



University of Essex

Creative Approaches to Trauma

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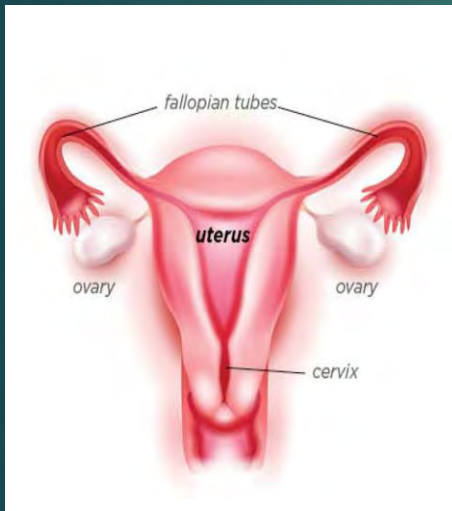
Hope and creativity....

- ▶ 'Any crisis also contains the seed of a turning point for the better, or of course the worse.'
Monica Lanyado (2018 p.148)
- ▶ *'Hope locates itself in the premise that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is the room to act' (Solnit, p. xvii).*
- ▶ *The creativity begins within....?*

Part 1

A Brief History of Trauma

Hysteria

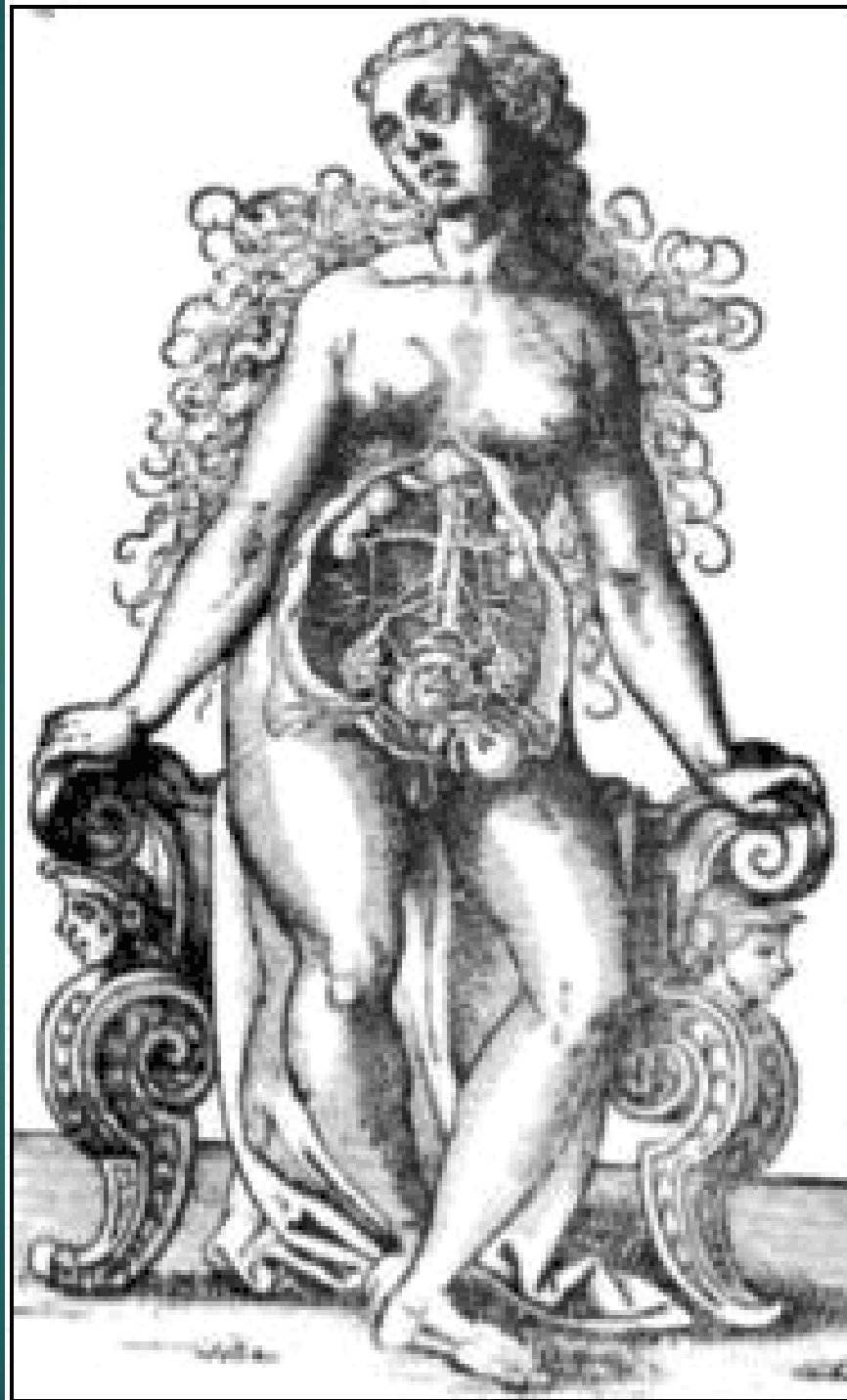


The word "hysteria" originates from the Greek word for uterus: *hysterika*.

It was related to a feeling of suffocation, breathing problems, dizziness, and seizures in women.

The Sanskrit root
of Hysteria
means...

‘placed behind’




The Hippocratic Corpus - late fifth- early fourth centuries BC

Hippocrates first
describes
hysteria as a
physical illness

“The womb is
the origin of all
disease”

Treated with
scents applied
to the sexual
organs



The wandering
womb was
seen as a kind
of animal
within...

Galen 2nd Century



- ▶ Now 'hysteria' is applied to widowed women who had been pregnant, desired intercourse but were deprived of satisfying this desire
- ▶ Retention of the 'female seed' was seen as the cause

The suffocation of the mother

16th Century

Edward Jorden makes
The first English study.

He attempts to show
Hysterics suffered from
a natural illness and are
not the victims of witch-
craft.

A BRIEF DIS-
COVRSE OF A DIS-
EASE CALLED THE
Suffocation of the
Mother.

Written vpon occasion which
hath beene of late taken thereby, to suspect pos-
session of an euill spirit, or some such like
supernaturall power.

*Wherin is declared that diuers strange
actions and passions of the body of man, which in
the common opinion, are imputed to the Diuell,
haue their true naturall causes, and do
accompanie this disease.*

By EDVVARD IORDEN
Doctor in Physicke.



LONDON.

Printed by Iohn Winder, dwelling at the Signe of
the Crosse Keyes at Powles Wharfe. 1603.

Trial of Elisabeth Jackson 1602

- ▶ He defended an old women, Elisabeth Jackson, who was accused of witchcraft.
- ▶ Jackson had verbally tormented and cursed the 14 yr old Mary Glover on several occasions, once for nearly an hour while locked in Jackson's house.

After this event, poor Mary began to have fits, was unable to swallow or breathe properly due to a swollen throat - *Globus Hystericus*.

She suffered paralysis of the left hand, then arm, then whole left side.

This was followed by periodic blindness and violent convulsions.



Jorden argued that there was a natural cause to Mary's symptoms – and that Jackson was not a witch.

Jorden even anticipates Freud by almost 300 years, suggesting that physical symptoms can be caused by:

‘perturbations of the minde’.

He refers to ‘infinite examples’ of people who ...

‘...have dyed upon joye,
griefe, love, feare, shame’

(p. 23r).



Early concept of the unconscious?

Agitation of the mind can bring us to illness, he writes...

"for seeing we are not maisters of our owne affections, wee are like battered Citties without walles, or shippes tossed in the Sea, exposed to all maner of assaults and daungers, even to the overthrow of our owne bodies."



Symptoms, then, are in reality
nothing but a cry from suffering
organs.

~ Jean-Martin Charcot

AZ QUOTES



Hysteria at Salpetriere

Paris 1870s

Charcot used demonstrations to show that hysteria wasn't related to the uterus



The cause was: brain damage, traumatic in nature



He realised that it wasn't organic - in neuology organic disorders require stable symptoms



The Queen of Hysterics

- ▶ The next image shows Charcot's most famous patient Blanche Wittman, the so-called 'queen of hysterics'.
- ▶ Freud kept this image in his rooms in Vienna, and later in London.





psiquifotos.blogspot.com



LES ATTITUDES PASSIONNELLES EN 1878

Biographical details...



Augustine was 15 when she arrived in 1875.

At 13 she had been threatened with a razor, raped by her mother's lover and sexually attacked by other men in the neighbourhood.

(Andrew Scull, *A Disturbing History of Hysteria*)

Is there a relationship between hysterical symptoms and sexual abuse?



The Arch of Hysteria...



Planche III.

ATTAQUE HYSTÉRO-ÉPILEPTIQUE
ABC DE CERCLE



Goude atouye kyméngue.

Salvador Dali, L'Arc hystérique



The Exorcist



A Nightmare on Elmstreet



The Neon Demon



Louise Bourgeois 2019



Part 2

Trains, Freud, War Neurosis & Neurology

Railway Spine

Before Charcot's demonstrations, the UK had seen a number of legal cases dealing with 'railway spine', a disorder said to be caused by train crashes.

Unaware of any illness after the crash the victim is said to have suffered 'shaking or jarring of the spine'



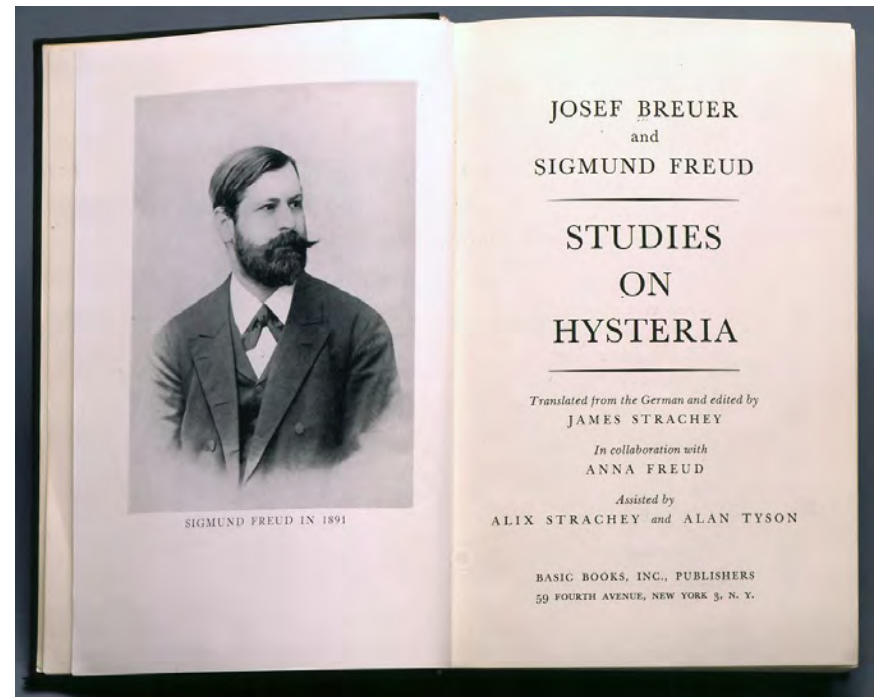
Fact or fake?


Were the back pain, and other symptoms, caused by physical damage to the spine, or were they 'hysterical' or 'psychological' in nature? (Shephard, 2002, p. 34)

If 'psychological' then train companies need not pay out compensation! Complainants were seen merely as 'malingerers'.

Studies in Hysteria 1895

- ▶ Freud and Breuer publish 18 case studies showing how hysteria can be treated – turning hypnosis to therapeutic ends as a part of a treatment (rather than medical demonstration).



- 
- ▶ They argued that there is no brain damage
 - ▶ **The wound suffered is ‘psychological’ – a trauma in the past.**
 - ▶ If this was the case then men as well as women could suffer from hysteria!

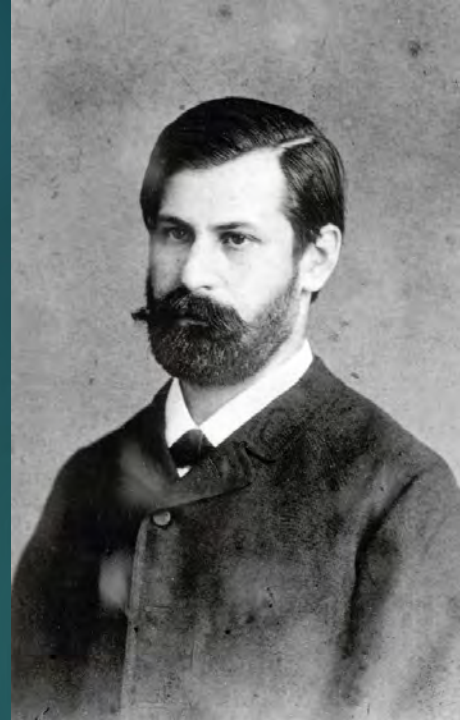
In *Studies* Freud notes something strange

‘I have not always been a psychotherapist. Like other neuropathologists, I was trained to employ local diagnosis and electro-prognosis, and it still strikes me myself as strange that the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science.’ (160-1)

Freud noticed....

**‘...intimate connection
between the story of the patient’s
suffering and the symptoms of his
illness’**

Consider the clinical leap forward
here and the distinction with
psychiatry.





Freud and Breuer note that:

‘In the case of common hysteria it not infrequently happens that **instead of a single major trauma, we found a number of partial traumas** forming a group of provoking causes’ (p 6).

Memory of the event...

It was the psychological trauma – or the *memory of the trauma* – which were causing the patient's symptoms.



These traumata remained in the mind in a 'strangulated state', affecting the patient's state of mind even though he/she was not aware of them.

Memorably they state that:

**‘Hysterics suffer mainly
from reminiscences’**

Freud's early case: Katharina

- ▶ While on holiday in 1893 an innkeeper's daughter (aged 18yrs) asked Freud, since he was a doctor, about her shortness of breath and the sight of an awful face which looked at her in a dreadful way.
- ▶ Katharina remembered that her symptoms had come on 2 yrs earlier (aged 16) when she had witnessed sexual intercourse between her uncle and her cousin Franziska.
- ▶ This memory reminded her that her uncle had also made sexual advances to her several times when she was 14yrs. Freud noted that she was relieved because the hysteria has now been 'abreacted'. Freud writes:

'The anxiety from which Katharina suffered in her attacks was a hysterical one; one that is a reproduction of the anxiety which had appeared in connection with a each of the sexual traumas'.

- ▶ *In a footnote (1924) Freud notes that in fact the 'man' relevant in this case was not the young girl's 'uncle' but rather her father.*

Internal Conflict

One of the defining features of this and his other cases in *Studies In Hysteria* is an *internal conflict*.

The patient knows something about themselves which at the same time they cannot bear to know.

Conversion



This incompatible idea is unconsciously censored and kept out of awareness

But if the undischarged emotion associated with this is too powerful then the psychical energy can be converted into a physical symptom


Hysterical blindness

Hitler was removed from the WW1 trenches in 1918 because he became suddenly blind after a mustard gas attack.





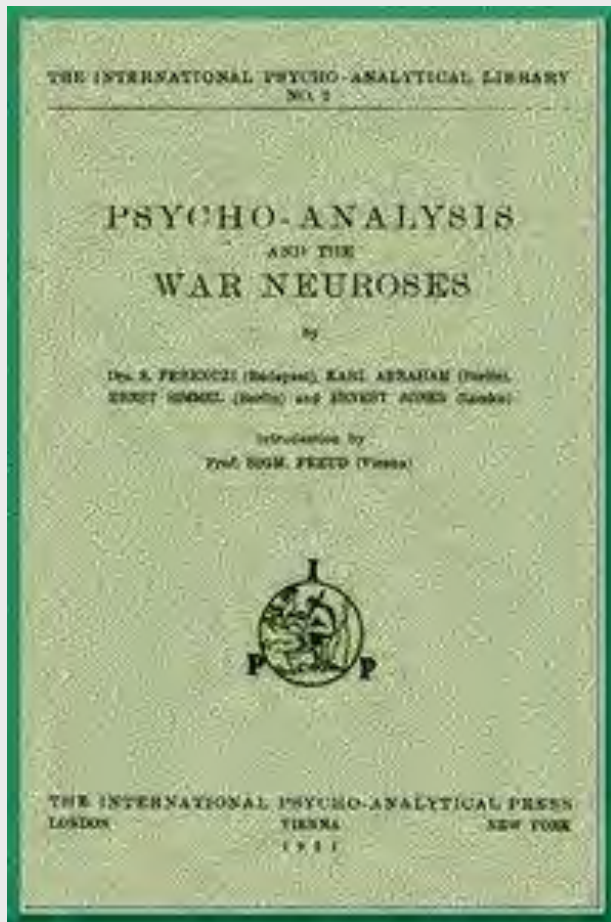
Fig 1. Soldier Adolf Hitler (arrow) in 1916.



Psychiatrists who saw him concluded that his was hysterical blindness, not an organic injury from mustard gas – in other words, he could see.

(Turnbull 2011, 83-4)

The First World War



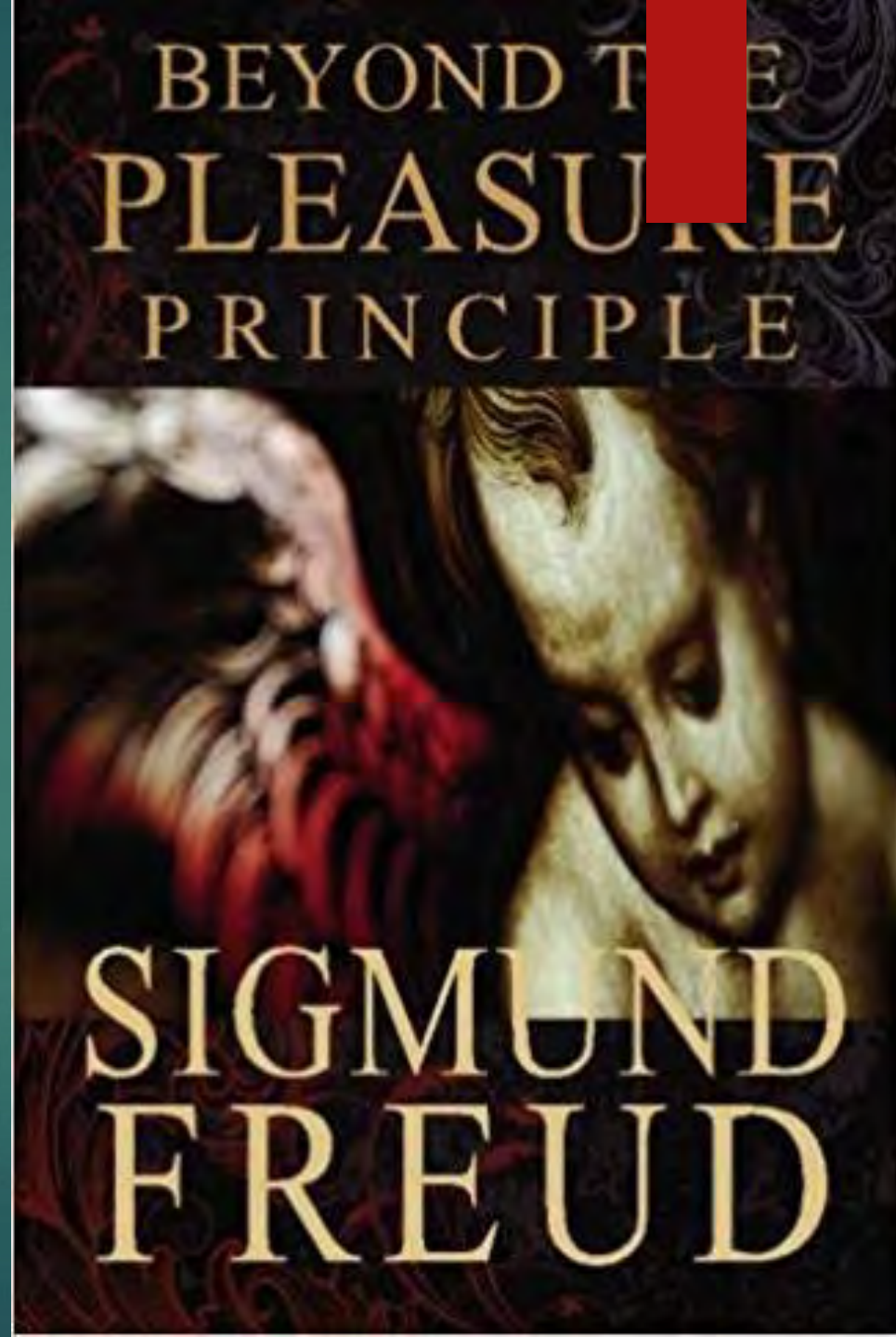
‘Freud also recognised from the outset that the war neuroses were functional rather than organic, psychological rather than physiological’ (Hunt, 2010, p.23)


Freud defended so called ‘malingerers’ in this 1921 text opposite.

The Berlin Polyclinic was founded in 1920 . Over 8 ½ years there 1,600 referrals, and 640 people treated.

‘Repetition compulsion’

In 1921s Freud suggests that traumatic experiences are repeated in order to master them retrospectively, or as Freud suggests ‘retroactively’.





Psychoanalysis: The last Resort...

More recently specialists are beginning to fall back upon Freud's ideas about trauma when other explanations fail.

Professor Turnbull PTSD specialist



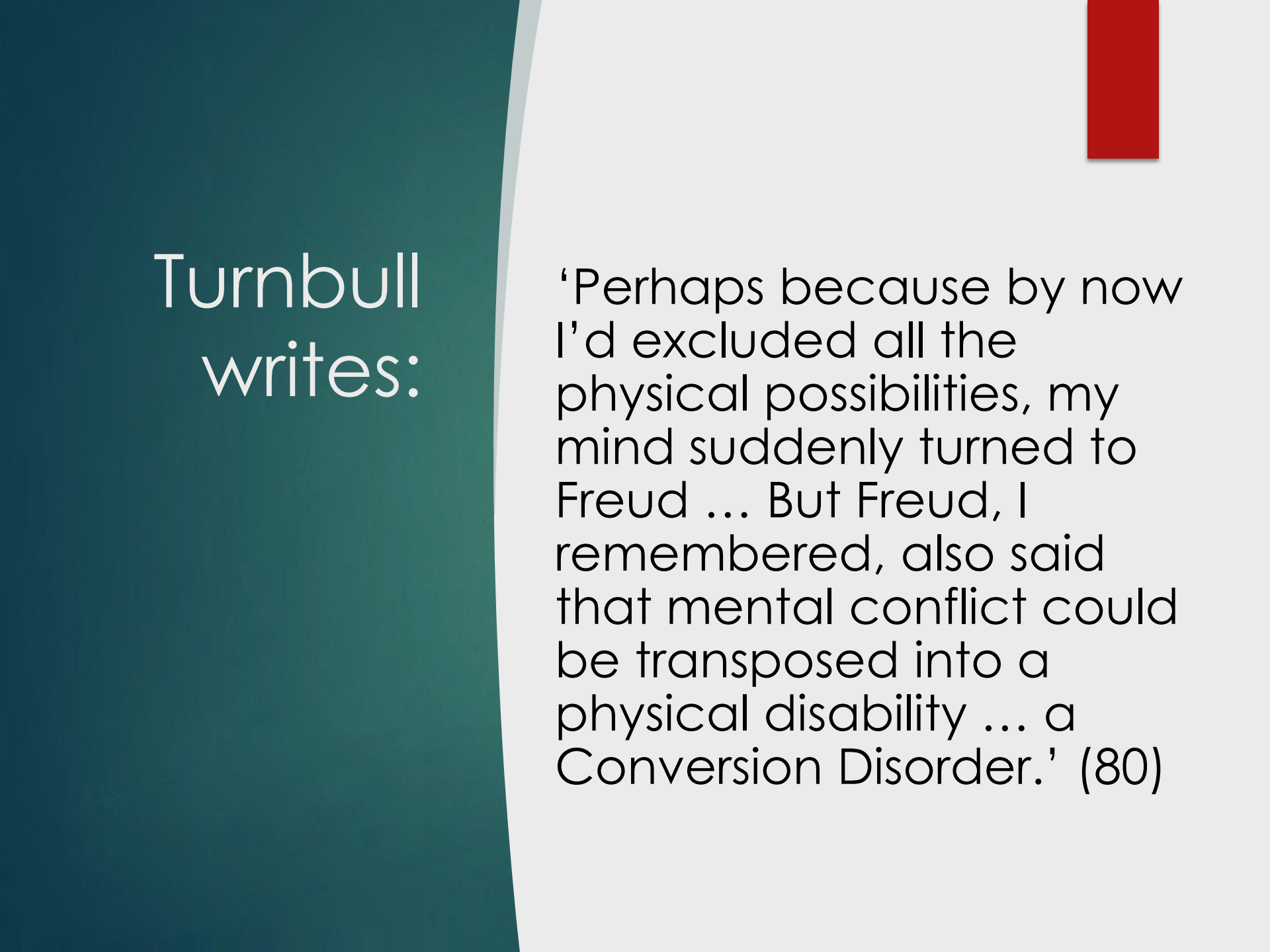
Paralysis patient

In the late 1970s Professor Turnbull was faced with a client admitted to hospital because she couldn't move her legs.

Spinal cord x-rays came back negative.

Since the client seemed not to care about her paralysis the nursing staff considered her a 'malingerer'.

She showed no pain response when Turnbull made a lumbar puncture.



Turnbull
writes:

‘Perhaps because by now I’d excluded all the physical possibilities, my mind suddenly turned to Freud ... But Freud, I remembered, also said that mental conflict could be transposed into a physical disability ... a Conversion Disorder.’ (80)



Dr Suzanne
O'Sullivan

*It's All In
Your Head*

Sadness...

Currently working at The Royal London Hospital and the National Hospital for Neurology her book relies upon Breuer and Freud to account for her patient's experiences...

Considering the Greek hysteria she writes..


‘But it is not an animal or an organ that wanders, it is sadness. And it is looking for a way out’ (177)

O'Sullivan writes:

‘...for all the shortcomings in the concepts proposed by Freud and Breuer in *Studies*, the twenty-first century has brought no great advances to a better understanding of the mechanisms for this disorder.’ (191)

O'Sullivan's example: Mary

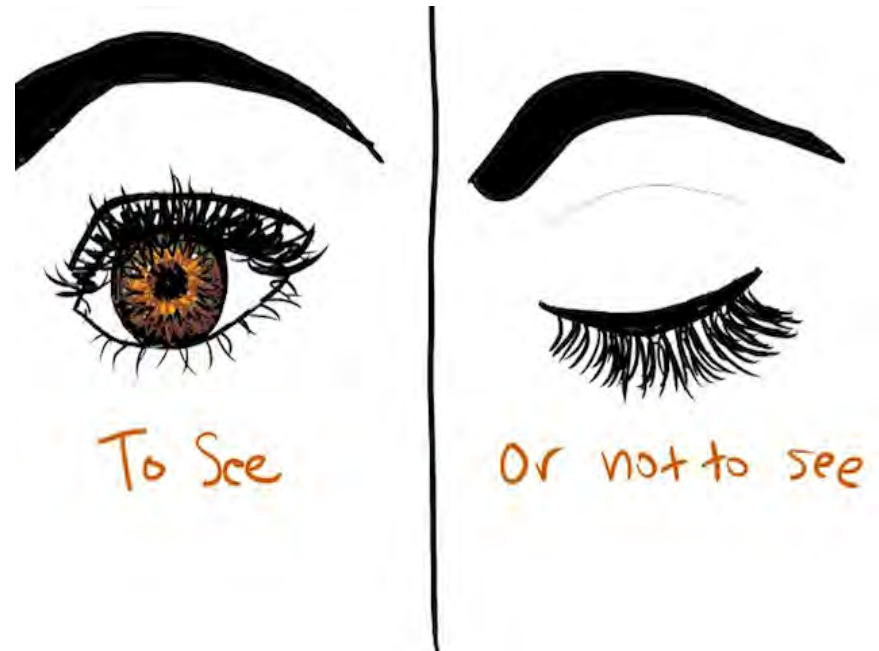
- ▶ A woman feels an overwhelming compulsion to close her eyes, until eventually she cannot open them at all.
- ▶ After numerous tests, nothing physically wrong was found with this patient, so what caused her symptoms?

- 
- ▶ Her husband was on remand for child abuse, but she still refused to think this might be an important factor in her illness.
 - ▶ Treated with muscle relaxant drugs, she soon recovered.
 - ▶ However, a month later, Mary is readmitted after being found wandering in the street in a night gown suffering from amnesia.
 - ▶ Brain scans and an EEG were normal.

Mary's husband had recently been released from prison.

O'Sullivan was left wondering what this patient...

'...could not bear to look upon" or "tolerate to remember.





Nicholson, T et al (2016) Life events and escape in Conversion Disorder *Psychological Medicine*.

Tim Nicholson found that patients with conversion disorder had indeed experienced a greater number of stressful life events than other people, and a dramatic increase in these events near to the time when their symptoms began.

Part 3

Trauma, Play and Creativity

Trauma: the disruption of continuity

- ▶ **The development of healthy and integrated individuals depends upon the experience of continuity, a sense of an ongoing and reliable relationship with the world and with others.**

Community, Culture and Change 18

Children and Adolescents in Trauma

Creative Therapeutic Approaches

Edited by
Chris Nicholson,
Michael Irwin and
Kedar Nath Dwivedi



- ▶ Human beings depend physically and psychologically on relatively predictable experience.
- ▶ Our bodies are built on continuous rhythmic cycles
- ▶ Night and day, eating and drinking, breathing, activity and rest, and many other homeostatic mechanisms
- ▶ We thrive in this regularity and rhythm from conception, to birth and throughout early childhood

Definition of trauma

‘Trauma’ could be defined as a serious violation of the expected rhythm and continuity of the individual’s life.

Etymology...

The word 'traumatic' comes from the Greek *traumatikos*, meaning: a wound or a piercing.

But *traumatikos* also relates to the Greek *tryein*, meaning:

to wear out or distress.

This combination of the physical, the wound, with the psychological sense of being 'worn out or distressed' is what makes trauma and its treatment a complex issue.



Both elements are seen in the history of trauma.

physical and psychological

Bessel Van de Kolk and Fisler (1994, p.2)

- ▶ 'A critical variable that determines the long-term effects of abuse or neglect appears to be the meaning the victim gives to the event'

If an injury carries abnormal psychological factors,



it is inflicted by a person entrusted with the victim's care
(van der Kolk and Fisler 1994)



or is very sudden,



then the injured party, despite appearing physically well,
may be haunted by the experience long after.

Creativity and Trauma

Trauma splits the psyche, fragments ones internal world, history and narrative self.

Higher order skills like creativity are damaged by traumatic events – especially in children.

David Howe writes...

‘One characteristic of children and adults who have been severely abused, neglected and traumatised is their **inability to deal flexibly and fluidly with situations. They fail to adapt and cope with change, whether in their own feeling states or external relationships....** In effect, the brain lacks complexity. It operates in a relatively rigid, compartmentalised way, lacking integration between many of its social, cognitive and emotional operations.’ P262

Howe, D. (2005) *Child Abuse and Neglect: Attachment, Development and Intervention*

Meares (2005) *The Metaphor of Play*



The Metaphor of Play

*Origin and Breakdown
of Personal Being*

ORIGIN OF THE

RUSSELL MEARES

ILLUSTRATED BY JENNIFER GILES



The Play Space

- ▶ Meares focuses upon a kind of 'inter-play' between mother and baby in his exploration of the quality of the early 'play space' which he equates with the gradual development of self.

Meares refers to Travarthen's 1971 'proto-conversation'

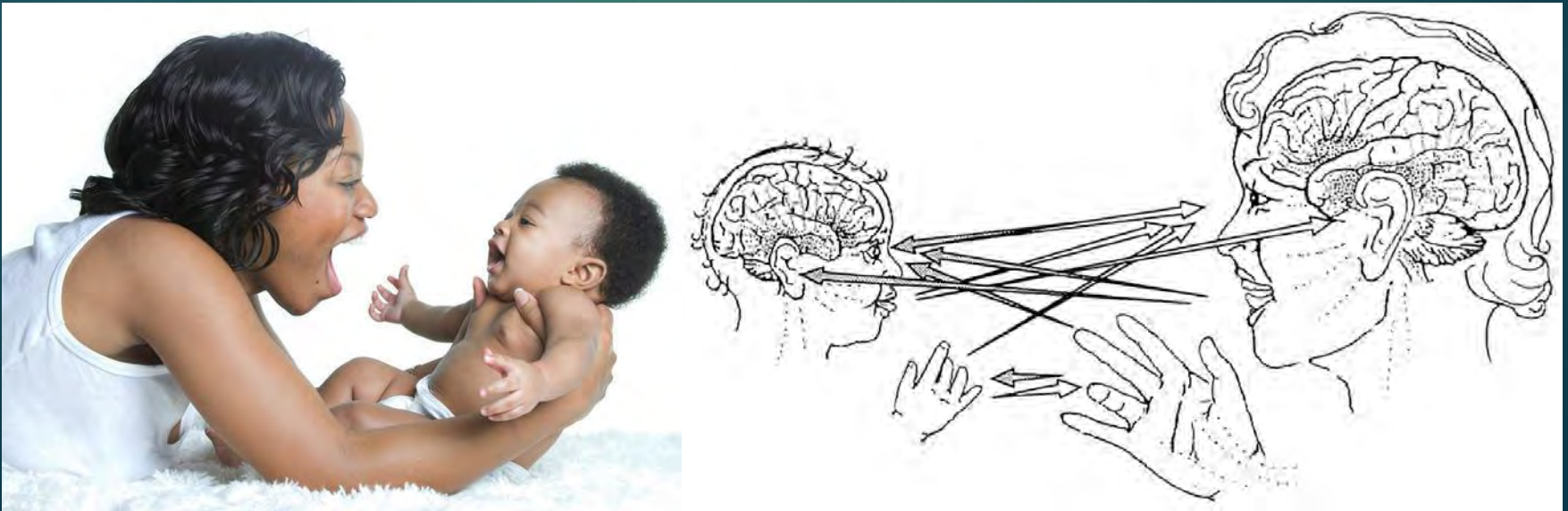
This is a dyadic conversation happening between mother and infant before verbal language has developed.

'The mother's gaze elicits responses from the baby, which the mother, in turn responds to', (24).



‘Primary intersubjectivity’

- ▶ In other words, Mum sort of matches her expression to the baby's own.
- ▶ It is like a dance or a performance created *between* both parties involved.



‘Affects are the coinage of the proto-conversation’

What he means is that early communication is not so much about modelling cognition or reason, but rather, it is a deeply emotional process geared toward social learning, becoming attuned to others, and is based on the exchange and sharing of feelings.

Missattunement

Poor mother -
infant
attumntment
damages the
development of
the play-space
and thus
constricts the
sense of self.



Meares writes:

‘Where parental failure
of attunement
becomes chronic, the
play space is never
adequately or securely
established’ (40)

Stimulus entrapment



- ▶ Over impingement on the baby's play space...
- ▶ ...can lead to a hyper-vigilant and discontinuous state of attention we frequently see in 'looked after' children or in ADHD and Borderline Personality Disorder.

Anthony Storr

The Dynamics of Creation 1972

‘One of the earliest signs of disturbance in children is an inability to mix and play with contemporaries’
p.170

So play and a capacity to socialise are inextricably connected processes.



Trauma as a break in Continuity

‘The first key then, to the treatment of traumatised children who live in residential care has to do with the replacement of continuity, the replacement and sustaining of the safe and containing rhythm of natural life, which must also include the rhythm of reciprocal relationships with caring adults’ (page 53).

Four relational approaches that don't draw upon psychiatry, diagnosis or medication...!

- ▶ Colwyn Trevarthen's 'companion in meaning making'
- ▶ Efraim Bleiberg's 'reflective function'
- ▶ Elizabeth Mein's 'mind-mindnesses'
- ▶ Joel Kanter's 'transitional participant'
- ▶ Clare Winnicott's work

Benefits of creative approaches

Story

- ▶ Stories are forms of transition and change
- ▶ 'Story metaphors can be used as powerful instruments for inspiring change'

Transformative Tales: How Stories Can Change People by Rob Parkinson (p.18)

- ▶ The encounters in stories and fairy-tales represent and pre-figure ways of coping with the world
- ▶ They acknowledge an imperfect world

Benefits of creative approaches

Art & Play

- ▶ Advantages over pure psychotherapy
- ▶ Non-directive – free association to free play
- ▶ Allow children to create their own metaphors and not have these imposed upon them
- ▶ Externalise the inner world
- ▶ Symbolise the dynamics within and between people in the child's world – their inner world!

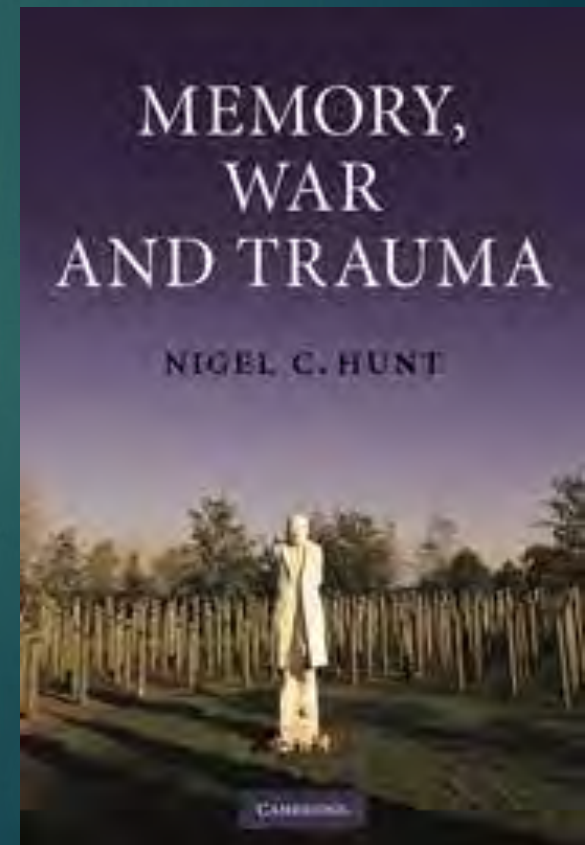
‘That which does not kill us can only make us stronger’.



Nietzsche

‘The traumatic event makes a person re-evaluate his or her life; that person tends to reflect on the traumatic event – how they and others behaved, thought and felt, and the implications of these. Through this, fundamental change related to the self can occur’ (p. 83)

(Hunt, 2010)



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- ▶ **<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2021/10/trauma-books-wont-save-you/620421/?fbclid=IwAR1YerQKn42xHpRlZKEGQcTeKXxLzJlGjovit6pS7Cf9HXQAJjwvulwpQ9c>**