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Theorising intergenerational trauma through the prism of history-in-the-now: historical consciousness, the sense-making process and its potentials for self-transformation

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Abstract

This article theorises the relationship between intergenerational trauma and historical consciousness, seeking to understand how negatively impregnated experiences of traumatising events that people inherit and interiorise can be actualised in their sense-making as a form of possibility for renewal and strength. Such an examination, which investigates how inheritors of collective trauma view history's workings and how these understandings shape their social positioning, can provide much-needed insight into the historical knowledge that inheritors bring to formal history classrooms and the different strategies that can be adopted to help them (and others) overcome these traumatic events' negative imposition on their self-identity and ability to act positively in the world. The article particularly focuses on the notion of inheritors' *transgenerational atmosphere* that holds them captive to the limiting experiences of their predecessors'

lived horrors, as they relate to the concept of *history-in-the-now*, which offers a novel way of grasping the workings of historical consciousness. Moreover, the author's broader *practical life methodology* is introduced as a pedagogical approach to helping inheritors – as learners – develop a positive, secure and grounded self-understanding. In emphasising inheritors' inner expansion, the approach involves the promotion of self-reflexive mindsets through investigating the histories and epistemologies that inheritors are socialised in and the conceptual resources they employ for constructing their understandings of reality. Such attention is meant to provide insight into the structure, function and outcome of inheritors' sense-making and the working principles that orient their actions when using the historical knowledge they possess.

Keywords intergenerational trauma; cultural and historical trauma; transgenerational atmosphere; historical consciousness; history-in-the-now; historical consciousness's practical life methodology; history-as-interpretive-filter; history-as-content-configuration; schematic narrative templates; reflexivity

Introduction

This reflection piece provides a particular theorisation of history and its workings to explain how people can activate their historical consciousness for purposes of self-transformation. Specific attention is placed on the intergenerational trauma people inherit and on history's role in helping them process it to foster possibilities for renewal and strength. History, understood in its embodied form, constituting who people are, how they think, feel and act, can help ensure that challenging effects from major disruptive life happenings remain beneficial for their personal growth and development. In operating to restore people's sense of dignity and integrity, history, from this perspective, can work to make them feel complete and fulfilled. It can provide balance and harmony, enabling people to engage with prior experiences on terms and needs that are truly their own. Underlying this view is the assumption that people's resort to history is instinctive or proceeds as a reflex, and that this resort is a natural resort to the knowledge they already possess, which people employ as a starting point to restore meaning when their lives are unsettled. My focus here on intergenerational trauma relates to victim communities that have experienced wide-scale, historically traumatic events whose many manifestations and after-effects persist into the present. History, when captured and analysed self-reflexively, I argue, can assist inheritors of trauma to better coexist with resulting fears and anxieties regarding the future well-being and flourishing of their loved ones, their communities of belonging and, ultimately, of themselves. When in such situations, history can define people's sense of purpose and responsibility and can help negotiate their perceived duties to their predecessors – the *original victims* – and what they believe to be the best way of moving forward. History can provide the answers people need and, at the very least, can help them account for how they decide to position themselves. Following this logic, the aim of this reflection piece is to offer inheritors of trauma the means of using history as possibility, if they so choose, showing them one way of regaining their ability and right to live authentically – that is, reflexively and responsibly in full awareness of their constant state of becoming – in the present moment as best they can. As an extension, what I propose can also pertain to others who, from near or far, are *implicated* in reinforcing and benefiting from the status quo of trauma (Rothberg, 2019). Having such individuals examine their sense-making of historically traumatic events and how it affects their lives can perhaps lead them to re-examine the role they play in causing pain in others and how they can change things for the better. The horrors of the past no longer need to cast a dark shadow and destabilise inheritors of trauma, but can instead be transformed and integrated into their embodied heritage, both individually and collectively, as a source of character and strength, enabling them to lean towards all the productive potentials and possibilities that the future can offer.

My own interest in researching historical consciousness and my specific attentiveness here to history's capacity for self-transformation, in many ways, originate from my own lived experience as a third-generation inheritor of intergenerational trauma, rooted in an unrecognised genocide. The

problem I seek to solve lies mainly in helping fellow inheritors (and others who relate) to overcome what I believe to be a no-win situation. In clearly suffering the legitimate pain of historical losses, I find many fellow inheritors to be *too caught up* in the past, hoping to alleviate their pain through an external form of validation (through justice and closure), which has never happened and perhaps will never be the case, and which continues to keep the pain alive, to the point where they seem to lose sight of the future. This constant quest for recognition and rectification seems to, moreover, mutually reinforce a perpetual glorification of my victim community's very ancient presence in a homeland they no longer possess, the loss of which causes additional mental distress. In following historian Dominick LaCapra (1999), there seems to exist a widespread form of melancholy, which emanates from the conflation of *absence* and *loss* regarding the historical trauma people inherit and which impedes inheritors from properly mourning their losses and moving on. Because the past's heavy weight is overbearing, the world is not seen anew with fresh eyes, from differing vantage points, thereby removing opportunities for appreciating possibilities for renewal and strength. For LaCapra (1999), absence is of a metaphysical order and refers to a sense of emptiness; to something that is missing from a believed self-understanding, where, if it were to be returned, the self would be whole again, pure again. It is as if members' happiness and self-fulfilment as a we-group can only arise from rectifying the wrongs of the past and by somehow restoring a former imagined golden age that is fundamentally gone. When historical losses – which are quantifiable, for example, in terms of perished lives and the dispossession of land – are conflated with a view that the victim community's perceived original, sacrosanct, untainted, unpolluted presence in the world has been affronted, the pain and anger that arise are harder and more complicated to heal. In viewing the powerful pull of the memory of genocide in such situations, particularly when its complexity is reduced to a main cataclysmic event that functions as a pivotal identity marker and mnemonic device of pain, absence and melancholy, the task of charting a path towards closure is difficult.

To explicate history's restorative capacity, I seek to examine the relationship between the functioning of the intergenerational trauma people inherit, particularly as it influences their sense of presence and being in the world, and the workings of their everyday historical sense-making and ultimate capacity for reflexive thought. To accomplish this exploration, I investigate what is known as inheritors' *transgenerational atmosphere*, a term developed by psychoanalysts and psychotherapists Bakó and Zana (2018, 2020), which I connect to the notion of *historical consciousness* and, more specifically, to my conceptualisation of *history-in-the-now* and what I call historical consciousness's *practical life methodology*. Inheritors' transgenerational atmosphere constitutes the medium by which psychological wounds or scars from cataclysmic events, such as the Holocaust and other gross human rights violations, including genocide, colonisation, forced displacement and dispossession, famine, slavery, atrocities of war and terrorism, are transmitted intergenerationally and consequently impact inheritors' general behaviour. Historical consciousness (Zanazanian, 2025) denotes individuals' experience of creating historical knowledge and using it to make sense of their very own temporality in the world to propel their actions in their ever-changing environment. History-in-the-now (Zanazanian, 2025) helps to operationalise historical consciousness and to consequently grasp the functioning of individuals' historicity in the movement of time where their *now* operates as an ever-evolving vantage point for positioning themselves regarding the many historically rooted life challenges they encounter. Historical consciousness's practical life methodology (Zanazanian, 2025), in turn, allows for a deep investigation of historical consciousness's workings through identifying and analysing the already available conceptual resources – cognitive frames or *schematic narrative templates* – individuals employ for giving meaning to experiences and realities of prior times and for using that information to orient themselves when faced with ongoing life problems, such as the intergenerational trauma they inherit from cataclysmic events.

In bringing these concepts together, I aim to formulate how inheritors of trauma can come to function according to their fullest potentials, if they so choose. In doing so, they can activate what I believe to be their inherent propensity to thoroughly live their wants, needs, desires and talents. Attaining these goals, I argue, requires examining the workings of inheritors' historical consciousness through employing both history-in-the-now and the practical life methodology to assess inheritors' construction and use of historical knowledge in their real-time sense-making as well as the degree to which their capacity for reflexive thought enables them to take critical distance from the knowledge claims they produce. By specifically analysing their representations of the *original event* and its after-effects, inheritors can come to understand how they construct and employ their knowledge of both. As I will argue, the key for them would be to identify the schematic narrative templates they use and to have them employ these conceptual resources in what I call a *multimodal* manner, where they recognise

knowledge as something complex that requires deep care, reflexivity and nuance when approaching their sense-making of the original cataclysmic event (particularly as a memory marker of group identity). In taking critical distance from their knowledge claims – as a step towards fostering possibility through reflexivity – they can eventually come to weaken the transgenerational atmosphere's strong grip. Three main questions consequently guide my use of the concepts I employ: How can history help expand our inner selves when our relationship with the intergenerational trauma we inherit can easily work to hinder our ability to feel complete and fulfilled as humans? How can we restore our sense of dignity and purpose when we – as inheritors of trauma – are held hostage to a transgenerational atmosphere that can readily control how we think, feel and act in our everyday lives? How can we let go of the pain and disruption and be true to our authentic selves – so that we attain a happy (balanced, harmonised, restored) state of equilibrium (by fundamentally re-establishing meaning to our unsettled lives), where we are alert to the world and to who we are within that world?

In what follows, I present my ideas in two parts. In the first part, I look at what historical trauma is and how it can affect our historical sense-making. I specifically examine what I call our *mental now zone of actualisation* where our meaning-making happens. To explain this process, I describe how we mobilise notions of history to make sense of time's movement, and particularly of historical trauma and its ongoing effects, to then explicate how history's ability to foster self-reflexive thought and action can free us from the transgenerational atmosphere's heavy weight. In the second part, I build on this relationship between trauma and historical consciousness, between the transgenerational atmosphere and history-in-the-now. Because my interest is in the construction and transmission of historical knowledge for change-making purposes, I look to key educational theorists who have reflected on the teaching and learning of historically traumatic events, to outline what has been proposed in using history to overcome trauma's challenging effects. Building on this overview, I then present the potentials of the practical life methodology to help inheritors – and others by extension – gain a positive, secure and grounded understanding of who they are and of their self-affirming presence in the world. The practical life methodology involves the promotion of a self-reflexive mindset through investigating the histories and epistemologies individuals come to inherit and the conceptual resources they employ for constructing their understandings of reality. This recognition can enable inheritors to grasp that the way they construct historical knowledge makes them human and thus gives them the legitimacy to engage in self-affirming practices. The hope is that they come to acknowledge the need to make what they have interiorised, as lived subjective experiences, objects for scrutiny, ready for questioning, complexifying and transforming.

Part one

What are historical trauma and the transgenerational atmosphere? How do they function?

Historical trauma refers to a devastating and far-reaching life occurrence or happening that ultimately – for a vast majority of its recipients – is unexpected and unsettling. This occurrence usually comprises a violent and oppressive experience that has a long-lasting effect across generations. The inheritance of such a violent and oppressive experience constitutes a legacy of an extremely inhumane nature that disrupts the lives of its victims and their descendants, generating a psychic and social wounding that persists into the living present (Brave Heart, 1998; 1999; Degruy, 2017; Hübl, 2023; Salberg and Grand, 2017; van der Kolk, 2015; van der Kolk et al., 1996). This injury does not easily heal and, to varying degrees, continues to affect its inheritors, as well as its perpetrators and their descendants. The reach of this impact includes bystanders at the time as well as implicated subjects in the present who inadvertently reinforce the resulting status quo through their non-cognizance or non-action to change things for the better (Rothberg, 2019). The effects of historical trauma on inheritors' mental, physical, social and cultural health are well known. These effects fundamentally work to disrupt inheritors' overall sense of balance and harmony causing a disequilibrium in their overall well-being and ability to engage with the world in an authentic and productive manner. They impact inheritors' self-identity and their quest for fulfilment and completeness as humans. These effects remain alive and are ongoing, still present, especially when they have not been resolved or integrated into inheritors' sense of self. They exert unease on how inheritors live their lives and, because of this strain, these effects are not dead but lurk hidden somewhere in

inheritors' minds, coming to the fore as soon as a connection to them is provoked by some mental or physical stimulus, thought or action. At the level of mental and physical health, these effects are normally symptomatic of post-traumatic stress disorder, producing stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, emptiness, fear, sadness and, in cases of the ongoing marginalisation of victim communities, dependency on alcohol and drugs, suicidal thoughts and other forms of self-harm. To varying degrees, in identifying with the pain of their predecessors, inheritors are in a prolonged state of mourning and in a constant state of worry or fear.

One way of grasping how intergenerational trauma affects inheritors' well-being is by looking at the workings of their transgenerational atmosphere. Through clinical work with second- and third-generation Holocaust survivors, Bakó and Zana (2018, 2020) introduce the notion of the transgenerational atmosphere to help explain how the inheritance of historical trauma moves from the original victim to their direct descendants. The transgenerational atmosphere refers to the mechanism or process by which the transmission of traumatic experience across generations takes place or becomes possible. In Bakó and Zana's conceptualisation, the transgenerational atmosphere represents a space-time field of intersubjectivity between generations where lived traumatic experiences of historical trauma are frozen in time and serve as hidden markers that impact individuals' mindsets, attitudes and behaviours. Remaining dormant, they are omnipresent. With the blurring of past and present, the transgenerational atmosphere's intersubjective field works as a timeless capsule of emotions, sealing and transferring such feelings as fear, anger and helplessness, consequently resulting in a continuity of the traumatic we-experience (Bakó and Zana, 2018). According to Bakó and Zana, these feelings remain undigested, seeking to latch on to the present. Once triggered, these feelings are expressed in different ways. Based on the we-experience, that is, on the experience of self-identifying members of the we-group (Assmann, 2010), the *me* can react disproportionately intensely to the events of the present: it can become an excluder, may experience a sense of persecution, of feeling threatened or may even become an aggressor. Embodying the negative we-experience, the transgenerational atmosphere follows the inheritors of trauma around like a ghost or phantom, igniting the traumatised psychological field as a new reality. As space and time become distorted, the original danger or threat from the original happening is experienced as existing in the present.

As such, the transgenerational atmosphere functions like a dark cloud that hovers over what I call the inheritors' now (Zanazanian, 2025). It is invisible, and its effects are not immediately sensed. This invisible cloud impacts mindsets and attitudes, where a fight-or-flight feeling of prior horrors is constantly felt, as if the traumatic experience is still ongoing in the present (Bakó and Zana, 2018). As the transgenerational atmosphere is transferred from one generation to the next, from victims to inheritors, it is done in a non-verbal, non-narrative manner, representing a non-symbolic or non-verbalisable memory, a form of unconscious and unintentional remembering. The transgenerational atmosphere is the space where the inherited trauma, frozen in time, is lived out and where narrative remembering is replaced with uncontainable unsymbolised emotions (Bakó and Zana, 2018, 2020). Because of the transgenerational atmosphere's omnipresence, inheritors do not live their lives but rather tend to live those of their predecessors; where inheritors identify closely with the trauma of their predecessors' lived experiences, which controls how they function in the world (Bakó and Zana, 2018). Heirs are thus not able to be their own, true, authentic selves and to live their lives according to their own true purpose. They do not evolve according to their own pathways in life. What they receive as their traumatic inheritance imprints deeply on their psyche, on their sense of self and identity (Bakó and Zana, 2018).

How does historical trauma influence our historical sense-making?

One big challenge when examining the effects of historical trauma is to see how its understandings influence its direct descendants' comprehension and meaning-making of their surrounding realities. My interest in specifically relating historical trauma's effects to our historical sense-making lies in my key assumption that the intergenerational trauma we inherit lends to shaping our world views, especially when it comes to how we position ourselves regarding the original, disruptive cataclysmic event and its consequent impact over time. To differing degrees, depending on context and outcome, I believe trauma's effects offer inheritors a particular lens for analysing social, political, cultural and economic occurrences, past and present, as well as for negotiating where they stand, from near or far, on (related) moral issues. While the effects of trauma are hard to pinpoint, their influence can be easily accessed through examining inheritors' culturally mediated memories of the original event and its after-effects.

Trauma's psychic and social wounding may be non-verbal and non-symbolic, but, in contrast, the understandings of reality that inheritors produce through these memories can be grasped by way of narrative. Based on the lens they adopt, narrative can help give words to inheritors' representations of the original event for making sense of lived experiences, realities and their (social and political) after-effects, which, in turn, can readily be employed for negotiating coherency, connectedness, situatedness, belonging and intentionality for living their lives (Bruner, 1996, 2005; Cobley, 2014; Polkinghorne, 1988, 2005; Ricoeur, 1984). For my purposes, what enables these consequent uses of narrative are its culturally available plots for providing its overall coherency and structure. For orientation purposes, based on inheritors' daily lived engagements, such conceptual resources, acting like cultural scripts or items of cultural knowledge, offer guidance to individuals, assisting them to help give meaning and inform the ways in which they interact with the world. Located in our knowledge repertoires, as per individuals' differing we-groups of belonging, these scripts can be seen as 'meaning-giving interpretive plots' (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 10), which we bring to the sense-making process according to their potential for resonating with the (pre-narrative) experiences we seek to give meaning to (Bruner, 1996, 2005; Cobley, 2014; Polkinghorne, 1988, 2005; Ricoeur, 1984).

To help expand on this process, the conceptual resources that I believe are fundamental for the functioning of our historical consciousness, and that I focus on, are what cultural psychologist James V. Wertsch (1998, 2002) calls *schematic narrative templates*. As cultural and cognitive constructs, schematic narrative templates are sense-making frames that enable their users to read the many realities they seek to understand. Constituting a form of narrative organisation, schematic narrative templates offer abstract degrees of representation and follow a basic storyline format, comprising core, skeletal narrative patterns that underlie, inform and are instantiated by many instances of specific narratives about a given past, no matter their degree of elaboration. In working as patterned devices that help forge group memory, schematic narrative templates resemble schema-like knowledge structures that act as easy, shortcut, simplifications required for making sense of the past (Wertsch, 1998, 2002). Developed through various processes of group socialisation, schematic narrative templates help to give we-group members a core understanding of who they are as a people, grouping, nation or collective. Possessing a strong emotional hold over their adherents, schematic narrative templates tend to be employed incognizantly. They infiltrate the human mind so deeply that they eventually gain essential truth-like properties that develop a life of their own and that are never really questioned. They are always taken for granted. Because of this characteristic, users do not realise the power templates hold over how they give meaning to the past.

In following this logic, when looking at inheritors of historical trauma, schematic narrative templates can help give meaning to the cataclysmic events that haunt them. Depending on the context, the types of templates they employ and the way they enact them in their real-time thinking, these uses, I believe, can result in different outcomes. Despite their affordances, these uses can sometimes lead to limited self-understandings and, at other times, to more relevant ones. If these templates were to be self-reflexively identified and analysed, I argue that they could be acted out intentionally in a more productive manner. Having inheritors capture the workings of these conceptual resources in their sense-making to then repurpose their use of them can, I argue, contribute to weakening the transgenerational atmosphere's tight grip.

What is history-in-the-now? How does our sense-making function in our now zone of mental actualisation?

A productive way to capture historical consciousness's schematic workings is to examine how individuals engage and position themselves regarding historical thinking problems related to major disruptive life happenings. Such a focus puts a spotlight on the sense-making process, permitting individuals' implicit, automatic and instinctive constructions and uses of historical knowledge to be investigated by identifying and analysing the conceptual resources they employ for such purposes. The structure, function and outcome of individuals' sense-making, along with their sense-making's working principles and patterns, can consequently come to light, as can the degree of people's reflexivity, and their potential openness to taking critical distance from the knowledge claims they put forth.

In my theorisation of historical consciousness (Zanazanian, 2025), I suggest this work takes place in the now of people's sense-making. The idea of the now, I argue, is a starting point for better grasping the workings of our historical consciousness. Inspired by key ideas from different perspectives in pragmatism, phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics and the study of Indigenous knowledge systems, the now,

as I envision it, ultimately comprises the source of our sense-making. It constitutes an embodied mental time-space zone that is always present in our minds, that produces meaning out of fluid and senseless reality and that fundamentally enables us to grow, question, critique and (re)position ourselves in our ongoing engagements with the world. Forming a field of temporal vision, the now functions as the main locus of our presence, growth and expansion as humans. We would not be able to be historical in our lives, able to interpret and engage with time's movement, without our now. As the now brings our ongoing, continuous present to life, it is the source of our constant state of becoming as historical beings. Comprising a transitional zone of mental actualisation, it is particularly where the negotiation and use of our conceptual resources for life orientation purposes come to fruition. The now forms a sort of staging ground from which the many cultural and epistemic expressions of our historical sense-making surface and are put into effect. In actualising the meanings we create, the now functions as an ever-evolving vantage point, designating it as the location of our historicity, where our creation and use of historical knowledge occurs. It is constantly in motion, propelling our sense-making and real-time actions. As the now functions as a launching pad, the *now moment*, I posit, comprises the precise act of sense-making at the exact instant where the conceptual resources we use for creating meaning are put to work and the resulting sense that is made is indeed actualised.

History theorist Reinhard Koselleck's (2002, 2004, 2018) twin concepts, *space of experience* and *horizon of expectations*, allow us to understand how we employ our historical knowledge in the now moment of our sense-making. They explain how our conceptual resources are employed to give meaning to the happenings that affect us. Ultimately, in following Koselleck, our historical sense-making emerges from a tension that arises between the space of experience and horizon of expectations we encounter when trying to make sense of historical reality. In my reading, our space of experience resembles a repository of our cultural knowledge, the elements of which come to the fore when possible and necessary for the thinking we are engaged in and that can evolve or be adapted according to new expectations. Our horizon of expectations, in turn, resides in the realm of what is to come, of what is anticipated, that has yet to happen, be experienced or be unveiled and, as such, possesses the potential of innumerable developments and thus is not complete, but open. Although what-is-to-come can differ from the experiences of prior times, expectation nonetheless depends on experience for it to materialise. Once expectations come to pass, they create new experiences, which can be added on to prior experiences, or be used to update them, or to even replace them. Even though happenings of prior times remain the same, the meanings we bestow on them change depending on the horizons we face and how we engage with the experiences we bring to the table when thinking about a historical phenomenon. Building on Koselleck's ideas, Paul Ricoeur (1988, 2006), elaborates on this process. Whereas what has happened in prior times cannot be changed, Ricoeur suggests that the meanings we attribute to it can, which, considering what-is-to-come's uncertainty and openness, offers the possibility for reinterpretation. Ricoeur basically argues that prior experiences can be expanded and opened to create new possibilities because the moral weight of the past can be adapted.

In following Koselleck and Ricoeur, I argue that the schematic narrative templates we use as part of our sense-making operation are culture's way of helping us frame our thinking for reading what is to come, our hopes or anxieties. As our schematic narrative templates emerge in the now based on prior experience but are triggered by our intentions for anticipating our expectations, I suggest that they are cultural-cognitive strategies that help interpret historically rooted phenomena. They enable individuals to make sense of given circumstances of a historical nature and allow them to have both an opinion and a guide for action. In the search to give historical meaning in the now, two specific schematic narrative templates – which I name *history-as-interpretive-filter* and its accompanying *history-as-content-configuration* – account for our sense-making's actualisation between our space of experience and horizon of expectations. *History-as-interpretive-filter* refers to those schematic representations 'that inform individuals' everyday, "common sense" visions of what makes history a reflective process or idea for engaging with the world' (Zanazanian, 2019, p. 854). As such, it helps 'embed history's rationalizing force for reading, organizing, and explicating social reality within a larger meaning of what history is and what it can do for guidance given the specific contexts individuals find themselves in' (Zanazanian, 2019, p. 854). As the propeller of individuals' sense-making, *history-as-interpretive-filter* shows the type of reading lens they use, as a cultural phenomenon, for understanding how historical reality in their thinking problem works. Two examples of *history-as-interpretive-filter* templates in my prior work are *HISTORY IS AN INSTRUMENT FOR POSITIVE OUTCOMES* and *HISTORY IS GROUP EMPOWERMENT*. Both emerge from a generalisable social

problem with historical roots related to a given community's long-term survival in a broader delicate context of intergroup relations, where community organisers seek to take action and make positive change for their we-group's presence and well-being. For the first template, in guiding community organisers' incognizant thinking, history is understood as working to cultivate and change people's minds and to specifically effectuate positive change through a growth in comprehension. For the second, in its incognizant guidance, history is seen as working to strike a chord and mobilise members, for effectuating positive change, through reconnecting and pushing them to action with a renewed understanding of the group.

The second type of schematic narrative template, reassembling Wertsch's original use of the concept, underlies the content and form of individuals' narrative configurations of past–present–future. History-as-content-configuration offers input into how people view the experiences and lived realities of the life happenings they are confronted with, particularly when their positionalities are called into question and point to a need of some kind of action. One example from the same social problem of community survival is a *REVERSAL* template, where community organisers' understanding of the story of the we-group in question (binding past–present–future) is one of a reversal of their group status, from an original positive situation to a subsequent negative one. In following this logic, despite a *reversal* of fortunes, it follows that these community organisers enter the thinking problem of community survival in two ways, either *constructively*, where history, as an intellectual mode of thought, comprises an *instrument for positive outcomes*, or more *assertively*, where it forms a means of fostering *group empowerment*. As these examples demonstrate, both our history-as-interpretive-filter and history-as-content-configuration templates serve to harmonise our understandings of prior times that have already taken place, but are nonetheless present, with a moving forward or towards what is unspecified and not fully determined and defined, yet full of potential surprises.

In this process, as our history-as-content-configuration helps guide how we account for our space of experience, it is our history-as-interpretive-filter that, I suggest, drives our thinking across the threshold into our horizon of expectations, helping us deal with any unforeseen circumstances by being open to what is to come, yet by also having a standby rationale, or logic, to account for whatever shows up. Accordingly, history-as-interpretive-filter not only provides a lens for reading the impact of our prior experiences on the present (in the now of our sense-making), but at the same time, in using the same logic, it helps give meaning to the things to come; it provides a logic for reading and integrating new experiences into how we make sense of the world. Brought together, the templates we use constitute our incognizant way of looking at the probable course and outcome of where we anticipate our thinking to lead us.

How can history overpower the transgenerational atmosphere's influence on the actualisation of people's historical consciousness?

To counter the transgenerational atmosphere's negative aspects and to specifically think strategically for our future well-being and flourishing, it is our ability to use history for reflexive thought and action that, I argue, can help harmonise our space of experience and horizon of expectations so that new horizons, new possibilities, are created. In this perspective, if the after-effects of historical trauma, as expressed by the transgenerational atmosphere, hover over our *now*, they can influence the quality of our relationship with our space of experience and how we use it to engage with our horizon of expectations. Following this logic, the transgenerational atmosphere would possibly control how we access our space of experience, as a resource pool we draw from for constructing and acting upon the historical knowledge we produce. This controlling effect would thus require us to take control of our autonomy when engaging with our space of experience. Since the transgenerational atmosphere's sway is invisible, the idea is to use our experiences of prior times in ways that we deem to be healthy, positive or productive, and to do so self-reflexively. Through accessing, disrupting and nuancing the knowledge we already possess of the original cataclysmic event and its after-effects, the aim would thus be to dissipate the dark clouds that hover over us, to disrupt, weaken and recast them, and to learn to live with the inherited trauma that imposes itself on our now. Such a transformation would ultimately require giving our interpretation of the ongoing traumatic experience a new form of relevant meaning. At a fundamental level, what matters is the *quality* of the relationship we hold with the trauma we inherit. Although trauma has a lot of negatives, it can also be positive, making us who we are today. Maximising trauma's possibilities requires giving the representations that we tend to produce of who we are and of our history a new life, putting the

pain to rest through reflexive analysis and turning what arises into a usable past, into a reinvigorating history. The aim is to transform the effects of trauma's dark shadow into a cultural inheritance, where the original cataclysmic event can come to constitute a life-defining memory that holds the promise of new and better beginnings. Such a commitment can contribute to making inheritors resilient and not overwhelmed by an overarching presence of the pain they carry.

One important way of better grasping the transgenerational atmosphere's controlling effects is by examining the conceptual resources we employ for making historical sense of the cataclysmic event's original occurrence and original trauma to see how they tend to be enacted in our now-moment engagements when reflecting on them. This approach can provide insight into our sense-making and the extent to which we take critical distance from the knowledge claims we produce. Upon grasping the stance we tend to consequently employ, we can question the gaps in our knowledge and the reasons why these questions are important to us, from which we can perhaps complexify what we know, recognise the need for care and nuance, and from there eventually develop explanatory understandings of history needed to transform our transgenerational trauma into a usable interpretation of prior times, a usable past, a reinvigorating history. In thus exercising our ability for reflexive thought and action, we can perhaps ease the pathways to concrete healing, which, in preparing the ground, would ultimately be done by trained professionals or therapists. Only through such processing can inheritors perhaps come closer to feeling whole, as complete and fulfilled persons. The underlying assumption here is that people advance in life, perhaps becoming more authentic as persons, when they problematise, question, adapt what they take for granted – that is, how the world works and their place in it – to new considerations, and reintegrate what they gain as new self-knowledge into a newer, more relevant, self-understanding. The way to get there, I argue, is to ultimately come to view and construct historical knowledge as something complex, hard to pinpoint, and that consequently needs to be handled with care. Because knowledge is fluid, multiform and multilayered, it cannot easily be simplified. Because of history's subtlety and grey areas, nuance and sensitivity are, moreover, important. Adopting such a multimodal stance should lead inheritors to seek more certain understandings of the original cataclysmic event and their ongoing given situation, all the while knowing that they can never be attained. The ability to take critical distance from one's knowledge claims should be central to their sense-making, as should being careful about the statements they make.

In this manner, history can give the inheritors of trauma the means to generate the necessary mindset and attitudes for establishing their integrity and dignity as humans (seeking to attain a balanced, harmonised and restored state of equilibrium). This outcome is what history, as a *teacher of life*, can ultimately do. Through repeating this reflexive process, the trauma we inherit can be integrated and our now zone can subsequently be strengthened. As our self-reflexivity plays a central role in this form of becoming, it can connect to a conscious aim of seeking to widen our sense-making capacities and to thereby feel more complete, enabling us to believe that we are headed in an intended and coveted direction of growth and expansion. This line of thinking can be found in the vast literature supporting spiritual and mystical approaches to consciousness, healing and self-realisation. One influential example emerges from the work of Thomas Hübl (2023), a spiritual facilitator, who suggests that the historical trauma we inherit is alive in us and requires to be integrated, put to rest, thereby enabling us to live our lives as authentically as possible. According to Hübl (2023), exercising our reflexivity can help us develop a more coherent self-understanding, which can lead to resiliency, generating a shift in how we position ourselves regarding the world, one that is different from before and that can be viewed as in our favour. The idea is that the clearer we are about our authentic self, the better the vision we will have for the future (Hübl, 2023). Developing such coherency and resiliency involves a process of what Hübl names *presencing*, which means moving towards our highest future possibility, giving a more meaningful purpose to life. Be it ordinary or ambitious, this purpose can contribute to restoring a sense of dignity and stability, leading us to feel more complete and balanced (Hübl, 2023).

Part two

What do key thinkers in education say about historical trauma and its teaching?

For Bakó and Zana (2020), inheritors can alter the transgenerational atmosphere's impact by way of genuine dialogue and understanding that can lead to distancing the lingering effects of inherited trauma from their living present. Through genuine dialogue and understanding, the wounds of the past can

be separated from the lived experience of the present. For this change to happen, the individual inheritor's authentic *me* needs to be strengthened, enabling them to develop their own self-identity and self-narrative. Through therapy, the therapist-healer helps the inheritor discover their true self and to re-narrativise who they are accordingly. The aim is to assist them to identify and differentiate the workings and impact of the transgenerational atmosphere from their living present. They are to discover their 'original' or authentic self, draw boundaries around what emerges and use that to redefine their relationship with 'the history of [their] family, events, and other [life] episodes' (Bakó and Zana, 2020, p. 83). They are to see these relationships in a new light, where they take critical distance from preconceived ways of perceiving the world, and adapt them to their newer realities, where they finally integrate this new frame of understanding as a part of the newer *me*. In a way, there is an adaptation to a new changing reality, where inheritors realise they are their own person with a right to their own understandings and feelings and where they can thus adapt their views of the inherited legacy correspondingly. They still connect with the historical legacy of the past, but they no longer merge with it. They see the past as *leading to who they are, but not as constituting who they are*. The new *me* becomes their core self, replacing the *we*-experience they share with their parents or predecessors. Through this process of integration, of becoming whole, authentically speaking, inheritors 'regain the space to live on their own terms, and to build their own identity' (Bakó and Zana, 2020, p. 87).

The contributions of main educational thinkers who have reflected on the teaching and learning of historically traumatic events can provide insights and nuances that can help bring Bakó and Zana's notion of producing a new authentic *me* (a *me* living according to my own true purpose and my own pathway) to life for a more historically minded audience. History educationalists, and even theorists of education who have contributed to bettering our understanding of the teaching of history, generally demonstrate an explicit concern to find productive ways of engaging with prior times, of better understanding the processes behind the creation of historical knowledge and the sharing of that information with learners. Core aspects of Bakó and Zana's approach can be found in these works, despite their overall focus on mainly non-inheritors' interactions, rather than those of direct descendants, with knowledge gained on historically traumatic events. The central notion of re-narrativising the self through reflexive thinking is very present, and this arises from the fundamental goal of helping learners stimulate and strengthen their personal understanding of what it means to ultimately be human. This coveted goal points to the importance of self-reflexivity for accepting the need for change in attitudes and mindsets, especially when it comes to re-narrativising the self through capturing how one creates and enacts one's historical knowledge in a multimodal way.

Canadian psychoanalyst Deborah Britzman (1998, 2024), for example, renowned for bringing Sigmund Freud's ideas to education, is keen to help learners re-narrativise the self through accessing the deep intimate reaches of who they truly are, permitting them to reframe their self-knowledge through contending with any inner conflicts that arise when looking at historical trauma. This reframing is to be achieved through profound introspection and self-discovery by identifying and disrupting pre-given normalised narratives or emotions. Central to this process is the resistance (which arises from the surfacing of inner conflicts and emotions) that learners bring to their sense-making. Resistance functions as the main precondition for initiating learning. For Britzman, knowledge about historical trauma becomes *difficult* because it arouses emotions, bringing disruptive inner conflicts to the fore. Emotions and inner conflicts particularly arise when the coherency of learners' self-knowledge – of who they are and what they know – is challenged, making the knowledge they receive hard to digest or handle. For Britzman, as difficult knowledge can unsettle learners' identity and self-image, it is precisely learners' resistance to it that can engender learning. Learning happens when one is open to engaging with the inner conflicts that arise. Building on Freud, Britzman calls this engagement *learning from*, which involves the gaining of insight or, more specifically, 'the learner's attachment to, and implication, in knowledge' (Britzman, 1998, p. 117). Insight entails gaining input into the learner's own life and the potential of resistance that may impede grasping and merging the differences between the self's knowledge and the other's knowledge. The goal is to question what these differences could signify for the learner's current life. Specifying further, Britzman states that 'learning from difficult knowledge' involves 'the confronted self[,] [vacillating] ... between resistance as symptom and the working through of resistance' (Britzman, 1998, pp. 118–19). Ultimately, what matters are two component parts of the learning process, both 'the self's relation to its own otherness [resistance/emotions and inner conflicts]' and 'the self's relation to the other's otherness' (Britzman, 1998, p. 134). At the very core, when looking through the lens of the victim-inheritor, the aim is for individuals to feel fulfilled as humans by trying to attain a complete

understanding of who they are for moving forward (while recognising the eventuality of new meanings and new directions) and, more specifically, to tolerate the reality and the pain of the trauma (Britzman, 1998, 2024). For direct descendants of historical trauma, the idea is to learn to live with loss, to harness what cannot be overcome and to not try to overcome what cannot be overcome. A way needs to be found to make loss a part of their life, to find a way to organise and use loss to their benefit, especially since life always still has something to offer.

Canadian history educator Roger Simon (2004, 2005) also provides some input. He is known for seeking to find ways to help learners essentially *decentre* themselves from their egos by getting to better know the self through better knowing the other. This decentring is to be attained through receiving and learning from testimony. Simon is interested in testimonies from the past and what they demand of us ethically in the present. His main concern here is with the testimony of traumatic pasts and how listening to it properly (that is, actively and reflexively) can open up possibilities for change – possibilities of accepting ‘new histories and altered subjectivities’ (Simon, 2005, p. 135). For Simon, learning from testimony ultimately refers to learning to *live with ghosts* – or to *being touched by the past*, by the testament of another. Being touched means accepting testimonies as a form of *counsel*, which enable us to go beyond our own egos and to shift our own unfolding stories in unanticipated ways (which at times may be difficult). This engagement requires being open to reassessing and revising our stories, altering the stories that guide our social relations and commitments (Simon, 2004, p. 190). It is thus by listening carefully to the testimony of others that we can learn and grow and become more human. Listening attentively requires paying attention to our compulsion to ask difficult questions (even unanswerable ones) that press for answers. The key here is to look for absences in the testimony that solicit questions, which if known would provide a fuller picture. Double attentiveness is thus needed, that of ‘listening to the testimony of the one who is speaking and of listening to the questions we find ourselves asking when [we face] this testimony’ (Simon, 2004, p. 195). This is where the self-reflexive component comes in, where we ask questions about our own questions, aiming to better understand why the information we seek is important. In thus bearing witness to testimony, the learner *acknowledges* the historical trauma’s heavy weight, *remembers* to keep the counsel they receive alive and acts in *consequence*, demonstrating the counsel’s worthy impact on how they perceive and navigate the world henceforth (Simon and Eppert, 1997).

From a broader angle, some thinkers suggest having learners be cognizant of the group narratives that accompany memories of historical trauma. These narratives usually tell learners, especially those from victim-descendant communities, who their self-identifying we-group is, what they have lived and how they should think, feel and act in consequence. The idea is to disrupt these narratives and to grasp the wider sense-making frames as well as the underlying political and power dynamics related to questions of identity and their impact on the functioning of the collective self and on individual members of the affected we-groups. These coveted goals point to the importance of examining the representations of the original cataclysmic event and its after-effects self-reflexively, which again suggests the need for a more multimodal approach to one’s sense-making.

For Israeli social psychologist and history educator Tsafirir Goldberg (2017, 2018), to move forward, it is important to keep learners’ emotions, sense of right and wrong, and self-identification in mind when addressing historically traumatic events. Goldberg argues that at a collective-level historical trauma is not a re-lived experience, as psychoanalytical approaches would suggest, but rather a culturally mediated memory. Learners may be on the defensive, employing ‘preconceived narratives and attribution biases’ for processing information and evaluating evidence, especially when their moral status and consequent positive social identity as a group are felt to be threatened (Goldberg, 2018, p. 156). Contrary to representing knowledge that is difficult, the reason for this defensiveness is that memories of in-group trauma function more like an asset, positively impacting the in-group’s self-image and self-esteem (Goldberg, 2018). In following the logic of social identity theory, where in-groups constantly compare themselves to their surrounding outgroups, Goldberg suggests that both victimhood and the memory of collective trauma are attractive identity markers. Cypriot curriculum scholar Michalinos Zembylas (2014, 2015) offers a more critical perspective. The problem for Zembylas (2015) is that emotions related to trauma are co-opted politically to justify ‘collective narratives and ideologies’ (p. 5). Politicised emotions are used to distinguish the other (the perpetrator group and their descendants) and to structure boundaries, providing ‘stark us-and-them dichotomies’ (p. 28). Consequently, the aim would be to disrupt the strong hold that hegemonic narratives have over emotional understandings of group identity and collective memory (Zembylas, 2015). The solution for Zembylas lies in questioning and disrupting

normalised ways of using emotions that create us–them dichotomies and to discover new ways of (creatively) reframing the self, the other, and the relationship between them. His notion of *critical emotional praxis* offers a framework for grasping the politicised use of emotions for such purposes. Through understanding how emotions impact us both individually and collectively and how they can be used for fostering openness, newer ways of engaging with others can surface.

Like Goldberg and Zembylas, other authors' work on the teaching of difficult histories – knowledge beyond a psychoanalytic mindset, espousing a social studies approach instead – demonstrates the prevalence of emotions in the learning process. While such *learning about*, which Britzman differentiates from *learning from*, assumes the learner's detachment from trauma because of an elicited distance by centring on 'the acquisition of qualities, attributes, and facts' (Britzman, 1998, p. 117), it would nonetheless appear that emotions still foster resistance or indifference among learners when engaging with the history being taught (Epstein and Peck, 2018; Garrett, 2011; Jones, 2022; Levy and Sheppard, 2018; Miles, 2019; Psaltis et al., 2017).

What is the practical life methodology? What does it do? How can it help?

As both a theoretical and empirical framework for grasping our everyday life uses of history, the practical life methodology serves to examine the workings of individuals' historical consciousness and its impact on their sense-making when negotiating where they stand on social issues with historical roots. From a 'mind-in-society' perspective (Wertsch, 1998, 2002), this framework pays attention to individual actors' mental functioning in relation to its embeddedness in their different cultures of belonging and communities of thought. In recognising history's multifaceted nature and fluidity, this focus permits investigating the relevance individuals attribute to history in ways that incorporate structured forms of knowledge production that are meaningful to them. In following this logic, the practical life methodology goes beyond looking at historical consciousness's role in organising narrative understandings of time's flow and more closely examines how individuals' cognitive and cultural constructions of historical knowledge correlate with the decisions they make around engaging with the world and contributing to it. To understand how historical consciousness informs one's decision-making as temporal orientation, the practical life methodology looks at the cognitive mechanisms that help frame uses of historical information so that meaning is created and at the ways in which such meanings consequently function so that individuals evaluate where they stand and know how to proceed.

The main concern here is with how we employ the conceptual resources or the schematic narrative templates we possess – the resources that permit us to do history and to be historical – to interpret the experiences of change and contingency that emerge in time's regular flow and that challenge us. To better capture this process, the practical life methodology, I believe, taps into history's differing life orientation mechanisms. It looks at the many ways in which history impacts our day-to-day positioning and helps to decipher the extent to which we are reflexive in our thinking. To these ends, the methodology's key notion of enactment is relevant. It permits grasping the inherent logic to how real-time historical knowledge is constructed and whether there is an ability to take critical distance from one's knowledge claims. Analysing enactment refers to investigating how both individuals' history-as-interpretive-filter and history-as-content-configuration templates, in their correlation in individuals' sense-making, are put into effect in real-time, which can be grasped by looking at the way individuals' view, construct and employ historical knowledge when making their claims. Enactment demonstrates the type of mindset individuals employ for structuring the historical information they produce, giving it some epistemic grounding that permits individuals to make statements they believe are relevant considering the historical social problem they seek to address. Of importance here, taking critical distance shows the extent of individuals' reflexivity in their sense-making, the degree to which they handle the knowledge they create and employ with care, and whether they account for their resulting claims and thus take responsibility for the consequences of their thinking. The more reflexive individuals are, the more they nuance their thinking, and the more they take critical distance from their knowledge claims, the more, I assume, they will be able to appreciate experiences and perspectives other than their own.

When applying and enacting our templates, it is also important to keep in mind that our emotions are prevalent in our sense-making and accordingly culminate in each of the stances that emerge. This prevalence appears to, moreover, correlate strongly with moral reasoning. In looking at inheritors' enactment of templates, their emotions or affect, in close correspondence to their sense of right or

wrong, I argue, are probably what guide the choice and use of their templates. In requiring a consequent response, I would, however, say that it is inheritors' construction and use of historical knowledge that end up informing the stances they adopt. Having said this, the stances that arise only offer a glimpse of how individuals put their cognitive frames into use at one given moment in time. If a particular type of template and stance comes to surface, this does not mean that inheritors have a clear predisposition for organising their sense-making in a similar manner for the same issue all the time. People's positionalities and sense-making are fluid and often change. Only by looking at them over a consistent period of time can we perhaps develop more concrete assumptions of their social positioning. With this consideration, what the practical life methodology seeks to offer is an *entryway* into people's minds for gaining insight into how their historical sense-making functions and how it influences the way they look at the world and take a stand in one given moment in the ongoing flow of their sense-making.

What are the practical life methodology's pedagogical implications?

Since historical consciousness's practical life methodology looks at the structure and enactment of our sense-making and at the potentials it holds for effectuating positive mental change, I argue that employing this methodology as a pedagogical tool can enable inheritors to discover who they are and how they function as historical beings. The methodology can raise awareness of inheritors' historicity and how they consequently use historical knowledge to construct the social meanings they need to navigate their worlds. The main idea relates to helping foster inheritors' reflexive thinking and the broadening of horizons. As such, the methodology permits capturing and analysing historical consciousness's cognitive and cultural underpinnings and the ways in which they inform inheritors' epistemic positioning. In investigating inheritors' enactment of the templates they use for structuring their sense-making, the methodology allows for a layered understanding of how inheritors employ historical knowledge to give meaning to time's flow, along with the underlying rationales that justify their visions. The extent to which they nuance their thinking and take critical distance from their claims can consequently come to surface. These workings, if exercised pedagogically, can help foster a genuine appreciation of differing points of view, especially when compared across inheritors. Coming into contact with this kind of information is useful, I argue, for self-analytical purposes. If done properly, developing such an understanding can tap into the sense-making structures that frame inheritors' lived realities and life orientations.

In following the practical life methodology (Zanazanian, 2025), two narrative tasks can help capture the workings of inheritors' historical consciousness. The first writing task comprises a guided reflection piece, where the inheritor is asked to describe a moment in time where they had to justify the importance of using history for making sense of the historical trauma they have inherited, or for sharing it with others, or for helping raise awareness of it. The key here is to capture how they justify the importance of using history to help attain their objective. This task helps capture the history-as-interpretive-filter templates they employ for making sense of the historical trauma. The second writing task consists of the same inheritor composing an open-ended history of the historical trauma from the very beginnings till the very end, as best they can remember. This task allows them to capture the history-as-content-configuration templates that they use for remembering the event, which would, in all probability, resemble their we-group's historical memory of the event. The aim is to purposefully get at inheritors' positioning regarding their cataclysmic life happening, where they are immersed in the context of its problematic realities, with the specific aim of grasping their sense-making and position-taking in light of explicitly stated challenges to their overall well-being. Through a complex of narrative analysis techniques (see Zanazanian, 2025, for complete details), the goal is to thus reduce the narratives that emerge to their core guiding idea, to their core storyline, where they capture the skeletal structure of what the protagonists of their two writing tasks, history (for the guided reflection piece) and the we-group (for the open-ended historical writing task), are doing, what their leading roles in the emerging narratives are and what they ultimately function to be. Separating what arises thematically, where similar themes are collapsed, non-transferable definitions are given and metaphorical thinking is used to provide visual cues and images, can then help shape what the templates look like.

In turn, to seize enactment requires looking at whether inheritors, in their narrative sense-making, are consequently self-aware of their thinking, whether they believe the statements they make, whether they show any consideration of their claims, whether they believe knowledge is external or internal to them and whether they are certain or uncertain of the knowledge they possess. Apart from the multimodal stance, discussed earlier in this article, other examples of stances that can emerge – again

based on prior research – include the unimodal, corrective, experiential and ideological standpoints. These stances demonstrate other ways in which inheritors' emerging templates could be employed when they confront their cataclysmic life happening. In thus positioning themselves, unimodal and corrective inheritors would view and construct historical knowledge as something that is inherently objective and external to them. Both these stances view history as something tangible and ready to use when engaging with reality, as if it were simply a matter of copying knowledge and pasting it to a given context. For the corrective stance, there is the added idea that 'true' or 'objective' history can easily be misunderstood, and some correcting is thus needed to restore its balanced understanding. Experiential inheritors, in turn, would view and construct history as something inherently subjective, internal to the self and thus relative to the individual or situation at hand. History is consequently found and applied through deep introspection of one's own experiences and those of one's family, ancestors and community for guidance. Ideological inheritors would view and construct historical knowledge as something inherently political and emancipatory, where they challenge mainstream knowledge and seek to liberate others from what is believed to be oppressive.

In grasping these workings, I believe, the practical life methodology can offer insight into fostering inheritors' personal growth and development, helping them to start to understand what it means to become fuller and more complete individuals, humans, members of society and beyond, while also recognising the same need and drive in others. This form of inner expansion can also contribute to improving the situation of their we-group and larger society, particularly by discovering ways in which these latter can develop and grow, while also maintaining their integrity and dignity as collectives. With such a perspective in mind, the practical life methodology should always be envisioned as a self-reflexive tool for raising awareness of individuals' epistemic sense-making by particularly enabling inheritors to reflect on their evolving positionalities and to account for their consequent knowledge claims when seeking to attain positive change. The purpose of this use would be to help inheritors embrace and account for their subjective experiences and beliefs, and to see how it can enable them to attain their objectives. What matters here, I argue, is to engage in an overall process of exploration, self-discovery and personal expansion, permitting inheritors to evolve at their own pace, according to their own needs and abilities for constructing and acting upon the historical knowledge they create and use.

Conclusion

In this reflection piece, I theorised the relationship that exists between the intergenerational trauma people inherit from unexpected cataclysmic life happenings and the functioning of their historical consciousness. I particularly examined the link between the transgenerational atmosphere that takes hold of these inheritors' mental functioning and the idea of history-in-the-now that works to help capture their collective trauma's influence on their sense-making for giving meaning to and positioning themselves regarding the original cataclysmic event. If we agree that history is embodied in our thoughts, emotions and moral reasoning, then the expressions of the different types of knowledge we produce for consequently navigating the world can be seen as comprising the output of our historical consciousness's workings in relation to the trauma descendants inherit. When learning about the process that leads to these outputs, inheritors can particularly gain insight into better seizing how their self-reflexivity connects to self-discovery and inner expansion. In helping inheritors become aware of these workings and how they function in their minds, they can consequently work to weaken the transgenerational atmosphere's strong hold on their sense of presence and contributions to the world. Through self-reflexively applying historical consciousness's practical life methodology, they can come to expand as humans through becoming able to objectify what they do not see as part of their subjective selves, but that which holds them back, and to transform what emerges into newer and more authentic understandings of their self-identity. Ultimately, the key for inheritors is to listen attentively to what they are saying to consequently fill any gaps that arise in their self-understanding and to question why they do not know what they do not know, why they want to find this information out and what this (lack of) input says about who they are, where they are headed and what needs to be done. Fundamentally, we are all on different pathways of becoming, and there is no one sure way of coming to terms with our transgenerational atmosphere, its control over our sense of being and ability to act and how we work to transform it for the better. The very first step, as I have tried to show, is to engage with our historical consciousness.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

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