ego Analysis*.

It was only a speculative beginning and Freud was well aware of the provisory character of his speculations which he explicitly mentions in these writings. Social, Group and recently Political Psychology has gone much further since. From a psychoanalytical point of view conflict is central, not only in the development of the psyche (Eros-Thantos to put it briefly), but also in the development of groups. In political theory and historiography there are, like in psychology, also opposing theories, for example the one Moses Finley contests in his book, *Politics in the Ancient World* (Finley 1983: 97-121).

Political oblivion goes hand in hand with psychic repression of the traumata related to stasis and therefore it has also to do with "the return of the repressed" on a collective scale, sometimes after very long periods of oblivion in a strong sense, that is oblivion related to a taboo. (Volkan)

For the core psyche, the one Freud called the unconscious, there is no time in the ordinary, vigil sense: it conserves impressions and experiences very well; just try to remember when you dreamt of friends or relatives who died long ago: they appear as if they were here, present, now. The theory of the defense mechanism called repression explains that repressed experiences which are removed from conscience can resurrect as if they had happened just yesterday. The fact that they are taboo for conscious memory (in order to protect the conscious life from being invaded by them, or better, from the affects accompanying them) protects these experiences from alteration through living experiences, an alteration which can lead to their slow dissolution. But this kind of peace for the psyche is an illusory one which only works on a superficial level of consciousness and takes a lot of psychic energy. It does not lead to forgetting in a more enduring, dissolving sense.

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