

Obituary

ALAIN DE MIJOLLA (1933-2019)

Alain de Mijolla was a neuro-psychiatrist and a full member of the *Société Psychanalytique de Paris* who made his mark on psychoanalysis by what he contributed to its history.¹ His first book, co-authored with his friend Salem Shentoub, was written on a completely different topic, because it concerned the psychoanalysis of alcoholism, but with his second volume *Les visiteurs du moi* (1981) he already made a name for himself, since he advanced in it a new and powerful notion, notably that of the unconscious identification with family members and especially with the grandparents. His consideration of the importance of this generational leap coincided with a theoretical and clinical examination of the past, and this was the starting point for his interest in the history of psychoanalysis.

Alain de Mijolla's work force and efficiency made him into one of the internationally recognized specialists on the history of psychoanalysis and he himself even lived the history of Freud and his paladins, a little bit as if it had also been his. However, his work was not solitary and he very quickly wished to develop it through collaborations with colleagues and through international exchanges with other researchers. This led him to create the *Association Internationale d'Histoire de la Psychanalyse* (AIHP) on 25 June 1985 in Paris, within the context of a dispersion of the psychoanalytic movement, after the dissolution of the *Ecole freudienne de Paris*, and following the multiplication of psychoanalytic groups. He entrusted the scientific administration of it to his wife and colleague Sophie de Mijolla-Mellor, and the general administration to his colleague and friend Jacques Sédat. The AIHP was officially recognized by the International Psychoanalytic Association in Hamburg, at a congress in

¹ Translated from the French by Dany Nobus.

Germany that took place the same year of its creation. Within the AIHP, people were expected to devote themselves to research on the history of psychoanalysis, free from psychoanalytic institutions and from any reference to a privileged author. This is how Alain de Mijolla facilitated research on Freud and beyond, on other analysts and the various psychoanalytic institutions. The AIHP organized numerous conferences in France and elsewhere, and in 2001 it received the Sigourney Prize in recognition of its activities and their importance for psychoanalysis. International conferences were organized every two years, in Paris, London, Brussels, Barcelona, Berlin and Vienna, on a wide variety of themes that were always treated from the angle of history: religion, lay analysis, hypnosis, the role of women in psychoanalysis, etc.

At the same time, the *Journal de l'AIHP* and the *Revue internationale d'Histoire de la Psychanalyse* were created, the latter published by the Presses Universitaires de France. The *Revue internationale* appeared once a year, in a large issue of more than 500 pages, and dealt with various themes: psychoanalysts around the world during the Second World War, Freud and his correspondents, the question of analysis by non-physicians, the relations between psychoanalysis and anthropology, the socio-political engagement of psychoanalysts, etc. The Presses Universitaires de France also published a series of books on the history of psychoanalysis, including a volume on the Freud-Klein Controversies, works by Peter Gay, Henri and Madeleine Vermorel's work on Romain Rolland and Freud, and many others.

This led Alain de Mijolla to work on an *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, for which he called upon many scholars from around the world, and which was published in French in 2002, at over 2,000 pages. The project was very much a shared enterprise. Alain de Mijolla managed the historical entries, Roger Perron handled those stemming from psychology, Bernard Golse was responsible for the field of childhood, and Sophie de Mijolla-Mellor for metapsychology and philosophy. Given his adherence to the Lacanian field, Jacques

Sédat was given oversight of the Lacanian entries and, among other things, Sédat also wrote the article on Lacan for it. Each editor was responsible for finding specialists to write the articles whose inclusion had been jointly agreed and if no one was capable of doing so, the editors would have to write the articles themselves. It was an extremely exciting adventure, resulting in two large volumes which were translated into many languages.

The third and final stage of Alain de Mijolla's work brought him back to the history of psychoanalysis as such, with two important works, both published by Presses Universitaires de France. The methodology he chose for these volumes was strictly chronological, in order to avoid holistic explanations. He wanted to turn the books into a kind of novel, or indeed a diary of psychoanalysis as it was written irrespective of the project, or rather the projects of the actors involved. The first book *Freud et la France* covers the period from 1885 to 1945 and the second, *La France et Freud*, takes the reader from 1946 to 1964, in two volumes. With a great many files at his disposal and further assisted by library research, Alain de Mijolla delivered a genuine *summa* which, even if it is evidently not exhaustive, is by far the richest account published in France to this date. A psychoanalysis that would be the repository? of a single truth does not exist, but there are different psychoanalysts who have each brought the fruit of their practice and who have broadened the field.

However, with some exceptions, it was difficult for us to establish scientific links with professional historians as the question was raised: Does the history of psychoanalysis qualify as History? And who should be its author? The historian, the psychoanalyst? What importance does it have for psychoanalysis as a practice? We need to distinguish three completely different fields here. First, there is the study of the life of those psychoanalysts who have left a significant body of work, as well as that of their reciprocal relations – filiations, exclusions, or even anathemas – and also the study of their insertion in the general history of their time, what they could have undergone or experienced of it, and the influences this great History has had on

what they themselves were carriers of and what they were able to transmit. Second, there is the study of the ‘psychoanalytic movement’, which covers the way in which psychoanalysts have gathered in societies, in groups, or even in hordes, often starting to insult one other and each claiming for himself to be the sole custodian of psychoanalytic authenticity, the sole custodian of the fragment of the True Cross. Finally, there is the specific place that should be accorded to the study of notions and concepts in psychoanalysis, a field which draws more on the history of science, insofar as psychoanalysis might be considered as one.

Alain de Mijolla’s works question the status of a fact, of narration and of documents in a ‘psychoanalytic writing’ of the history of psychoanalysis. The ‘historical’ explanation implies not only the reference to the past, but also the presence of a narration, of a history that relates to a past and which can be that of a singular individual or of a group. It is opposed to logical or symbolic explanations which, for their part, are a-temporal. The historian with whom the psychoanalyst might feel the most spontaneous affinity concerning the notion of ‘fact’ is the one who adopts the most empirical position. Consider Paul Veyne, for instance, for whom history is an account of singular events, which are nonetheless never grasped directly and entirely, but always incompletely, through the lateral testimony of traces of documents and witness statements. In the history of psychoanalysis, the most valuable documents in this respect are the correspondences, but also the reports of the general meetings of psychoanalytic societies and, more recently, the interviews that have been conducted, alongside supporting images, with psychoanalysts who are being asked to share their recollections.

Awareness of the historical importance of these documents is quite recent and involves not only a work of salvaging the scattered documents, but also of preserving these documents, which are necessarily destined to become part of the past and therefore potentially ‘historical’. This is where a certain disorientation may strike, because life itself implies that the past gives way to the present and that we do not encumber ourselves in an obsessive fashion. Also, prosaic

considerations pertaining to available space (even if the virtual space obviously offers a completely different way of appreciating this) will ultimately prevail when it comes to deciding what to keep and what to get rid of. For in fact none of all these materials is potentially historical and it is only in the aftermath, when a historian decides to use them in order to construct a historical narrative, that these documents will acquire this quality.

It is all about a story, because history is above all narration, as psychoanalysts also experience when they are required to report on a clinical case. In this regard, the historian and the psychoanalyst are likely to get along well when they maintain that it is difference and not repetition that constitutes the principal object of their interest, because it is the basis of the law. This proposition might seem paradoxical for the psychoanalyst, yet this difference is not constituted according to an event in itself, but rather vis-à-vis a whole with which it contrasts, therefore drawing attention to itself. However, for the historian, temporality alone ensures this effect of contrast and makes it possible to transcend the contents of the facts, without therefore resorting to generalizations. Conversely, for the psychoanalyst temporality does not really come into play and, without moving to generalizations, it is the old (even archaic) trace that is repeated in the current one that generates an interpretable meaningful effect. Were psychoanalysts to merely listen to the analysand's words as trivial occurrences [*faits divers*], or even attempt to constitute a 'body of facts' according to a certain period, they would be unable to interpret. Without therefore referring to a 'body of laws', as the physicist does, or seeking rigor in agreement with the theory, psychoanalysts must raise the singular to a level where it becomes explanatory for another singular.

As such, the clinical experience that is being reported in the writing of a case is never a simple narration. It is intended to be an illustration, or even a demonstration, not of a law but of a causal whole about events that are forever beyond reach, but which the subject may nevertheless take hold of because they give meaning to a current history which would otherwise

be devoid of it. In addition, whereas psychoanalysts would never relinquish their theoretical-clinical practice for this exercise, Veyne's statement on History, according to which it would be 'pure curiosity for the specific', still retains its interest, much like the practice of the historian is not limited to the individual or the singular. Even if it is not formulated in terms of a law, it is still the discovery of a kind of generality in the individual events that the historian focuses on. The passage from individual singularity to specificity consists of understanding, which makes the singular intelligible by giving it a general scope. The specific would be defined, then, as the singular mode of appearance of the general, but both the historian and the psychoanalyst would only have the singular as a direct object, even if they formulate it by means of categories that can and must be expressed in general terms. There is only objectivity in what exists without thought and thus without interpretation. And, unlike the stones, facts do not speak for themselves, but always depend on the subjectivity of a narrator who 'makes them speak' and therefore makes them intelligible and transmissible.

This narration, whether historical or specific to the narratives of clinical cases, releases, from a diffused reality, an exemplary experience which it models and constructs by retaining only the elements that are relevant in view of a meaning, and which it then strives to make transmissible and possibly usable as a reference point for the intelligibility of other situations or other cases. However, clinical narration is not to be confused with the work of analysis, and a meaning breaks with what makes it specific. The linear time of the narration, irrespective of the ruptures that the stylistic effects may bring to it, necessarily falls short of the proper temporality of the analysis as such, that is to say of the insight that is elicited by an interpretation, because the latter implies a complete temporal dimension, that of the 'mixed time' of the transference, which brings a past that has been repressed or foreclosed from memory back to life in the present. The past inhabits the present there, not as a memory or a trace, but as a web that might support the expression of affects in forms that take on the

appearance of destinies. While historians can flatter themselves by bringing the past back to life, there is never any possible confusion with the present. At most, comparisons may lead to the conclusion that nothing has changed over the centuries. However, despite this apparent proximity, the past that is connected to the present by causal relationships never crosses the limits that are imposed upon it by successivity. This successivity remains immutable and establishes the historicity of the event, precisely because it occurred at a time that will never be repeated. Hence, the temporality proper to psychoanalysis does not affect the historical method when this method takes psychoanalysis itself as its object.

Alain de Mijolla possessed a great freedom of expression. He always accepted that there could be points of view, but never the truth about an author. As a result, psychoanalysis as a discipline cannot exist under the auspices of just one. Psychoanalysis exists and so do psychoanalysts, who each bring their own theorization or conception of psychoanalytic practice.

Sophie de Mijolla-Mellor and Jacques Sédat