

A view onto the whole issue

The present volume has two aims. As the title suggests, it should be understood as a critical contribution to the continuation of Freudian civilization theory which regards the aggression drive responsible for the “civilization and its discontents” and therefore in need of repression. Secondly, it refers to a fundamentally baffling gap in real historic and in psycho-historic historiography. These provide us with a lot of information about dying and death (just think about the studies of Philippe Ariès) whereas mourning about these man-made devastations is totally left out, as if there is nothing to mourn about.

Keeping this in mind while reading endless articles about the World Wars and genocides of the 20th century 'remembered' with great effort but without the necessary pause for fully absorbing the remembered through a depressive process¹ in view of these historical disasters. Without these terms of the depressive, whatever form they take, truly learning from history is hardly possible if it's possible at all.

The claim to be a “critical contribution” of Freudian civilization theory is to be understood literally. This is not as a turning away from psychoanalysis as many have done. Freud and his drive theory find their fatal confirmation thousands of times every day. Death drive and its slightly more cautious brother, the aggression drive, act powerfully before our eyes, behind the scenes and on every stage of history as news programs show us continuously.

The publishers of the well known 'Freud-Studienausgabe' claim, thoroughly misrepresenting him, that in *Unbehagen in der Kultur* (civilization and its discontents) Freud sees antagonism “between drive claims and the limitations imposed by civilization” as irreconcilable.² They claim, the irreconcilability, mitigated through “sublimation” but never overcome, is the source of “discontent”.

So, discontent because of not acted out aggressions? This has a limited value in an individually lived daily routine. For the course of history packed with slaughters of all kind, specially regarding contemporary experience (1914/1944/2014), this interpretation ignores realities. The following research and reflections consider the so far suppressed mourning about the woeful course of history³. A course which causes way more than discontent (namely despair, indignation, massive suppression and denial). But this finds very little attention

¹ The terms „depressive“, „depression“ and the correspondent „depressive pausing“ are not to be understood in a pathological or clinical sense but in the sense of the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1882-1960), who showed founded the theory of object relations and described the “depressive position” as a successful overcoming of the schizoid-paranoid position.

² Citations are from the Freud-Studienausgabe of 1972 (→ bibliography). The citation is in volume IX, S. 193.

³ The danger of a neutralization of mourning with its specific guilt pain needs be in the mind's eye. Mourning as „anthropological universal“ with reference to all mankind (Rüsen 2013) will not be treated later on.

in the *collective psychological household* (kollektiver Psychohaushalt)⁴ and anyway is overridden by the historical-political trend setters of the media. But: is mourning about history simple “suppression”? Or is it a collective – constitutional incapability of historical and political mourning?

The figure of the incapability of mourning has had a special imprinting through the well known 1967 book of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich which refers to the consequence of Nazism and will not be commented here.

The farewell in terms of historical mentality from the GDR after 1989 had partially similar traits as the incapability of mourning after 1945.

- Who was entangled with the society system of the GDR could not mourn, at least not right away, because a political “introjection” is not easy to give up and mourn.
- The ones who had their wishes come true, did not have any reason to mourn (like the cold war-warriors in the west) or saw themselves overridden by developments which didn't realize what had been aimed to (the civil right movement in the east).
- The ones who had arranged themselves with the division (great part of the left and also large parts of the total population, statistically more people in the west than in the east) felt more taken by surprise than they were worried about the future.
- Actually, the problems of change and the farewell to old structures perished in the rumbling of historical and political continuity. History is always faster than an a historical, critical elaboration of a transformation. .

Despite the involvement of the personal history of the author in the historical problem field (I was born in 1939 and grew up as a “Wessi”, western German → chapter 6), the historical content of the thematic will be enlarged and projected into a principle. How is the total course of history to be judged? Wouldn't it be good to have an element of mourning about the multiple aberrations which could contribute to not having the old mistakes repeated all the time?

Mourning *about* history (including its different pasts) can be made conscious (and this is the main intention of this book), but cannot be re-staged if not in a very inadequate way, not in a museum of a scientific exhibition, nor on stage⁵ or in commemoration ceremonies. The latter ones may encourage processes of collective mourning but cannot execute them in substitution.

The first part presents first advances made into this so far little considered problem field (chapter 1-4).

The second part enlarges the spectrum of eventual approaches treating both literature mourning statements and the difficulties of a methodologically

⁴ In Norbert Elias one can find the term „Affekthaushalt“. Freud uses the term „Libidoökonomie“ (translator's note).

⁵ An example: the theatre piece *War Horse*, staged in Berlin in summer 2014, a world success, undoubtedly contributes to reconciliation in the year of commemoration of WWI, renouncing glorification of war and nationalism as demonstrated impressively in the love between the main character and his horse Joey. On the other hand, a great deal of the 32 scenes consists in battle events, staged with ear-battering gun thunder. - After the show an actress asked the audience money for a refugee organization.

transparent research of the theme. The British historian Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) and the so far hermeneutically suppressed category of subtext find special attention (chapter 5-8).

The third part confronts readers with testimonials of art history, literature and cultural history with pictures, sculptures, tragedies, philosophical texts and music works which have donated much more attention to the psycho-historical and “melancholic” attitude towards life than any intellectual tract of individualistic mourning songs.

Here a first insight in this dimension of our thematic:



Crying virgin at the cathedral of Magdeburg. An enduring mourning icon remembering the 30-year-war.

The fourth part treats the main question of this book dealing with the reasons for the absence of enduring collective mourning processes. Short terms mourning expressions are not missing. What is missing, are the longer lasting processes of transformation able to release “mourning work” in a psychoanalytical sense. The fifth part encircles the term of mourning work and applies it though to the examination of history. In order to be able to mourn about historical meanders and destructiveness of all sorts, we need internal counterweights which can be understood as historical and life story legacy.⁶

The appendix reassumes texts which have led and accompanied the author's research process. They are integral parts of the total argumentation but can lead to alternative conclusions for the readers. It would not be absurd to start the reading of the book with the first text.

One result of the whole, maybe the most important, is anticipated here: Whoever wants to participate the depressive or melancholic mode of attitude (“mourning”) at his examination of history, must love, must be able to love, not love history but love life.⁷ In so far mourning about history doesn't ask permanent lamentation about fate but asks for enforced integration of disparate psycho-historical tendencies⁸ which overstretch the factual systematizing narrative.

⁶ Psycho-historical counterweights for balance maintenance are to be distinguished from counter terms we know from other areas. Let's think of worry/concern as a counter term to guilt and hope as counter term to hopelessness. When arguing with counter terms there is a risk of an intellectual repellent polarisation and bossiness.

⁷ Erich Fromm (1900-1980) divided conceptually between love for life and love for death (bibliophile and necrophilia)

⁸ Psycho-history has a blurredly defined research profile (one could also day with Piskorki, page 203: it is still in the fledgling stages) and unites different authors like like Alexander Mitscherlich and Lloyd

Most probably the lack of love for life is the biggest obstacle for the possible generative force of historical-political mourning.

Psychological household:

Household in the sense of a home to look after. There are income and expenses and also things to put in order on a daily base or once in a while, rubbish and old, useless things to throw away, stuff that need to be moved to another place, and other items need to be purchased or earned to make a house a home. Our psyche works in a similar way.