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The Twain Can Meet: The Joining of the Repetitive Past and the Singular Present in Psychoanalytic Therapy

Can the history of the past and present meet? By looking at why history repeats itself, and specific to psychoanalysis, why repetition compulsions and reenactments occur in analytic treatment, this paper will explore the relationship of the past, as reflected by conscious experience, to the present, as manifested through unconsciously generated experience.

In life, we bring the past and our experience of the past forward in order to inform the present of what has taken place before, to inform its sensibilities and assist with its decisions. The freshness of the present, in turn, reaches back into the past to vitalize and illuminate, especially its darkened areas.

However, the present, experienced and undergone through unconsciously generated experience, is often not "present" for the past to meet. Because of our anxiety, its unknown nature, and its oftentimes confusing and disorienting nonlinearity, we most often attend to, block out, and dissociate unconscious experience, experience that often seems irrelevant and contradictory to what we consciously conclude are the lessons that history is teaching us. One of the hypotheses I will explore is how the past history may fill the vacuum in the space that the present has left, leading the past to appear to repeat itself in our experience.

The hope of past and present meeting is potentiated in psychoanalysis because analysis is distinguished by its emphasis on the unconscious, and within Interpersonal Analysis in particular because of its focus on the here-and-now.

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