

Throwing the case open: the impossible subject of Luisa Passerini's

Autobiography of a Generation

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This article takes up John Forrester's account of the psychoanalytic case (1996, 2017) – not in its development as a professional tool for gaining empirical knowledge about individuals, but as it gets reworked across the twentieth century, often outside the psychoanalytic clinic, as an inquiry into the social and historical enmeshing of subjectivity. Italian feminist and oral historian Luisa Passerini's study *Autobiography of a Generation: Italy, 1968* (1996[1988]) will serve here as an illustration of such a hybrid attempt to intervene methodologically from 'inside' the case in order to forge a space for 'subjectivity' within history – which, I will argue, is a slightly different project from Forrester's concern with a 'science of the individual' (1996: 9). While invoking some of the features of a clinical psychoanalytic account – particularly by incorporating an account of her own analysis – her book also re-inflects this model to depart radically from what we know about case-histories. In part this is because psychoanalysis is being combined with forms of historical and social enquiry. Here Passerini was not alone – Ronald Fraser's *In Search of a Past* (1984) and Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986) are examples from the same period of further hybrids between historical investigation and psychoanalytic case histories. But the formal departure under discussion here has also to do with the radical nature of the design which, by drawing on various narrative, reflective and analytical tools pioneered by Sigmund Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), reworks the

disciplinary framing of social and historical phenomena. Part log-book from a psychoanalysis, part autobiography, part historical account of the experience of 1968 in Italy (thus potentially three forms of case study), Passerini's work subverts the models designed to contain it. It has been described as both 'non-ordinary' history (Petó, 2012: 376) and an 'experimental autobiography' which breaks all the basic topoi of that genre (Pravadelli, 2012: 372).

Some notion of this tendency – some interest in changing the rules of the game – can already be derived from Forrester's genealogical work on cases. Although Forrester states that the original impetus for his own 'thinking in cases' came from the psychoanalytic case history (1996: 1-2; 2017: 127), as important was his long-term engagement with Michel Foucault. One of his earliest published papers was 'Michel Foucault and the History of Psychoanalysis' (1980), and he remained in debate with Foucault throughout the next few decades (Forrester, 1985, 1997, 2014). The project, then, was not just about the constitution of knowledge from cases, or how they arose as a style of reasoning, but also about how cases come to intervene in the historical constitution of individuals, and of subjectivity per se. In 1996, in 'If *p*, then what? Thinking in cases', Forrester turned in particular to *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977) and its description of emerging professional cultures in the nineteenth century through which individuals are described, judged, measured, and also normalized. For Foucault such forms of examination turn each individual into a 'case' – and by implication psychoanalysis was to be included in the critique of such technologies. What intrigued Forrester was the possibility that, contra Foucault, the genre of the case might afford more disrupted, more tentative or singular versions of how one arrives at knowledge of people and their situations: 'What many find most seductive

in psychoanalysis' he writes, 'is its promise to give an account of the divergences, the detours, the idiosyncrasies of the individual's life' (Forrester, 1996: 10); psychoanalysis promises to reveal life, 'in its singularity and distinctiveness' (ibid.: 10). This point about particularity is explored by Julie Walsh in the current issue (2019). According to Walsh, the psychoanalyst 'follows the ethnographer in her commitment to thick description' (2019: ??); the logic of the case study 'is designed to give space to the many and often contrary lines of study that emerge from within the patient-analyst experience' (ibid.: ??).

'If *p*, then what? Thinking in cases' was concerned with establishing the wide-angled view of this: Forrester traces possible roots for the modern case history from Greek medicine and medieval Christian casuistry to the case-method approach to teaching in the Harvard Law School of the 1870s. In a virtuosic way he touches on the birth of statistics, Darwinian natural history, and J.S. Mill's attack on logic, in an attempt to position the case history as a new vehicle in the history of knowledge – one that becomes central to the transmission of psychoanalysis as a science. But, for Forrester, there is another way of thinking about psychoanalysis and cases, which approaches them not in terms of professional practice, but from the perspective of the individual *for whom* the case history provides a 'new way of telling a life' (1996: 10). This alternative view might root itself in the example of Freud's self-analysis and *The Interpretation of Dreams* which emerged from it. As Forrester put it, 'Each dream unveils a little more of that singular version of an autobiography that we find in that book' (ibid.: 10).

Impossible Cases

The questions I'll be pursuing here concern the transformations that the *psychoanalytic* case introduced into the construction of individuality going forward: not only into models of the psychotherapeutic case history, but also into Edwardian and modernist autobiography and historical accounts of personal life. Freud developed a set of practical clinical techniques – including the analytic encounter, the couch, the encouragement of transference, the recollection of childhood, and the probing of sexual desire – which were designed to render visible a narrative of subjective life in its most intimate details. As such, psychoanalytic case histories become comparable to other genres of self-narration, such as the autobiographical writings of Rousseau, De Quincey, and others, who equally developed new ways of chronicling self-experience and took an interest in the elusive relation between the infant and the adult, in memories, fantasies and the unconscious (see Böhmer, this issue, for a discussion of how cases can be read in a wider cultural context which includes their circulation in literary networks).

What I want to pursue here is something different, which is the emergence of new kinds of autobiographical work – informed by psychoanalysis – with radical, experimental or critical dimensions, which end up dismantling the boundaries of the conventional life, and the conventional case, without necessarily putting anything solid in its place. I see this genre emerging in part out of interactions between the psychoanalytic case history and the cultural project of modernism. I have in mind texts such as Walter Benjamin's memory work in *Berlin Childhood* (2006) and the *Arcades Project* (1999); H.D.'s *A Tribute to Freud* (2012) or her later psychological account *Magic Mirror* (2012); Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* (1986) – which contains a great deal of autobiographical detail and self-analysis, and includes

psychoanalytic theorisation as well as excerpts from case histories. Wilfred Bion's *A Memoir of the Future* (1991), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Dialogue on Love* (1999) and more recently Julia Kristeva's *Teresa my Love* (2014) provide further examples, as do psychoanalyst Marion Milner's early self-analytical exercises and C.G. Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Some of these texts have been important to Passerini's own work – she cites Benjamin in both *Autobiography* and *Memory and Utopia* (2007), and, in this latter work, she suggests Bion's memoir as a model for how to think the limits of disciplines such as history in the light of 'memory's fragile power' (2007: 30). She 'devoured' H.D. in the late 1960s (2012: 305), and *Autobiography* recalls how Fanon is summoned during a séance in the early 1970s and questioned about the date of the coming revolution (1996: 110). This doesn't mean Passerini was explicitly drawing her model from such authors, but her hybrid model for a case certainly has structural affinities with theirs.

One could refer to all these texts as 'exploding' or 'impossible' cases because they challenge our idea of what the self is, and how an account of its life might be framed methodologically (Passerini described her own topic of 1968 as 'the explosion of subjectivity' [2007: 56]). These works redraw conventional maps of lived experience, while still attempting to objectify it in some way, to put it into public circulation as a model of how subjectivity works. I'm taking the model of a 'case' here to imply a formal arena of professional or scientific jurisdiction, within which an investigator mobilises a case, or assembles cases, to explore or explain a specific point: to determine something, as an example for others who share similar disciplinary or professional commitments. I'm therefore assuming, at the very least, an element of instrumentality in the psychoanalytic case (however much this may be hedged round

rhetorically with uncertainty or digression). Freud described his Dora case as incomplete and ‘imperfectly elucidated’ (1905: 12), yet he expected it to ‘substantiate’ the views he put forward in 1895-6 upon ‘the pathogenesis of hysterical symptoms’.

Cases also sustain the illusion that there is a standpoint from which one can look at an individual subject, or an element of subjectivity, in a relatively isolated way – isolated from the broader social and historical context. But these alternative forms of quasi-psychoanalytic self-investigation I’m putting forward disrupt that model, and introduce large swathes of structural *indeterminacy*, in a number of ways. Firstly, they’re autobiographical, or contain components of autobiography, so the role of the investigator and the role of the individual are collapsed. Second, and in part because of this, the narrative structures of these texts are often dominated to a far greater extent than are psychoanalytic ones by the free associative leaps of their authors, and by tones of hesitancy, loss, crisis, or rapture. The relations between subjectivity and psychoanalysis are effectively turned inside-out – so that subjective narrative provide the frame for psychoanalysis, and not the other way round. Finally, and most significantly, these ‘impossible’ cases are being used to generate questions not just about an individual subject, but about broader conditions for subjectivity in history and society, and how these objects of study interpenetrate. They explode the more sociologically limited arena of any professional use of case-work and replace it with a much more complex and extensive engagement with human history. Everything that used to be outside the case is now inside. Some of the broader contexts invoked in the texts I’ve mentioned include the legacy of colonialism (for Fanon); capitalist modernity (for Benjamin); the history of civilization and religion (for H.D.); or the

historical emergence of the Baroque as a turning point for the representation of the sensuous body (for Kristeva).

The questions thus raised are so far-reaching and radically posed that they dwarf the notion of the psychoanalyst-analysand relationship; but this makes it all the more interesting that the latter is retained, in varying degrees, as a useful stand-point by the authors in question. All of them, in their very different approach to representing the composition of a life, make ample use of the new sources of self-knowledge which became privileged sites for psychoanalytic self-exploration: the unconscious, the irrational, free association, the sexual, the dream, childhood, the repressed. One question to be asked, then, is: how is the psychoanalysis functioning? What does it become in these texts? And what are they, any more, cases of?

I want to leave open the question as to whether psychoanalysis inexorably leads these writers in this broader direction. Or, alternatively, whether it's something in the authors, and their decision to engage issues of social and historical consciousness, that is giving their narratives their radical shape, with psychoanalysis providing a set of useful tools with which to mediate the complex unsettled fragments of their enquiries. Freud arguably already provided a model for the interpenetration of the micro-histories of cases with the very broad social and historical scale of civilization when he moved into the terrain of anthropology, the analysis of groups, and the history of culture and religion. *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) is a grand composite of all the socio-historical frames which Freud engages beyond the clinic, while still setting them within the putative mould of a case history. But Freud's history of human society also tended to be the Oedipus complex writ large – according to Forrester, the

central 'exemplar' for psychoanalysis (1996: 10). All the texts I've put forward pretty much divest themselves of that particular structural model. In fact all the writers I've suggested as examples of this hybrid type of case appear bereft of foundational structures and explanations. They give us incomplete, anxious, and unassured accounts of the whole within which they are trying to situate human subjectivity.

One reason for this is their experience of war – the projects of Bion, H.D., Fanon, Milner and Benjamin all have a particular concrete relation to war and its traumas. But another is that psychoanalysis has also appealed to writers for whom the forms of provisionality and instability that Freud introduced into the model of the mind – in comparison with other psychologies of rational consciousness – provide a different kind of fulcrum through which to try and understand the interconnectedness of communities and subjects. Psychoanalysis introduces an interest in dimensions of mental life which subvert the notion of a consciously told narrative about the self and replaces this with the unconscious life of consciousness. The post-Freudian ego never entirely regains control of its own autobiography. This much might be shared with other late-Victorian psychologies of the unconscious, such as that of Pierre Janet or Frederic Myers. What psychoanalysis brought in addition was new practices through which to read dreams, mental associations, jokes or infancy, which further destabilised narrative expectations and moral or intellectual demands for coherence. Not only did Freud unhinge the way we think about consciousness, he unhinged the ways in which people thought about the unconscious – this was a radical step he took. Freud supplied new intimations about the way mind, body, lived emotional history and external events are connected through forms of instability and disconnection. Perhaps none of the texts I've mentioned would be written in quite the same way

without the example of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. This interest in dis-junction also explains the alliances literary modernism forges with Freud. Many of the texts I've cited draw directly from modernist techniques – particularly in their use of montage and abrupt shifts of tone (Bion was informed by readings of Joyce and Pound; Benjamin by surrealism; Fanon by Aimé Césaire and Édouard Glissant; H.D. by imagism; Kristeva by Tel Quel).

Autobiography of a Generation

This is a good stepping off point for engaging with Luisa Passerini's *Autobiography of a Generation* as an example of some of the features I've outlined above – most obviously in its combination of autobiography and psychoanalysis with a wider set of historical investigations, but also for the way it engages the case history while also methodologically unhinging it. It is itself an exercise in montage, presided over by an epigraph from Raymond Queneau's *Pierrot mon amour* on the instability and deceptiveness of the past. There will not be space here to track its complex narrative in a huge amount of detail or to assess it as a work of history – though I will try and give a sense of how the text dislocates itself from conventional historical practice. What concerns me more overall (with a glance back to Forrester's debate with Foucault over the transmission of cases and the production of subjectivity) are the ways in which the text amplifies the notion that the psychoanalytic case history contains the seeds of its own undoing. This is because the concepts of the psyche, and the nature of mental histories which come out of psychoanalysis, are typically ones which dissolve a sense both of the boundaries of the person (a trend already initiated in Freud's *Group Psychology*) and of history as a narrative that can be sequentially ordered (already apparent in the complexity Freud introduced into accounts of

memory through the concepts of the unconscious, screen memories, and *Nachträglichkeit*). As Michel de Certeau observed: psychoanalytic biography affirms ‘an erosion of its own postulates. Working from within, it dismantles... the historical and social figure that is the standard unit of the system within which Freudianism was developed’ (1986: 15; I wish to thank Thomas Kugler for alerting me to this passage).

A crisis somewhat along these lines – at least involving the dissolution of the conventional framing of historical and social identity – inaugurates the unfolding of Passerini’s multiple narratives. There are in effect three explicit threads to this book. One comprises excerpts from oral history interviews for a collaborative project mapping trans-European dimensions of the experience of 1968. These fed into a collective study, *A Student Generation in Revolt*, edited by Ronald Fraser and published in time for the twenty-year anniversary in 1988, as was *Autobiography* itself. The second component is a set of autobiographical reflections drawing on Passerini’s own diaries from 1984-87, but also collaging inserts from interviews about her life, along with other recollections published in Italian venues in the mid-1970s. The oral history sections (contained in the three even-numbered chapters of the book) consist of interviews with leaders of the student movement from the Humanities faculty at the University of Turin, and reflect back on 1968 and its legacy, tracked through moments of disillusion and reinvention up to the late 1970s. But the transcripts begin with the interviewees’ recollections of childhood in the 1950s, as one of the commonalities for that generation was the legacy of fascism (Passerini’s previous study had been on *Fascism in Popular Memory* [1987], examining the Turin working class in the 1920s and 1930s.). Thus in terms of temporalities, it’s a very complex work (Lisa Baraitser devotes an excellent chapter to this aspect of Passerini’s

book as well as its clinical dimensions in *Enduring Time* [2017]). The third narrative strand is the specifically psychoanalytic one which, in a similar way to Sedwick in *A Dialogue on Love*, reports and reflects on moments in her analysis with Dr. G. The analysis, which commenced in the Spring of 1984, ranges freely over the present and the past, trying to locate something that's missing, which has left Passerini feeling bereft at this point of her life. The work as a whole is very much a narrative of inexplicable feelings of loss or absence.

One aspect of this absence is a methodology or structure through which the different elements of the book could be made to cohere (and which might turn the account into a case *of* something in particular). This makes it a hard book to summarise – at the very least, it is not a straightforward history of 1968 in Italy; that more conventional processing of the material into a chronological narrative can be found in Passerini's contributions to the collaborative *1968* book, in relation to which *Autobiography* is a form of fall-out. The uncertainty as to its form, purpose, and subject matter is to a certain extent caused by a series of practical and methodological crises which govern the book's inception and appear to provide its initial impetus. One is Passerini's dawning recognition that the international oral history project won't come together, or not in the way originally envisaged, and that therefore she 'will have to work alone on memory, and perhaps not for the purpose of producing a history' (1996[1988]: 21). This shift in part establishes her move across the boundary from historical work to psychoanalysis, though the boundaries of genre remain unsettled here (in a later commentary Passerini judges *Autobiography* not to be a work of history because it doesn't footnote references to sources, 'a prerogative of history's epistemological status' [2012: 317]).

A further 'shock' to disciplinary norms – and to the case history form – comes through a process of mirroring in which Passerini recognises aspects of her own life in those of her interviewees, who like herself grew up in the aftermath of Mussolini's Italy and belonged to radical student communities in the late 1960s. The first chapter of the book is called 'Mirrors' (with perhaps also a nod to Lacan's theory of the formation of the ego in the 'mirror-stage'). Of one interviewee she writes, 'In his story I observe some of my own experiences; in his gestures I recognize some of my passions' (1996[1988]: 2). Rather than conveying reassurance, this doubling uncomfortably collapses the methodological boundary between the investigator and the investigated. The book thus opens with a personal drama: 'I conducted my first interviews with the protagonists of 1968. The interviews plunge me into my own past: as I listen, the film of what I was doing at the time unreels. Memory redoubled in this way is hard to bear' (ibid.: 1). The excavation of recent Italian history involves her in the demythologisation of her own childhood, creating a short-circuit between history and autobiography. Is this a work of meta-history? An act of self-recollection? Or a deconstruction of the forms of memory – oral history presenting the missing supplement to mainstream historical scholarship, while psychoanalysis in addition presents that which eludes the conscious testimony of the person? These are questions which fluctuate around the montage of interviews with the protagonists of 1968 themselves, which are organised more legibly around three major themes: 'Choosing to be Orphans' (covering the later 1940s to early 1960s); the explosion of 1968 itself; and the 1970s, under the rubric of 'Paths of Individuation'.

But there's a third crisis – professional and methodological – which is that Passerini finds the transcripts from the interviews are themselves unusable: 'They reproduce neither my own emotion at seeing myself in the mirror nor that of the other person at recounting his or her own experience as a whole for the first time. Those who get the transcripts react with disappointment, irritation, rejection' (ibid.: 2). The personal and the social throughout the book act as metonyms for each other. Passerini enters psychoanalysis at this same point in order to deal with a mid-life crisis – anxiety attacks, a sense of rootlessness, and emotional incapacity: she is attracted to men who are never there for her, 'Mirror of my own not being there' (ibid.: 46). But that generation as a whole was founded on the experience of estrangement, and the need for emancipation from constricting familial and authoritarian social structures: 'At the roots of our memory, in dozens of life histories, I find a rupture', opens the first oral history chapter (ibid.: 22). Thus a complex, circular relation is set up between Passerini's attempt to work through emotional blockages in her own identity, and to locate a sense of rupture at the heart of the 1960s and 1970s. If self-recollection justifies her own insertion into the narrative of the student rebellion as it broadened to engage the plight of migrant workers in the Fiat factory – 'In May 1969 I found myself, without any specific political affiliation, in front of Mirafiori, along with many others, handing out leaflets' (ibid.: 102) – so her statement to her psychoanalyst – 'I have no memory of any origins that resemble me' (ibid.: 4) – equally speaks to the existential unease of those dislocated from the world into which they were born.

The Case of Subjectivity

That much concerns the intertwining of Passerini's personal 'case' with the historical one. But there is a further 'doubling' going on which has to do with the way in which

Passerini professionally orients her work precisely around an attempt to *give a history of subjectivity*. Here the psychoanalysis makes itself felt not just as a technique of self-investigation, but also as a disciplinary tool. ‘The main contribution of psychoanalysis to historical studies’, in her view, ‘has been to make subjectivity – including its unconscious dimensions and internal fissures – into an object of history’ (2012: 309). Already in Passerini’s earlier study of the cultural experience of the Turin working class (1987), her interest in fantasies and jokes (mobilising Freud with Bakhtin) was designed to render more everyday, elusive and unconscious aspects of subjectivity materially present for the historian. ‘It is an irony of history’, she argues there, ‘that what is written about it so largely ignores the personal lives of individuals in the very period (the past hundred years) when individual subjectivity has been transformed, becoming an important area of scientific study and political interest’ (Passerini, 1987: 3). It is, then, as an episode in the history of subjectivity that the student movements engage her attention in the mid-1980s. Indeed, what differentiated the Turin movement from that in Rome was the former’s emphasis specifically on self-creation. As one of the student leaders, Guido Viale, clarifies (in Passerini’s contribution to the Fraser book, rather than in *Autobiography*): ‘Here were those who had been silenced discovering themselves as the protagonists of their own lives, expressing their needs in a new language’ (Fraser, ed., 1988: 253). By the time Passerini publishes *Memory and Utopia*, in 2007, she will situate 1968 very broadly indeed in terms of epochal changes in train since the 11th century (2007: 55). Within the 1988 book, there’s a more local narrative to tell about the shift from family and community life of the 1950s towards this sudden irruption of new and radical forms of experience.

The value Passerini ascribes to subjectivity makes it a hinge-point between the book as (1) a work of critical history; (2) a form of personal recollection; and (3) a 'case', which is searching for the lineaments of 'something' formal to be transmitted from the event of 1968, but which is proving elusive. The material is both held in the quasi-form of a case, and is everywhere deflected from being given a solid, formal articulation. I will briefly sketch some different gestures the book performs around this failed materialisation of 'subjectivity' in each of these modes. First (as history) the thematic movement across the chapters of interviews sketches different social phases of self-discovery. 1968 heralded 'the establishment of new fusionist communities'. Looking back, Laura Derossi, one of the student leaders, complains: 'I didn't have an individual life, I no longer did anything by myself...' (1996[1988]: 89); Luigi Bobbio (another Turin leader and Derossi's fiancé at the time) recalls the assumption that 'the public is the expression of my subjectivity, it is my way of being myself' (ibid.: 89). This period is followed by the fragmentation of the larger group into the myriad organisations of the New Left, and during and after this the conversion of that original fervour into periods of isolation and individual crises during which 'individuals are moulded who did not exist before' (ibid.: 149). Passerini refers to this overall arc as a 'subjective upturn' (ibid.: 23). The account provides an interesting analogy to the origin of the book itself (the splitting off of a personal memoir from a group project), and Passerini's turn to investigate her own subjectivity can be envisaged as itself a product of that historical turn: 'For this generation what we might call the right of autobiography – to give a sense, or more than one sense, to its own past... assumes a particular meaningfulness' (ibid.: 154).

However, there's something about the move from the collective to individual subjectivity, as well as the series of ruptures and crises implicated in that transition, which at the same time undermines the exposition of that first narrative in which subjectivity is something positively materialised in history. It is here that the more fluid, intuitive mode of recollection accomplishes a subtle form of work – this would be the second 'gesture' (memoir). On the one hand, the shift to more inward-facing work on personal identity and the politics of desire acts as an example of what it means to become a 'subject'. But the modes of melancholy, despair and crisis encountered in her self-reflections allow her to recast that same historical trajectory as a loss – a loss that is often disowned or covered up in the retrospection and self-justifications of her interviewees (hence, perhaps, everyone's disappointment and irritation with the transcripts). From this perspective, the eruptive power of the university occupations of 1967 and the major strike of 1969 is dissipated (the student leadership diminishing as the struggle broadens to other sections of Italian society) and ultimately rechannelled – into more conventional political alliances (the trades unions, the Communist Party); for a segment of the younger generation of activists into the bleak terrorism of the 1970s; for many, back into the working world, where they now find themselves as experts in media and communications. Recollections of the time are 'laden with uneasiness' (ibid.: 126); against this backdrop 'stands the shadow of a defeat, without the clarity of what exactly has been lost and who has won' (ibid.: 126). It is this mode of mourning, uncertainty, and 'not knowing' on the part of the author which perhaps could not be incorporated into the more 'official' and factual account in the collaborative study.

But this touches on a broader methodological issue which is: what does it mean to give a history of subjectivity? And here is the third ‘gesture’ through which the case of subjectivity is both invoked and radically problematized. The ‘idea of combining memory and historiography’ (ibid.: 121), while showing affinities with the trajectory of 1968 in Italy itself, also presents a crisis of historical method, which as yet had no formal place for the kinds of ‘subjectivity’ Passerini is making her object of enquiry. In the earlier case study of Turin under fascism (Passerini, 1987), the memories of working-class protagonists were read by assimilating them to the more mythic and symbolic forms encoded in folk tales and oral culture. The method of interpretation in *Autobiography* is harder to pin down, and not just because the subjective sense of these middle-class participants remains a more open-ended and elusive affair. It is also because of the way in which the autobiographical and semi-psychoanalytic drama woven around the interviews disarticulates the narrative, and displaces a historical vantage point with uprootedness and a painful, confused doubling-back. Where one expects the governing perspective of the historian – the ‘expert’ of the case – is only a disconsolate subject, who cannot find her beginning or end, and is in despair. What Passerini does with the case here – by including herself in the case – has radical implications for the methodology. The composite nature of the book, which she assembled in a white heat across the summer months of 1987, produces a certain kind of intuitive, dream-like solution, to the problem of form. But from which point in this hall of mirrors is the subject and subjectivity counted as being rendered visible? Only in its occlusions? Was the potential of subjectivity, inaugurated in 1968, simply lost again through historical change? Or is it lost in the telling?

Methodology in a Subjunctive Mode

Here it finally becomes clearer how the psychoanalysis might function – or what might be riding on it. One might presume it is psychoanalysis that can reach into the broken and stuttering narratives of the subject in order to retrieve its history. Isn't this what psychoanalysis classically does? And yet, Passerini's solicitation of psychoanalytic modes of enquiry seems purposefully to disrupt the sense of a specific clinical or interpretive logic. She chooses an analyst who is Jungian, but influenced by Freud and Lacan (2012: 312); her text recalls the impact of Wilhelm Reich on the generation of 1968 – 'We were convinced that orgasm combatted the repression of bourgeois society' (1996[1988]: 43) – and the guiding influence of Milanese psychoanalyst Elvio Fachinelli, important in disseminating Lacanian ideas to Italian students (she attended his groups in the early 1970s). Psychoanalysis is something that more loosely imbues the text, and the history, and indicates zones into which an account of subjectivity (personal or historical) might be pursued. But it is *not* that which wraps the individual subject up as an object for the historian. Instead, it is that which helps Passerini to suspend knowledge of the subject (recalling Forrester's critique of Foucault, again). One factor informing this decision *not* to arrive at a clear view of the 'subject' is that it is simply too early to see what this subjectivity is, or became, or is still in the process of becoming. As in fact the Fraser book also suggests in its closing statements: 'The historical significance of past events can be fully appreciated only when their contribution to shaping the future becomes clear. The present – only two decades on from 1968 – is not yet that future' (1988: 353). Passerini's book in many ways situates itself within this lapse, where knowledge of 1968 is strangely suspended, while making clear the pathos of occupying this hiatus in historical judgement, and in self-knowledge.

In the Fraser book, that suspension of judgment is really a qualification introduced into the books concluding remarks, but it provides the very terrain of *Autobiography* right from the start. It is also something very much engineered precisely through the post-Freudian evocation of subjectivity as something inherently conditioned by *Nachträglichkeit*, by ambivalence, by forms of forgetting and by that which remains unconscious. Passerini recalls of her own professional ‘turn’ in the late 1970s: ‘Having decided to bring subjectivity into history, I had no doubt that this had to include the unconscious, although it was not clear exactly what this meant’ (2012: 308). One can argue, then, for a different way of approaching the contribution of psychoanalysis to the case. It is not just that the unconscious acts as a cipher for Forrester’s quarry, the enigmatic particularity of the individual – ‘the specific and unique facts that make that person’s life their life’; ‘the deafening silence that constitutes that life’s secret truths’ (1996: 10). The unconscious can also be ‘writ large’ into the fabric of interdisciplinary enquiry, thus allowing methodology, and the framework of enquiry per se, to be pitched as incomplete and provisional, the objects and their linkages still awaiting discovery.

Something like this notion of psychoanalysis as a disrupter of ‘the case’ was already broached in the quotation from De Certeau quoted earlier: ‘working from within, it dismantles... the historical and social figure that is the standard unit of the system’ (1986: 15). ‘It remains to be seen’, he adds here, ‘what new and different form (which will no longer have to be “biographical”) this machinery heralds, or is preparing for us’ (ibid.: 15). One picks up the sense from *Autobiography* as well that its object is so unprecedented that Passerini demands an entirely new disciplinary vantage point, at present unknown, adequate to the forms of experiencing and relating which belong to

subjectivity; and adequate to 1968: ‘individuals are moulded who did not exist before’ (1996[1988]: 149). At a beautiful moment which introduces the final historical chapter on ‘Paths of Individuation’, Passerini remarks: ‘Now it is necessary to develop, in the form of voluntary assent something that had been – despite the continuities and the preparations – a spontaneous rupture, the insurgency of a subjectivity still lacking subjects’ (ibid.: 125). This sentence – with its complex shifting tense – ostensibly refers to the moment at which 1968 was forced to translate its explosive utopian potential, its suspension of social life, back into historical time and conventional organisational forms. The ‘now’ refers to that moment *then*. But her invocation of the present tense here – her identification with it, even – also evokes the suspended form of *Autobiography* itself, which turns to the psychoanalyst precisely in order to throw the case open. The case of an insurgent subjectivity still awaiting its subject.

Looking back on *Autobiography* from the vantage of 2012, Passerini related her methods to the 1968 slogan ‘*imagination au pouvoir*’, meaning: ‘challenging power in a radical way by inventing new forms of communication and intersubjectivity, which allowed new relationships between subjects, and within the subject itself, to be imagined and put into practice’ (2012: 315). As Passerini went on to articulate her goals in further projects across the 1990s and 2000s – particularly through studies on the nature of European identity and European memory – she found other ways to address this methodological aporia: as a commitment to pluralism, intersectionality, multiplicities of subjects and histories, and a relinquishing of disciplinary mastery. In a book on the idea of Europe, edited by Anthony Pagden, she writes of ‘being aware

of the foundational character of intersubjectivity as a horizon for new identities’ and expresses the hope that ‘these futures will be identities of irony’ (2002: 208).

The very post-Kantian lesson Passerini offers – as do many of the other examples of hybrid and transformational psychoanalytic autobiographies I’ve cited – might be that in giving a historical account of subjective life it’s not enough to tell the history of cases, because these, confined within their professional limits, are always outstripped by the changing versions of ‘being a subject’ they are trying to map. What the case might provide, from this more radical perspective, is rather a platform from which to pose uncontainable questions and to present uncontainable objects. The extensive object, in Passerini’s case, is whatever is mediated by her researches, her recollections, and her own analysis – all of which in turn arise out of the broader histories to which individuals remain structurally, if elusively, tied.

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