

Freud's influence

Personal and professional perspectives

PETER BLAKE

ADMIRER or ridiculed, idealised or pilloried, Freud was a gigantic intellect. His credentials as a psychologist, indicated by his commitment to studying the mind, are beyond question.

Also beyond doubt is Freud's influence on 20th-century thought inspired by and inspiring scientific, cultural and social endeavours across continents. For many years Freud represented a universal reference point in scientific psychology. For or against him, historical figures in our field often identified themselves by the position they took in relation to his corpus. The Freud idealisation of the 1950s and 1960s gave way to the Freud-bashing of the 1970s and 1980s, but with the emergence of neuroscience as the organising paradigm of psychology, the subtlety of his reflections about the workings of the mind are finding exciting new echoes. In December 2000 *The Psychologist* ran an excellent series of brief articles (available to download from www.bps.org.uk/03cu) offering an evaluation of psychoanalytic thought from the contemporary perspective. It was surprising, and to some of us gratifying, to see how aspects of modern cutting-edge psychology appeared still to articulate well

BRIAN ROCK and PETER FONAGY introduce this special issue, marking the 150th anniversary of Freud's birth.

century-old Freudian discoveries.

Freud's mission to demonstrate that unconscious wishes and beliefs could crucially impact on behaviour became a non-question with the discovery of the cognitive unconscious. Subtle aspects of emotion processing previously only observed on the analyst's couch are brought into fascinating relief by ingenious experiments in social neuroscience. Arguably, Freud's greatest discovery of the curative power of human consciousness ('where id was there ego shall be') has become the guiding principle of almost all psychosocial interventions. For understandable historical reasons, Freud took the nature of human consciousness too much for granted and focused on what the scientific instruments of his time could cast only very dim light on, that which was not in focal awareness. Yet 21st-century psychology seems more puzzled by the nature and influence of consciousness – the tip of Freud's iceberg analogy – than what lies below the water-line, which laboratory and neuroscience investigations will slowly but surely continue to uncover.

The 150th anniversary of Freud's birth provided the seed for embarking on this collaboration between the British Psychological and the British Psychoanalytical Societies. We take a more

personal perspective, inviting some of the leaders of British psychology to reflect on the impact Freud's theories may have had on their thinking and scientific development. Perhaps it is at this point of conjunction between the personal self-narrative and the professional, systematic and scientific account where Freud's contribution can still be most readily detected. Freud's ideas continue to be helpful in organising our experiences of ourselves, be that in relation to personal, scientific, literary, artistic or historical endeavours. This capacity for conscious self-reflection is admirably present in all the contributions in this issue. They make for a rich tapestry of thought, for which we as issue editors are very grateful.

■ *Brian Rock is a consultant clinical psychologist based at the Haringey Psychological Therapies Service, Halliwick Psychotherapy Department, St Ann's Hospital, London. He also works with refugees at the Tavistock Clinic. E-mail: brian.rock@beh-mht.nhs.uk.*

■ *Peter Fonagy is Freud Memorial Professor of Psychoanalysis and Director of the Sub-Department of Clinical Health Psychology at University College London. He is Chief Executive of the Anna Freud Centre. E-mail: p.fonagy@ucl.ac.uk.*

WEBLINKS

Freud's greatest contribution – have your say:
www.bps.org.uk/z5dn

Prints created for the Freud Museum, used on the cover and throughout this issue:
www.freud.org.uk/fmport.htm