

Howard Stein Festschrift Listening with Howard

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February 22, 2022. Russia invades Ukraine. I am putting the finishing touches on my Howard Stein tribute. Serendipitous or synchronistic, both things arrive together, a conjunction of events changing my dialogue with the world. Process demands a rewrite, but how to intertwine both strands? Standing in this place and time (after a life lived immersed in psychohistory), I owe a debt to many colleagues, especially my dear friend, Howard Stein.

In the traditional *Festschrift*, authors customarily use the honoree's scholarly contributions as inspiration to write an original essay. Using Howard's work as a touchstone, I want to do the same, showing how he has influenced my work on the origins of World War II and my thinking on the war in Ukraine.

I have heard Howard present at many scholarly conferences and seen his gentle touch as a Group Process Analyst at regular meetings of the International Psychohistorical Association (IPA). I have also read just about everything he has written, from his many books to articles in places such as *Mind and Human Interaction*, to his recent analyses of contemporary politics in *The Journal of Psychohistory*, to his psychohistorical poetry. He has called me a scholar's scholar. I return the compliment.

We met first in 1978, at the first IPA convention. We discovered a mutual interest in the relationship between local group fantasies and national group fantasies. We wondered how micro-fantasies reinforced macro-fantasies, and vice versa. We set out to do a panel on the subject. I don't remember my topic, but I do remember Howard's. He explored the pattern of requests sent by an audience of classical music enthusiasts to a local Oklahoma radio station. He hypothesized that the thematic patterns he uncovered in the music told something of the emotions shaping unconscious impulses on the national level, as well as how nationwide fantasies helped shape the impulses behind those local requests.

His work was creative. It was sensitive. I was awed. Our research soon took us down different paths. Years passed. An echo of our now abandoned earlier collaboration showed up in the Preface to his collection of essays, *Beneath the Crust of Culture*, where he pointed out how “the local can help illumine universal processes” (Stein, 2004, p. xii). I wonder today what our professional careers might look like had we continued to explore mutual micro-macro reinforcements.

But what to highlight from the vast range of Howard's fertile mind? His work, so far-reaching and profound, makes it difficult to decide. One strand is the theme of listening, not surprising for someone who identifies himself as a psychoanalytic anthropologist. Howard's whole career has blended the approach of the anthropologist with the tools of the psychoanalyst. In his book, *Listening Deeply* (1994/2017), as well as in his other writings, Howard tells us why it is important to listen, shows us how to listen, and shares what he has learned from listening. As an organizational consultant who helps groups become more efficient, Howard's hands-on experiences offer us how-to examples. Case studies illustrate his techniques. I hear implicit in Howard's writing the mandate to abandon orthodoxies and simply listen to what is being said; improvising is necessary if we are ever to get at what our sources are really telling us.

The analytic part of my historian's mind separates listening into three categories: listening to others; listening to colleagues; and listening to oneself. Listening to colleagues is not easy. We incline to be critical and find vulnerable places in each other's work so we can disagree. We learn this again in graduate school. Everyone is pushing their own book and theory. Others have emphasized better ways, offering possibilities of fruitful cross-fertilization. A careful reading of Paul Elovitz' (2021) anthology, *The Many Roads of the Builders of Psychohistory*, shows the value of listening and mentoring. In Peter Loewenberg's (1985) article, “The Creation of a Scientific Community: The Burghölzli, 1902-1914” in *Fantasy and Reality in History*, he concretizes how a fortuitous gathering of scholars is crucial to building a vibrant intellectual community.

For historians, listening means listening to documents. Here, Howard's influence on me has been immeasurable. In his early papers, Howard called attention to *folie à deux* in human affairs. I knew the theory, of course, but Howard's reminder came at the right time. My research into the diplomatic origins of the Second

World War was just beginning. I was then four years into sobriety, one day at a time. I was learning about codependency and the role of the enabler in addictive systems. I was ready to hear what Howard had to say.

Alerted to how rationalizations covered projections and systems of hidden collusion, I began to listen to historical narratives differently. When I ran across Neville Chamberlain's comment on the state of European diplomacy in 1931—"We are all locked in a suicidal embrace which will probably drown the lot of us"—his words suddenly made sense. What if other powers were engaged in a *folie à deux*? What if they too unknowingly and unconsciously worked at helping Hitler? I discovered several historians—not just A. J. P. Taylor—who said the same thing. I began to see documents in a fresh way and listen with the Third Ear.

Many diplomatic historians consult only diplomatic documents. I approached them as an anthropologist approaches culture. I cast a wide net, seeking sources of all kinds: diaries, memos, diplomatic documents, speeches, private letters, memoirs, oral histories, newspaper headlines, fiction, journalistic reports, body language, newsreels, poems, films, magazines, iconic photos, fashion, jokes, paintings, poems, architecture, toys, music, radio programs, political cartoons, and the writings of historians. I expected to encounter an occasional organic metaphor. (I was familiar with organic metaphors having first encountered them as an undergraduate in the writings of the 12th century monk, John of Salisbury.) I found them in abundance. Unexpectedly, I found much more.

The documents of the 1930s revealed an unconscious and partly conscious fantasy of the European powers as partners in a dysfunctional family system writ large. It was European-wide, shared by all social classes, and permeated the media. Politicians and statesmen spoke this way all the time. I realized the fantasy was based on historical reality. Royal families had used courtship, marriage, divorce, and inheritance as diplomatic tools for centuries, a practice still alive in the late 19th century.

When World War I ended, monarchy collapsed throughout the continent. The real family of nations became a memory, though it did not disappear. It went underground, becoming an unconscious fantasy, a habit of mind ready to be acted out on a blank screen onto which people could project the experiences of their own dysfunctional families. Though the proof was massive and overwhelming,

it took me a long time to accept what I was finding. The documents spoke repeatedly of courtship, wooing, marriage, and divorce, of marriages of convenience among the Powers, as if the countries of Europe were real people. Political cartoons depicting the Nazi-Soviet Pact showed Hitler as a groom and Stalin as a bride, sometimes Stalin as a groom with Hitler as a bride.

The political cartoons of David Low often showed the Great Powers in family situations, as children playing with blocks, receiving toys, or being abducted from the family bed. European statesmen, for their own unconscious reasons, divided up dysfunctional family roles and acted them out, with Hitler and Germany the out-of-control raging child. As journalist César Saerchinger (1940) put it: Germany "is the problem child of the European family; and problem children are dangerous when they are out to 'get theirs.'" Germany is a problem child with a loaded pistol in her hand" (p. 99).

Great Britain played a maternal role, in Hitler's terminology, "the British governess." France played the abandoned child: to Prime Minister Herriot and others, France found "herself facing Germany alone." So too the Belgians, who orphaned themselves into neutrality. Italy was an enabling younger sibling with Mussolini acting, in Chamberlain's words, "like a child and the child was dreaming of some large new rattles." Czechoslovakia, a "newborn state" birthed into "life" by "the midwives of Versailles," was delegated the designated suicide, becoming Europe's infanticidal sacrifice. So too Poland, called by Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov and others, "the ugly offspring of the Versailles Treaty." Stalin, the "Little Tsar of Mother Russia," played the distant, often absent father.

Through *folie à deux*, I had discovered an unconscious *folie à plusieurs*, not because I said so but because they said so. I subsequently found that post-World War II diplomatic dialogues, except for an occasional reference to a "Velvet Divorce," contained few examples of family fantasies, conscious or unconscious. What had played such a critical role in the 1930s suddenly disappeared. What of the current Ukraine invasion? Can my earlier findings help us understand what is going on today?

I am told young people do not watch television, that they get their news from TikTok. It is seven days into the assault. I have not looked at TikTok. I listen to what I am being told on cable news

and in the newspapers. I listen as Howard might listen, hearing impressions, bits and pieces of undigested raw data, too sparse and too soon to be analyzed. These are suggestive, fragmentary thoughts, which are presented as such to encourage the reader to consider various possibilities.

The Ukrainian ambassador to the U.S. says it is like the German invasion of Soviet Russia, “a replay of 1941.” One Ukrainian volunteer thinks of it as an earlier time, the “Spanish Civil War, 1936.” Civilians take refuge in subways, London in The Blitz. A retired U.S. admiral says: “Put the videos in color into black-and-white and I feel I am looking at images from the 1930s.”

Former U.S. ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul says the invasion “reminds me of September 1, 1939” when war broke out in Europe. Estonia’s ambassador to the U.S. calls it “a 1939 moment.” There are references to a “David vs. Goliath” conflict—an outnumbered group of “little people” (like the Czechs, Greeks, or Poles against the Germans) fighting a mighty force of Russians. Is this collective suicide in the name of heroic defense?

Every day we hear the immigration crisis is the worst since the Second World War. (With Ukrainian vaccinations against COVID at 35%, immigrants, always perceived as disease carriers, turn fantasy into reality.)

Nazis targeted homosexuals as well as Jews; the head of the Russian Orthodox Church blames gays for the invasion of Ukraine. Putin plans to place Ukrainian cities under siege. Does this recreate his mother living through the siege of Leningrad?

Ukrainian President Zelenskyy utters the word “appeasement” at the 2022 Munich Security Conference, recalling the Munich Agreement of 1938. There are war crimes, calling to mind Nuremberg and the war crimes trials in post-war Japan. There is a discussion of Governments in Exile, calling to mind the Norwegian, Dutch, French, and Polish Governments in Exile during the Second World War. There is talk of “The greatest land war in Europe since World War II,” talk of “a Russian Blitzkrieg,” talk of putting liberals and resistance fighters in camps like World War II. Putin tells the world, “Nazis run Ukraine.” People ask: Where is our Churchill?

The Nazis targeted for death the people they imagined would be prisoners in their yet-to-be-conquered territories, includ-

ing Churchill, David Low, and Roosevelt. Russia draws up a Death List of Ukrainians. Zelenskyy and his family are on it. Zelenskyy's courage in staying in Kyiv echoes the courage of the King of Denmark: "We are all Jews here." Like Germans after Versailles, we hear Putin feels humiliated. Does Putin's friendship with Xi Jinping reenact the Nazi-Soviet Pact?

There are organic fantasies. In 1938, many talked of the "dismemberment of Czechoslovakia." In 2022 there is talk of "The dismemberment of Ukraine." We hear Putin is intent on "decapitating" Ukrainian leadership. Echoing the 1938 headlines of British papers on the *Anschluss*—they called it "The Rape of Austria"—today's media speaks of "The Rape of Ukraine."

Family fantasies show up. An ITV reporter speculates: "For the Russian-speaking people of Marajapol it must feel like a fratricide." We are reminded the war is between fellow Slavs. People have family in each country. We hear echoes of Stefan Zweig's words in 1940, "Europe...has torn itself apart suicidally in a war of brother against brother." On CNN, Thomas Friedman speaks of Putin wanting to pull Ukraine "back into the bosom of Mother Russia."

Putin is our Hitler, the out-of-control raging child, a container for our projected feelings of craziness. He is "unhinged," "demented," "insane." We feel humiliated. Is Trump Putin's enabler? Is Biden our new Chamberlain?

Khrushchev's daughter, a Professor of History at The New School, says that Russia, ironically the defender of Europe in the Second World War, is now in danger of starting the Third World War in Europe. As in 1939-1940, and again in 1944, Hitler's generals plotted against him. There is speculation today that Putin's generals, or protests by the Russian people, will bring him down. Hitler felt isolated; the word was "encirclement."

Putin, too, is alone. He has created an encirclement of his own. We remember his Mussolini-envy, seeking to show his manly chest at every photo-op. We remember him as a K.G.B. agent, stationed in East Germany when the Berlin Wall came down. A wild rumor has it Putin's goal is to invade Germany to restore the East German state, another way in which he and Europe can experience the Second World War—and its aftermath—by reliving them a second time around.

This is what the documents tell me. Given the very few references to family dynamics, dysfunctional or otherwise, there is a massive mountain of evidence referencing World War II, Europe's second Great Trauma of the 20th century. There can be many reasons for these associations. Preliminary reports suggest today's events are not driven by fantasies of family dysfunction but by fantasies to reenact the Second World War.

I see images of destruction. Refugees flee. Infanticidal fantasies bubble up. Babies, toddlers, newborns in the arms of their mothers lie dead on the streets and in hospitals. Russian forces attack a nuclear power plant suicidally endangering Ukraine, Russia, Europe, the world. For one who always favors the underdog, I side with Ukraine. Though I know in a nuclear world we must be restrained, anger stirs within me. I want to give those bastards what they deserve. "No-Fly Zones be damned. Let's go and kick them in the ass!" I am encountering the third leg of my listening tripod, countertransference.

Part of any psychoanalytic training, of course, is countertransference. As a subject of discussion, it was briefly in fashion among psychohistorians in the early 1980s. If Elovitz' *Many Roads of the Builders of Psychohistory* compendium is any guide, interest in the subject may be making a modest comeback. On pages 95-98 in *Listening Deeply*, Howard Stein provides a Master Class in dealing with countertransference occasioned by events in his own life. In light of the invasion of Ukraine, my decision to rewrite this essay owes much to Howard's work on countertransference.

Thus, I return to the themes we began with: Howard's scholarship and Russia's attack on Ukraine. It is fitting to include in full one of Howard's poems of hope, "Thaw in the Ice."

Imagine—
age old foes
sit down with each other
in a safe space, tell stories
of how the other is a monster
who inflicted grievous wounds
that can never be forgotten—
only to hear the enemy's own story
of vulnerability, of suffering, and of fear.

Each begins to listen more
by having been listened to deeply

by listeners who arranged the meeting.
No miracle, but minute breakthroughs
of compassion and concern,
a tiny thaw in the ice,
a small breach in the wall—

Could the enemy be more human than a monster?
Might tomorrow not be condemned
to be the same as yesterday and today? (Beisel, 2015, p. 62)

There are real Good Guys and Bad Guys in history. Not everything is a *folie à deux*. Sometimes, no matter what we do, the other guy can't see us as anything but an Enemy. So, I maintain my skepticism, as does Howard, even at his compassionate best. Conflicts continue and listening will fail sometimes, perhaps most of the time. Still, because it works often enough, it needs to be tried all of the time.

I turn now to my next project. Documents are my companion; motives reside in them. I feel on the edge of knowing, ready to listen, anticipating the new adventure. I imagine Howard here with me. We wait for the new dialogues to begin, listening for what the documents have to tell us about what lives within them.

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