



## PSYCHOANALYSIS IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: A CALL FOR TAKING ANALYTIC THINKING, WRITING AND ACTION INTO THE BROADER WORLD

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*Starting from the premise that psychoanalytic writing is a core feature of the profession of psychoanalysis, the author considers what and how analysts write about psychoanalysis as inseparable from the state of affairs of the field. What is psychoanalytic writing and what is its purpose? For whom do psychoanalysts write—and can or should this ambit be widened? Does the way we currently and traditionally present psychoanalytic thought and work clarify or obscure what psychoanalysts know and do? These and other questions critically probe differences between what psychoanalysis can do in the consultation room (therapeutic action) and how psychoanalysis can impact our broader world (psychoanalysis “in action”). Using the writer’s own experience as a psychoanalyst who works as an advisor and consultant to corporate leaders and organizations and who writes for a diverse business readership as a point of entry, an argument is made for psychoanalysts to use writing differently to more effectively communicate to the world what psychoanalysts do, what psychoanalysis is capable of, and to be more inventive in engaging in contemporary society.*

**Keywords:** action, applied psychoanalysis, business, consulting, lay analysis, society, writing

### Introduction

Psychoanalytic writing is a core feature of the profession of psychoanalysis.

Writing and clinical work have been connected from the beginning. Freud conveyed insight into human life and the human condition with literary beauty and deep sensitivity, and his prolific output and gifts as a writer were instrumental to the early establishment of psychoanalysis. The narrative style Freud favored—case material presented more as novella than objective evidentiary clinical report—has been emulated by generations of psychoanalysts since. That early model of writing unequivocally announced an essentialness of psychoanalysis: language as an instrument of treatment.

For better or worse, it also set-up contrasting challenges to psychoanalysts. One is to validate psychoanalytic theory and treatment methodologies as

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singular but nonetheless in accord with the scientific method and standard study protocols used by researchers and practitioners in psychology and social science. The other is to effectively present and demonstrate to the outside world what psychoanalysis is and what psychoanalysts do.

Discussing what and how analysts write about psychoanalysis, then, becomes inseparable from examining the state of affairs of the field.

This is not a conventional psychoanalytic journal article. It contains no theory, clinical material or patient histories. It holds no advocacy of one practice modality over another and no re-assessment of sanctified principles governing interpretation, treatment, or clinical technique. And, however important, no meta-analytic review of the historical psycho-cultural forces, cults of personality, and un-negotiated conflicts between the founding authorities of psychoanalysis (for example, the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society's turf wars in the early 1900s) which splintered and balkanized the field from the beginning and have contributed to a legacy of intramural fragmentation and wide-scale institutional non-coherence continuing to this day.

Consideration of the antecedents of historical trajectories are meaningful, but my interest here is primarily forward-looking: what can psychoanalysts and, more narrowly, psychoanalysts who write, do today and tomorrow to have a more significant impact on human affairs beyond the profoundly important work analysts do with their patients every day? What can we do outside the consulting room altogether? Where can psychoanalytic expertise be delivered and used to benefit society as a whole and, more specifically, to materially assist people in positions of authority, responsibility and influence, people whose decisions and behavior are amplified by virtue of their leadership roles?

Clinical practice has been the mainstay of psychoanalytic work for more than a century. And perhaps should remain so. But there are many avenues to expanding and solidifying psychoanalysis as more than a treatment method for patients.

What follows here is my explanation of some of the ways we—psychoanalysts—can achieve that and some of the reasons I think we must do so.

In “The Question of Lay Analysis,” Freud (1926) wrote that “the use of analysis for the treatment of the neuroses is only one of its applications; the future will perhaps show that it is not the most important one.”

As a psychoanalyst working as an advisor and specialist consultant to corporate leaders in a range of industries and regularly writing in a wide variety of international publications for both a general business readership and to address the interests of professionals in specific sectors, I know from experience that there is indeed much more that psychoanalysts—and psychoanalysis—can do in the world. There are additional domains in which psychoanalysis can contribute beyond patient treatment in order to enhance—and also to re-affirm—our reputation as

a provider of important and unique expertise. And additionally, to deliver practical and valuable approaches to human problem-solving.

To consider psychoanalysis in this way invites comparison with other enterprises. Whether an organization makes a widget or provides a service, is involved in manufacturing, technology, entertainment, the arts, or healthcare, is for-profit or not-for-profit, publicly traded or privately held, every organization must harness a complex array of elements. Some of these are specific to sector, industry, mission, and commercial or other function. Others adhere to the general tenets of good management: competent, ethical leadership, fiduciary responsibility, an intelligent workable operating plan, and a skilled, engaged workforce. Successful organizations must also listen to and understand their marketplace—including providing a product or service for which there is a market—be prepared to seek or create opportunities, leverage competitive advantages, and remain attuned to anticipating or responding to the wants, needs and expectations of users and consumers.

Each enterprise and situation is unique and so there is no single formula for getting this right. One approach is the maverick disrupter. Henry Ford, an exemplar of the individualist innovator, is apocryphally credited with having said, “if I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses,” implying that genuine innovation leads its market, not the other way around. Similarly, Steve Jobs, Apple’s iconic co-founder, was notorious for insisting that new product development adhere to his vision for the brand’s technology and esthetic rather than react to obvious consumer trends. However, dismissing or ignoring market indicators can lead to disastrous results. Kodak, for example, which had dominated the film and camera market for a generation, failed to accurately forecast the massive impact of digital photography. And Blockbuster, once the leading provider of home movie and game rentals in America, eventually declined into obsolescence with the advent of Netflix, streaming, and other video-on-demand services.

I suggest we look at psychoanalysis, and by extension psychoanalytic writing as a vehicle for communicating with the world about psychoanalysis, through a similar lens. On this view, we can ask, is psychoanalysis like Apple—able to independently dictate the terms of how society understands and values what we offer? Or are we more like Kodak and Blockbuster—falsely convinced of the durability of our unique authority while misconstruing what the cultural tea leaves are telling us about how we are seen and experienced? Some answers, and outcome scenarios, are already visible: psychoanalysis will continue to be misunderstood and mischaracterized. The field and what practitioners do will continue to be derided as anachronistic, impractical and irrelevant; it will continue to be overshadowed and overtaken by data-driven research and cognitive, neuroscientific and psycho-chemical approaches to emotional and

behavioral change. It will be nudged aside by behavioral economics, eclipsed by affective computing and algorithmic analytics, and incrementally marginalized, perhaps into near or even total obsolescence.

Other questions arise from this line of inquiry: What is the purpose of psychoanalytic writing? For whom—for whose or what benefit—is psychoanalytic writing generally produced and published? What role does the presentation of psychoanalytic thought and work—what psychoanalysts know and do—through writing and in various other formats and venues play in clarifying or obscuring it?

Who are psychoanalysts' constituents and for whom do we write? Colleagues and fellow psychoanalysts? Practitioners and researchers in psychology, psychiatry and other allied areas of mental health and social science? Academics and scholars? Patients? Prospective candidates and future analysts? The general public?

Conversely, what are the consequences of *failing* to clearly communicate to broader audiences what psychoanalysis is capable of? And to actively take psychoanalysis—psychoanalytic thinking and understanding about the human mind—in less traditional or even unconventional directions?

By way of answering many of the questions, I want to look at some ways psychoanalytic writing can be used differently as well as more effectively to do three things: (1) mitigate the peripheralization and decline of psychoanalysis; (2) help advance greater public awareness and more accurate understanding of what psychoanalysis is and what psychoanalysts are capable of doing; and (3) deliver actionable insight and practical assistance to leaders and decision-makers.

### **My History with Psychoanalytic Writing**

I arrived as a candidate-in-training at The National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis (NPAP) in New York after a life as a conservatory-trained professional musician. My natural language had been sounds, not words, and other than writing the occasional program note for some of my concerts, I had had no inclination or experience as a writer. Nonetheless, I started writing early in my training. Looking back, it was doubtless an important, though at first unconscious, part of my transition not just of profession but identity, from musician to psychoanalyst, and as a form of sublimation and transposition from one mode of expression to another. A lifetime of rigorous focus and dedication at the piano was readily transferrable to scholarship; I found the writing process compelling and enjoyable. Before I had graduated from my institute, I had already published a number of essays and book reviews in analytic journals. It became obvious to me that writing was more than a transitional process. As my career progressed, I continued writing and publishing, and also contributed to the publication and review process for several journals as an advisory board member and submission reader.

My first forays outside of writing for analytic journals were letters-to-the-editor. I mostly submitted letters to the *New York Times*. Reflecting on those that were selected for print, the winning formula came into focus: concision. The word-count restriction for accepted letters was severe, especially before news outlets migrated to digital platforms allowing easy access to posting comments online. Writing those letters became a practice in winnowing a point to its salient essence. Nothing extraneous. Zero body fat. If I wanted to increase the likelihood of one of my letters hitting ink, it needed to be clear and to-the-point.

Like the Karate Kid who discovers after-the-fact that he's been learning basic martial arts movements by painting the fence and waxing cars, I found that through writing these letters, I'd been unwittingly honing a process of distilling complex psychoanalytic ideas and perspectives, and rendering them accessibly. Simpler but not simplistic.

They were also a near antithesis to traditional psychoanalytic writing. Differences between long- and short-form writing aside, our professional literature, even the best of it, tends to be verbose and opaque, filled with technical jargon, countless references, and conceptual rabbit holes winding down into layers of multiple functions and meanings. It is often incomprehensible to anyone outside the field.

One day, I created an opportunity to do something more with that skill. Having already expanded my professional life outside the bounds of clinical practice and into business consulting, I regularly read a number of business publications. An article in *Fortune Small Business* magazine about destructive corporate leaders caught my attention. A world-renowned business management guru was quoted extensively, offering sage input on the problem and recommending solutions. I was stupefied by how superficial his account of the issues seemed to be and how over-simplified and unlikely to succeed his proposed solution was.

I felt compelled to respond. How? A letter-to-the-editor. Shortly after submitting my letter, one of the magazine's assistant editors contacted me to advise that they wanted to publish it but that some edits would be needed to make it even shorter. In our brief conversation about what to cut, I sensed a keen interest in the perspectives I was surfacing. I suggested that the magazine consider giving me space on an ongoing basis in which to address these sorts of issues, which I suspected would be useful to their readership.

The Editor-in-Chief and the magazine's leadership agreed. The note announcing what readers could expect from my column explained that “[*We recently*] ran a leadership story that explored the detrimental workplace of a pyromaniacal small business owner. We hoped the story would generate a lot of mail from readers with similar experiences, but we didn't expect to receive a letter from a noted Manhattan psychoanalyst, who eloquently chided us for not anteing up a deeper, more thought-out

solution. “The imperative for these managers to detonate is governed by unconscious factors that cannot be eliminated on demand,” he wrote. We were intrigued, and even more so when the doctor, Alexander Stein, agreed to work with us on a regular basis.” (FSB, Murphy, 2007)

My column—“Business in Mind”—ensued. I had already branched out of working exclusively as a clinician in private practice and was consulting to business leaders. But producing this regular column for FSB marked the clear launch of a new facet of my professional life: writing as a psychoanalyst for a business readership.

### What is Psychoanalytic Writing?

“Writing as a psychoanalyst.” The meaning of that phrase sounds obvious on its face: a psychoanalyst who is writing. But is it the case that only a psychoanalyst can produce psychoanalytic writing? What qualifies certain work as psychoanalytic? The credentials of the author? The content? The venue? Other criteria?

A brain surgeon and an author fall into conversation at a dinner party. The brain surgeon, on discovering that his neighbor is an author, expresses his longstanding plan to take up writing when he retires. “What a coincidence,” replies the author, “I plan to take up brain surgery when I retire.”

The author’s barbed retort underscores that there are certain areas of expertise which simply cannot be approximated at an amateur level. There is no question that being a writer—a profession which encompasses a range of forms including poetry, novels, plays, screenplays, journalism, and more—requires significant knowledge, skill, dedication, practice and of course talent. But the reality is that while the neurosurgeon might be able to write, possibly well and maybe even successfully, the author faces a barrier to entry in becoming a neurosurgeon of an entirely different order of magnitude. A writer in one field cannot always migrate into another.

This clarifies one definition of psychoanalytic writing: work explicitly informed by a psychoanalyst-author’s clinical training, expertise, experience, and knowledge of psychoanalytic concepts, theories, and techniques. Psychoanalytic writing, like other technically specialized areas of science and scholarship, can only be produced by professionals deeply knowledgeable in that domain.

Nonetheless, psychoanalytic writing is typically not incorporated into the curriculum of psychoanalytic training alongside theory courses and clinical practica. Though analytic candidates spend years *reading* analytic writing, there is scant instruction or guidance given to becoming a contributor to that literature.

To help redress that problem, and based on my track record as a psychoanalyst who had published articles in prominent psychoanalytic journals and who was also regularly writing for mainstream business readers, I was invited some years ago to create a writing course titled variously “Psychoanalytic Writing” and also “Writing Psychoanalysis,” my class was designed as a practical multi-section how-to workshop for both established analysts and candidates, as well as writers not trained as analysts but with interest in and some understanding of basic psychoanalytic history and theory. The intent was to help attendees learn more about writing and publishing psychoanalytically oriented articles.

I delineated three categories of psychoanalytic writing for the class:

1. The personal, theoretical, clinical, ethical, and logistical aspects of writing and publishing psychoanalytic articles in peer-review journals for a readership of professional analysts or other scholars.
2. Writing psychoanalytically—knowledgeably drawing on a psychoanalytic understanding of the complex dynamism of mental functioning, behavior and relationships in composing any piece of writing irrespective of style, form, content or intended venue.
3. Conceptually accurate and sophisticated but accessibly written pieces to be published in mainstream outlets and platforms for the general public and also for readers in various industries and business sectors.

The first category involves the various elements any analyst will, or ought to, thoughtfully consider when commencing a piece of writing intended for publication in a psychoanalytic journal.

Concisely, this typically begins not just with identifying a topic of interest but with the author’s awareness of why any particular topic has risen to such a level that it feels necessary to embark on writing about it in the first place.

Of additional importance is a psychoanalytic approach to examining the writer’s inner life, the psychoanalyst’s psychology—motivations, anxieties, prohibitions, fantasies—as well as the writing process itself—the knowledge and technical skills needed to translate ideas and inspiration into readable form. And to successfully overcome any of the problems commonly categorized as “writing issues”—anxieties or inhibitions which materially encumber or degrade the writing enterprise or which subvert the necessary follow-through to publication.

Other important considerations include confidentiality, ethical risks and responsibilities, transference-countertransference implications, and professional benefits. And finally, writers must attend to various methodological components, such as research, organization and development of ideas, literature review, editing, and navigating the politics and administrative idiosyncrasies of journal submission and revision protocols.

I call the second category “writing psychoanalytically.” This is any writing (screen or stage play, short story, novel, biography, journalism and other news reporting, social and political commentary, obituary, long-form magazine article, etc.) which demonstrates psychological or psychoanalytic literacy. Deep theoretical knowledge or psychoanalytic training, clinical experience and licensure and accreditation are not necessary requirements. Basic competency in fundamental psychoanalytic ideas and ways of understanding the human experience are useful but not pivotal for an author’s ability to intentionally, not just intuitively, produce more psychologically sophisticated work irrespective of the subject or publication venue.

My main focus here is the third category. Like the first, it can only be written by a psychoanalyst. But it is substantially dissimilar to the writing traditionally produced by professional analysts for fellow analysts. This work is not meant to be published in peer-review journals. It might not be read by or taught to candidates. Nor will it necessarily ever be cited by colleagues in subsequent contributions to the literature or presented at psychoanalytic conferences and incorporated into academic and scholarly discourse.

The function, framework, focus, language, and impact of this type of writing are categorically different. It is not in service of presenting or explaining psychoanalytic theory, technique, or clinical case material, to discuss psychoanalysis as a treatment methodology, or to use psychoanalytic principles in so-called “applied” contexts such as explicating works of art, music, or literature and the psycho-biographies of composers and artists.

Rather, psychoanalytic concepts, perspectives, understanding and explanations of human behavior and decision-making are delivered in articles, blog posts and other written works to wider audiences and across a broad spectrum of professions. Psychoanalysis is brought to bear as a powerful, actionable and solutions-oriented tool.

### **How Psychoanalytic Writing is Different from Other Types of Expert Writing**

Is psychoanalysis similar to other highly specialized disciplines and areas of scholarship? Consider medicine, astrophysics, mathematics, biology, chemistry, aviation and aerospace technology, musicology, linguistics, computer science, economics, engineering, law. At the highest levels, nearly every hard and soft science requires extensive education and training, deep knowledge, and lengthy supervised apprenticeships or internships.

These fields and the many subspecialties within each of them have professional membership organizations. There are domain-specific peer review journals and adjudicated conferences where the latest research, finding or development is presented. Colleagues share exciting breakthroughs and



frustrating setbacks. Established careers are furthered and new ones are launched. Rivals joust. Scores are settled. Apple-carts are tipped. Egos are bruised and inflated. People network and pitch; listen and talk (mostly talk). Academics and practitioners speak and write in dialects largely indecipherable to non-experts. They use technical jargon and acronyms, and reference concepts, theories, proofs, precedent scenarios and use-cases which only fellow in-the-know scholars and practitioners could understand and find relevant.

Countless professionals publish papers in their fields' journals using specialized terminology, complex formulae, data-filled charts and tables, and dense theoretical and technical discussions, unconcerned whether it is meaningful or even comprehensible to non-experts.

Field work and other research in the soft sciences—sociology, anthropology, history and research psychology—is typically targeted to academic audiences and fellow professionals. The work of scholars in these fields is more often than not unnoticed by the public unless or until a bungled or astonishingly significant study becomes newsworthy, some scandal involving a lab or researchers in it rises to prominence, or an eloquent authority in the field writes a book or participates in a media event which attracts wider attention.

All of which underscores that, with iconic exceptions—consider Oliver Sacks, Jane Goodall, Jacob Bronowski, Carl Sagan, Stephen Hawking, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Stephen Jay Gould, among others, whose wonderful storytelling, personal charisma, and captivating work catapulted them to recognition beyond their esoteric discipline—the preponderance of scientists and scholars go about their work without necessarily ever needing to write about it for the public or generating broad attention for it.

Most subject matter experts—academics, scholars, scientists, researchers, surgeons—even those whose work is commercially used and applied in a market or requires grant funding or other capital backing to be prototyped, trademarked, and sold, do not rely on writing about their rarified research processes or the esoteric theory and technique in their practice as a requisite to business preservation and development.

In all of these respects, psychoanalysis is not appreciably different from many other specialized fields.

Where psychoanalysis stands apart is in its perplexingly self-abnegating relationship with the outside world.

Many technically rigorous fields undertake research or do work which indirectly impacts commerce and society or has a direct commercial pipeline to the world outside its insular boundaries. Pharmacology, defense and weapons technologies, computing and other technologies, software development, the chemistry of personal care, hygiene, and cleaning products, medical instruments and procedures, and the auto industry are prime examples among many others.

The specialists themselves are not commonly left to their own devices to communicate the value of their work to the wider world. These professions draw on knowledgeable journalists and bloggers who write in dedicated sector-specific beats—tech, cars, healthcare—or engage PR firms to report on current trends and new developments, and to either raise public awareness of benefits and advantages or help reassure shareholders, investors and consumers in less favorable situations.

These professionals also cultivate networks of talented and ambitious young disciples who will contribute to ongoing research as a part of the training and apprenticeships through coursework and labs in funded university departments.

Though psychiatrists with medical school appointments and psychologists in academic posts can also train and become licensed to practice as psychoanalysts, psychoanalysis itself has never established footholds in numbers as a stand-alone department in teaching hospitals, universities, and research centers. In fact, the norm today is that undergraduates interested in psychoanalysis will not be attending psychology classes but studying literary critical theory. Psychoanalytic thought and work have over time become eclipsed by empirical research in cognitive and behavioral psychology and neuroscience. Its influence is circumscribed, and its functionality frequently questioned.

Psychoanalysis has failed to adequately address any of this. The field encountered its Kodak moment decades ago: rather than vigorously responding to the increased market competition and reputational attacks, we have adopted a wait-and-see-let's-analyze-this-more attitude. Action could and should have been taken to correct the numerous ways psychoanalytic ideas and practice were mischaracterized and maligned, and to fortify public trust in the quality, utility and applicability of psychoanalytic treatment. But no strategic campaign has been marshaled.

Edward Bernays, Freud's nephew (Anna Freud's son), is known as the "father" of modern-day marketing and advertising. Bernays' innovations in the psychology of advertising drew from the well of psychoanalytic principles and insights introduced by his Uncle Sigmund and elaborated by his mother and her cohort. Bernays and his disciples' work created powerful new frameworks and techniques for market producers to engage with and influence the public using unconscious motivations, inhibitions, group dynamics, and susceptibilities to control and manipulation. Psychoanalysis as a profession has never leveraged marketing, branding, public relations or crisis management as resources to either quell and rebut widespread mischaracterizations about the field's efficacy and relevance or to help rehabilitate and burnish its image.

These are complex multifaceted problems and will not be resolved any time soon. In the meantime, there are certain less controversial but quite consequential steps the field can take toward both repairing internal institutional fractures and clarifying public understanding of what we do and how we do it.

## **“Applied Psychoanalysis” and “Lay Analysis” Should be Retired**

“Applied psychoanalysis” as an idea and a term should be set aside. Traditionally, applied psychoanalysis refers, as its name suggests, to the application of psychoanalytic principles in non- and extra-clinical settings where there is no living patient or even a person. It involves applying psychoanalytic perspectives to study and interpret objects or ideas in a range of fields including art, literature, music, religion, biography, history, philosophy, mythology as well as sociology, anthropology and political science.<sup>1</sup>

But applied psychoanalysis is more than a simple designation of another para-clinical use of analytic principles. It encodes an ancient and pernicious classism. It suggests a caste system which has been designed and perpetuated to install and preserve a hierarchical status quo: there is psychoanalysis, which by default means clinical practice, and then there is applied psychoanalysis, which is a lesser off-shoot.

While an examination of the origins and development of that system is important, what I want to emphasize here is the problem we have now: prejudicially distinguishing different classes of psychoanalysis.

The bias implicit in the distinction—proper Psychoanalysis vs applied—is at the root of a number of systemic problems. These impact myriad processes and structures in training candidates and determining the eligibility of certain psychoanalysts to serve as supervisors or teachers or otherwise be conferred various privileges and benefits. It creates and amplifies financial, social and professional inequities between and among colleagues.

It promotes an anxiety-driven conservatism which limits and inhibits progressive and agile decision-making across the profession. More than merely a descriptive term of art, the concept represents an attitude, an orientation, which is divisive, exclusionary, and ideologically antithetical to the values and ethical principles psychoanalysts profess to embody and promote.

Similarly, “Lay analysis” is another relic of psychoanalysis’ early days. It too should be sent to pasture.

Freud published his paper on lay analysis in 1926 in response to and defense of Theodore Reik’s being prosecuted for the temerity of practicing as a non-medical—a lay—analyst. That Freud needed to advocate for the right of non-doctors, a ‘lay’ person with ‘only’ a PhD, to be psychoanalysts is understandable in the context of psychoanalysis’ formative history and the climate of middle Europe in the first decades of the 1900s. Nearly a century later, it is only a retrograde vestige of Victorian patriarchy. The rationale for it—that only

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<sup>1</sup> A simple key-word search in PEP (Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing) yields over 100 separate articles classified as or which topically refer to applied psychoanalysis. Interested readers should look to that literature for more information which is beyond my focus here.

medical doctors are competent to provide psychoanalysis—has been long-debunked and is spurious on its face: understanding the mind and treating problems of human experience as a non-medical procedure is central to psychoanalysis. It has no place in 21<sup>st</sup> century culture.

In practice of course, hundreds if not thousands of non-medical psychoanalysts are now trained and licensed under the auspices of state licensing laws that permit people with postgraduate degrees in non-mental health disciplines to enter psychoanalytic training for licensure (see, for example, N.Y. Edn. Law § 8405: NY Code—Section 8405). And there are institutes—including the one at which I trained, NPAP, founded by Theodore Reik after he emigrated to America—dedicated to enabling people from many different backgrounds and earlier professions to become psychoanalysts.

But, like applied psychoanalysis, the idea of the lay analyst continues to cast a shadow, if not a stain, on psychoanalysis' reputation. With what authority can psychoanalysts hope to speak to issues of social inequality and discrimination, or position itself as relevant and useful for addressing any number of other issues people face in contemporary society, when our field still preserves its own Antediluvian attitudes?

What can be done now? Can psychoanalysts use writing to help reverse the adverse effects of decades of reputational hammering and market decline, as well as to reassert itself as a field offering relevant impact?

One answer is at the heart of one of psychoanalysis' core strengths: understanding the root causes of human problems and determining deep, incisive and durable solutions. To quickly explain the essence of this prototypic form of psychoanalytic problem-solving to business audiences, I often tell the story of Aron Ralston. Ralston (2004) is famous for his memoir "Between a Rock and a Hard Place" which director Danny Boyle brought to the big screen in 2010 as "127 Hours" with James Franco in the title role. Ralston was an extreme outdoorsman who suffered a catastrophic accident during a solo hike in a remote canyon in Utah. While descending into a crevasse, he dislodged a boulder which pinned his right wrist to the side of the canyon wall. He had gone out that day without informing anyone of his whereabouts, had packed very few supplies, and was ill prepared for unexpected trouble. Trapped in grave circumstances, he knew he would die unless he found a way to extricate himself or was miraculously discovered and rescued. His assessment of the problem was simple: the boulder was pinning his arm. He focused all his attention and effort on the boulder. By the fifth day—nearing the 127 hours of the movie's title—he had to acknowledge the futility of trying to manually shift a multi-ton boulder to free his arm. Facing certain imminent death, he re-assessed the situation and suddenly realized he had misdiagnosed the problem: it was his arm that was trapping him, not the boulder. By transforming his understanding, he was

able to innovate a radical but life-saving solution: he self-amputated his forearm with a pocket-knife, tied a make-shift tourniquet and clambered out. Fortunately, he came upon other hikers who called for medical help. He survived and went on to get married, have a child, and now works as an engineer and motivational speaker.

Ralston's predicament conveys a double message which audiences can readily grasp. While nothing so drastic as literally losing a limb is required, it is a cautionary metaphor of the sorts of issues psychoanalysts encounter every day. These include the consequences of people not seeing a problem or the obvious solution right in front of them. And also the adverse consequences of misunderstanding or ignoring problems and their root causes, and then pursuing compromise and pseudo-solutions. It is also a clarifying illustration of what psychoanalysts are trained to do—to remain reasonably composed with prolonged periods of not knowing or not understanding and also to discern the substructure of complex problems no matter how distorted, obscured or displaced, and then develop a course toward resolving them.

How does this translate to psychoanalytic writing? First, we must recognize our equivalent of the boulder, the decisions we and our predecessors have made and continue to make that pin psychoanalysis in a canyon where important messages cannot be heard. These are the venues in which psychoanalysts mostly publish—professional journals whose content is accessible only behind paywalls—the exclusionary manner in which we generally write and the audience of peers for whom our work is mostly produced.

But in the spirit of examining root causes, just as any psychoanalyst would naturally be interested in Ralston's decisions that morning before he fell which deviated from the best practice safety guidelines he knew but ignored and which unthinkingly contributed to his dire situation, we likewise understand that there are other issues of which the restrictive problems of abstruse writing for a limited readership are both derivative and symptomatic.

Chief among them is psychoanalysis' view of itself as an utterly unique and essentially pure science; a discipline pointedly differentiated from other branches of psychology and a clinical enterprise whose sole purpose is to treat patients (see Graf & Diamond, 2018 for other perspectives on this issue and certain problems to which it relates). To conduct such treatment in accordance with its own clear and essentially unique methodologies. And which collects, interprets and validates evidentiary data regarding its understandings of mental life and human experience in ways that disregard or deviate from established scientific protocols.

Psychoanalysis has not ignored this problem entirely. A number of psychoanalysts have focused attention on the importance of validating psychoanalytic theory and clinical interventions—for instance, the inferential assumptions

analysts make from the raw data of the clinical interaction (see, representatively but not comprehensively, Boesky 2005; Boesky, 2013; Tuckett, 1994, 2001).

Still, the field remains deeply divided about how, or even if, a clear and unified system of evidentiary validation can or should be achieved. And in addition, psychoanalysts as a group, at least in the United States, have not satisfactorily brought their views out for wide-scale discussion and debate.

These point to parts of the profession which are challenging to confront and perhaps unpopular to voice. There may be psychoanalysts who object to any changes to established, sacrosanct terms and processes. Who will defend against acknowledging these issues as being problems. Who will refuse to, or simply cannot, envision modifications to the professional landscape in which practitioners deliver and deploy psychoanalysis outside conventional frames of clinical practice and applied academic scholarship.

This reluctance to change is expectable, even for professionals oriented in their daily work to examining and reducing impediments to change. It is an anxiety-driven paroxysm which, like all episodes of that type, attempts to preserve a mythic comfort. But there is no actual suggestion or proposal that the defining characteristics of psychoanalytic practice be altered or amputated, or that certain critical standards be amended or lowered. To the contrary, there are opportunities for psychoanalysis to be used more expansively in ways that will only enhance, not replace it, none of which derogate its essentialness as a science of the mind or efficacy as a treatment method.

Psychoanalysts are uniquely educated, rigorously trained experts in understanding and addressing issues involving the human mind, mental architecture, psychological development and functioning, subjective and emotional experience, the problems and sequelae of trauma and early attachments, fantasies and anxieties, unconscious conflict and repetition and their powerful ongoing impact on decision-making and behavior.

That is an impressive synopsis of core competencies which demonstrate substantial utility beyond its conventional clinical and academic uses.

### **Writing for the Business World and in the Public Sphere—Psychoanalysis in Action**

Central to the clinical analytic enterprise is a theory of therapeutic action (Gabbard & Westen, 2003; Strachey, 1999). Drawing on diverse models of mind and various technical mechanisms, psychoanalysis is primarily oriented to facilitating mental and emotional change. It aims to help patients in treatment work through and break out of repetitive cycles, to overcome the crippling effects of deeply embedded responses, and to relinquish ancient positions to allow for and welcome greater intimacy and vitality in relationships and work.

To achieve this and other important aims in their clinical work, psychoanalysts must of necessity be flexible and creative.

Yet, as I have been discussing, for all its gap-leaping innovations and remarkable capabilities, psychoanalysis as a profession suffers from rigidity and a general failure to adequately develop and adapt to changes to and in the world. On the whole it remains too distant and asocial. Too timid or deliberative to assert positions and act decisively. And it has passively, anhedonically, allowed itself to be considered and declared nearly irrelevant without a whimper of distress or a bark of outrage, let alone a vociferous defense. How psychoanalysts have communicated to and with the wider non-analytic world is both causal and symptomatic of these problems.

It seems psychoanalysis confuses therapeutic action with actual action. I recall attending a public discussion more than a decade ago between two very well-established senior analysts on the differences between psychological and external reality. The moderator proposed a hypothetical scenario: there is a fire in the building in which your office is located. Alarms are clanging and you and your patient can see and smell smoke. What do you do? One of the analysts was unequivocal: get out. The other advocated for staying put to pursue an exploration of the patient's idea of something burning outside but coming into the office as a transference communication, an expression of an internal fantasy regarding something potentially scorching and dangerous.

There may be no other profession besides psychoanalysis which acknowledges and understands the presence and forcefulness of internal reality as distinct from externalities in this way. Or in which practitioners can patiently and thoughtfully engage with people about such matters. Not as interventionists, social workers, or first responders, but with attention to the internal world, the potency of fantasy and symbolism, and the subjective experience of being the individual with her or his unique history, living that life. In ways that can effectuate deep changes in how a person thinks, feels, and behaves. This is part of the special sauce of psychoanalysis.

But there may also be no other profession in which an actual observable crisis could be seriously questioned as potentially just a symbol, a mental construct to which no actionable physical response is required.

Remember the Henry Ford quote—"if I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses"? It remains unproven that Ford actually went on record to deride and dismiss his customers. But whether he said this or not, it perpetuates the mistaken idea that innovators are mavericks and that innovation rejects established norms and ignores customer input. Travelers in the early 1900s would not and could not have told Ford they wanted vehicles propelled by a combustion engine. But they knew they wanted a faster and easier mode of transportation than the horse and buggy. Innovative companies

don't look to their customers to tell them the specific factors needed to create improvements, but good communication and customer feedback helps business leaders understand what consumers are looking for.

Freud and Ford are obviously not interchangeable as innovators and they did not set out to create comparable industries. Psychoanalysis and car manufacturing could not be more different. But Freud, like Ford, intuitively embodied some key characteristics of history's successful inventor-entrepreneurs. Freud closely studied the postulates and practices of his fellow neurologists and through observation and experience began to formulate alternative diagnoses and treatment plans to better address patients' presenting maladies. He experimented with various treatment methods but could revise or abandon them if outcomes suggested doing so. And the early case of Dora (Freud, 1893) in which his patient admonished him for continually interrupting her, triggering his developing awareness of the importance of analytic listening and the patient's free associations, is understandable as a proto-form of consumer feedback leading to product enhancement.

Freud as agile entrepreneur.

Psychoanalysis has, in my view, become too removed from that original posture. It can as a profession be much more inventive and attentive to the needs and challenges of contemporary society.

How can we go about that? What does it look and sound like? How, actually, can psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic writing be used—and still qualify as psychoanalytic—in other contexts in the broader world? Here, I offer my own work delivering analytic perspectives and precepts to the business world as one example. After a year or so of my columns appearing in *Fortune Small Business* magazine's digital edition, and having written a feature-length article which ran in print as a year-end cover story, the Editor-in-Chief informed me that the magazine wanted to migrate my column to a regular monthly spot in the print edition. His letter announcing this shift to the magazine's subscribers observed that

[f]inancial journalists often describe entrepreneurship in strategic terms, as though business owners were Spock-like automatons who coolly select optimal courses of action based on the best available data, [but]it's not so simple, of course—few entrepreneurs are able to check their emotions at the office door. (Murphy, 2009)

He referenced my December 2008/January 2009 cover story entitled "Make Fear Your Friend," saying that the piece had "struck a chord with many readers who had grappled with the intense emotional pressures of running a business." My column, "Emotional Edge," was then formally introduced.

What the Editor-in-Chief of FSB identified first as a distinct and valuable feature for the magazine's readership of business owners, also applicable elsewhere, is the psychoanalyst's ability to have insight into and accessibly articulate



aspects of people's emotions. And in addition, importantly, to show how and why helping people know more about their emotions, inner lives and deeper impulses and inhibitors have meaningful relevance to the pragmatics of decision-making and behavior in business. And then to connect that understanding to practical usability.

Everything I do in my work and writing is deeply informed by and imbued with my training, knowledge, and clinical experience as a psychoanalyst. Although I have reduced my private patient practice to focus on working as a business consultant, I am and remain a psychoanalyst through and through.

This is distinguished from the conventional practice of psychoanalysis in many important ways, but it is not an application, perversion, or misuse of psychoanalysis (see De Vries & Manfred, 2006; Sulkowicz, 2018 for more about key differences between clinical psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic business consulting and already established frameworks for bringing psychoanalytic principles into organizations). I use psychoanalysis—ideas, clinical techniques, a frame and method for understanding the human condition—as a powerful multipurpose tool with different impacts and outcomes.

At core, all of my consulting work and writing is premised on the understanding that there is no such thing as an enterprise which is not a human ecosystem, irrespective of its sector or commercial focus. There is no facet of corporate or organizational life which is not governed and influenced by powerful psychological forces. And that even in technology-forward scenarios, where autonomous decision-making agents are intended to function without human involvement or supervision, it is critical to design and develop them with a deep, psychologically sophisticated understanding of the human dimension and their impact on society and human life. People—the human element—are at the center of every professional situation.

## **Conclusion**

Financial Times columnist Janan Ganesh published a piece in October 2019 titled “Why we’re all psychologists now” in which he astutely pinpoints some issues and problems concerning society’s conflictual relationship with a psychological understanding of itself and its citizens and the “casual adoption [of psychiatry and psychotherapy] by the masses on a hobbyist basis ... [and] the civilian dalliance with what is a branch of medicine ... ”

“At any given time,” Ganesh writes, “there is a subject that a civilized person must know a little bit about. It used to be the classics. At other points, it was art history or the French language or (when it was still ‘natural philosophy’) science. Mastery was never expected. But it was hard to survive polite company without at least a smattering. Economics rose to this status in the previous

decade—see Malcolm Gladwell’s book sales—but could not survive a crash it had failed to predict. What usurped it was psychology.”

“We are all Freudians now,” Ganesh laments. “There is the amazing confidence with which the non-qualified diagnose others from afar,” he continues. “Are we better off for it? If people really do engage with their emotions more than previous generations did, then perhaps. But I suggest that something distinct is going on. People engage with engaging with their emotions. That is, they know their way around psychological concepts better than their forebears. They are steeped in the terminology. Whether this is quite the same thing as truly communing with one’s interior life is doubtful. If anything, it seems like a way of keeping it at some remove.”

This aligns with a lot of my experience consulting to organizations, and also with what I read in the business press and hear from society’s popular influencers and thought leaders. There is no shortage of positive-thinking, pop- and cognitive-behavioral psychology and organizational social science messaging which is indelibly shaping public notions about human motivation and behavior. Though there is a good deal of incisive and useful research being done, most of it is diluted, compressed and translated into quantified data and palatable talking points for general consumption. Much of what ultimately gets presented to and ingested by the business world and the general public veers between psychologically naïve and psychologically illiterate. The problems of reductionistic thinking and oversimplified solutions offered in that *Fortune* article on toxic leadership to which I responded over a decade ago are as prevalent today as then.

But business leaders and technologists are not gulping all that pabulum because they are indiscriminating or disinterested in anything better. Executives have industrial-size responsibilities and competing requirements on their plates every day. Most do not have, or do not think they can allocate, the bandwidth or patience to deeply explore and understand human psychology. What is offered in business magazines and other content-platforms under the umbrella topic of human behavior appears to credibly provide comprehensible answers and practical, executable solutions. In a world in which the value of something is measured as the value it is capable of yielding, it actually almost makes sense that psychometric tests and formulaic cognitive explanations of direct causal links between thought and action would be prized.

And yet, there is a great desire to know and understand more, and to be provided with more sophisticated insight and expertise.

To me, this presents an unparalleled opportunity for psychoanalysis. From my perspective, every aspect of the world of human affairs—from legitimate business and technology to the shadowy underworld of nefarious illicit dealings—involves, is impacted by, and is an expression of the human condition as psychoanalysts understand it and about which psychoanalysis can provide material help.

Writing psychoanalytically—psychoanalysis itself—can and should be used in more muscular, actionable, and outward facing ways. It can and should be used as a force for positive change and influence on a larger scale, in addition to being an utterly unique treatment method to help patients. This is how we can more effectively leverage psychoanalysis as a powerful and unparalleled tool which is woefully underutilized, but much needed in today’s complex, distressing, and endlessly beguiling world.

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## Psychoanalysis in the Public Sphere: A Call for Taking Analytic Thinking, Writing and Action into the Broader World

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To cite this article: Alexander Stein (2020) Psychoanalysis in the Public Sphere: A Call for Taking Analytic Thinking, Writing and Action into the Broader World, *Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, 17:2, 141-160, DOI: [10.1080/1551806X.2020.1748450](https://doi.org/10.1080/1551806X.2020.1748450)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1551806X.2020.1748450>



Published online: 04 Jun 2020.



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