

# **“Regression of a critical theory – On the fate of the ‘Psychoanalytic Movement’”<sup>1</sup>**

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To what extent Freudian theory can be said to be ‘critical’ is soon said. It addresses those inexplicable phenomena – Sphinx-riddles like hysteria or anti-Semitism – in the face of which ‘traditionally’ structured theories tend to fail. To do justice to the ambivalent nature of such enigmatic phenomena it combines explanations with so-called ‘general interpretations’. It sets as its goal the decoding of ostensibly natural phenomena as essentially social, to make it possible for individuals to emancipate themselves from repetition compulsions, enabling them to correct their own behavioral habits. Integrating as it does both explanations and interpretations psycho-analysis is thus an unusual science, empowering human beings suffering from their own culture to break, to a degree, the spell under which they live out their lives. Faced with the intolerable antagonism between wish and reality they react with the construction of defensive rituals, the invention of a ‘private religion’. Psycho-analysis shows them the way out of this cul-de-sac of neurotic ‘pseudo-religions’ by pointing the way back to the original conflict between wish-fulfillment and reality upon which this ‘religiosity’ is based, thus clearing the way for creative and novel compromise solutions. Other social sciences – especially sociology – could take a leaf from the book of psycho-analysis when it comes to reflecting their own murky involvement with theories which have a potential for both domination and emancipation.

Critical theories have, like books, their fate; they emerge from concrete social contexts, historical situations, whose specific problematic they formulate. Temporally bound, yet at the same time seeking transcendence – seeking to escape their own historical specificity – they lay claim to truth and validity beyond the concrete situation in which they are formulated,

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meaning: for all eternity. Yet they are no less, in their turn, a product of their times, subject to abuse, distortion, revival or indifference. It is the changing social relationships within which critical interpretations (rather: their supporters, specific interpretive communities) seek to survive which decide their fate. That aspect of a theory which makes it timebound passes on with it; that aspect which opposes the spirit of the times, seeking escape or transcendence, has a chance to live on. In every new epoch in which the core insights of a theory are to be passed on, it – the theory – must shed those aspects which seem outdated. Each new era reshapes its relationship to the past. The conflict between obsolescence and relevance does not end as long as the theory has an impact, i.e. remains alive. Its living tradition [Wirkungsgeschichte] is nothing other than the ceaseless debate [Auseinandersetzung] on the question: which parts belong to yesteryear and which to the future. Has a new truth found expression in a theory, so it is buried by each ‘present’, and needs, time and again, to be uncovered anew. Critical theories hence go through periods of decline and revival.

Freud’s critical theory evolved in the three decades leading up to the first World War. In the following two decades, i.e. between 1914 and 1934, psycho-analysis – meaning Freud and the Psychoanalysts – problematised itself. Two contradictory interpretations on the logical status of psycho-analysis evolved – on the validity of which psychoanalysts and non-psychoanalysts are still at odds a century after its birth.

„Psychoanalytic movement“ is the self-appellation of a group of dissenting intellectuals seeking a way out of the war- and pogrom-producing culture which surrounds us. „It hardly needs to be said“, Freud wrote, representing in this an entire generation of social critics, „that a culture which [like ours] leaves such a large number of its members dissatisfied and rebellious has neither the prospect of surviving for very long, nor does it deserve to do so.“<sup>2</sup> The goal which united the innovators and reformers, rebels and revolutionaries, secessionists, malcontents, dissidents of the pre-war period and the interbellum was to save the bourgeois world from that atavism against which all culture is directed: barbarity. The most unassuming formulation for this program is one in turn found by Freud, when he proclaims the goal to be the creation of a culture in which „no-one is oppressed“.<sup>3</sup> The politicizing intellectuals (menschewiks, bolschewiks,

2 Freud, Sigmund (1927): *Die Zukunft einer Illusion*. In: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol.. XIV, Frankfurt am Main 1963, p. 333.

3 Ibid., p. 374.

anarcho-syndicalists), the therapists and researchers of the unconscious gathered around Freud, the painters of the “Brücke” [Bridge] or the “Blaue Reiter” [Blue Horseman], the lyricists and internationalists around periodicals like *Der Sturm* [The Storm] or *Die Aktion* (Franz Pfemfert), the Russian futurists, the Akmeists and „Serapionsbrüder“, their Parisian colleagues around André Breton and the Frankfurter friends of Max Horkheimer: all of them could have subscribed to this formula.

The specifically Freudian project of an ‘emancipation from superfluous inner compulsion’<sup>4</sup> is not easily placed within the established system of the sciences. He himself often misrepresented and obscured it. The science of the (repressed) unconscious is an ambiguous one. To many it appears as a „natural science of the soul“, leading the way towards a human technology [Humantechnik]; for others it is a hermeneutic *sui generis*, which refuses to capitulate before ostensibly ‘meaningless’ texts, practices and institutions.<sup>5</sup> The peculiar combination of „scientific“ and „scholarly“ [geisteswissenschaftlicher] methods within psycho-analysis (i.e. of explanation and understanding)<sup>6</sup> show, on examination, their ‘object’ – the cultural institutions and the soul itself – to be ambiguous. Depending on the specific biographical or cultural situation, these ‘objects’ may appear either ‘natural’ – i.e. as apparently immutable – or as reversible artefacts. Psycho-analysis is a science of a special kind. The fascination which it exerts has its origins in the fact that at its heart it harbors a critique – inexplicable on scientific presuppositions – which makes of its object a subject. This psychoanalytic critique remains in scientific guise, unobtrusive. Why? Because it has to take the pseudo-natural status of its ‘objects’ (patients, clients) seriously for as long as it takes them to liberate themselves from it.<sup>7</sup> For this reason there coexist in Freud’s texts two terminologies. His concepts derive, first of all,

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- 4 "The emancipation from superfluous inner compulsion would be the first revolution to provide the human race with genuine relief." Ferenczi, Sándor (1908): *Psychoanalyse und Pädagogik*. In: Ferenczy (1927, 1938): *Bausteine zur Psychoanalyse*, vol. III, Bern 1964, p. 12 f.
- 5 C.f. Bernfeld, Siegfried (1932): „Der Begriff der Deutung in der Psychoanalyse“. In: Bernfeld (1969-1971): *Antiautoritäre Erziehung und Psychoanalyse. Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 2, Frankfurt, p. 236-286. Idem (1941): „Psychoanalyse als Gespräch“ [„The Facts of Observation in Psychoanalysis.“]. In: *Psyche*, vol. 32, 1978, p. 355-373.
- 6 C.f. Apel, Karl-Otto (1968): „Szientistik, Hermeneutik, Ideologiekritik. Entwurf einer Wissenschaftslehre in erkenntnisanthropologischer Sicht.“ In: idem *Transformation der Philosophie*, vol. II, Frankfurt 1973, p. 96-127. Habermas, Jürgen [1963-1977]: *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften*. (5th, expanded edition) Frankfurt am Main 1982.
- 7 C.f. Dahmer, H. (2001): *Soziologie nach einem barbarischen Jahrhundert*. Vienna, p. 31-42.

from the literature of the natural sciences of the second half of the 19th century – i.e. from the works of anti-metaphysicians like Helmholtz and Mach – secondly, from Schelling’s philosophy of nature, which Freud’s academic teachers had rejected, to place in its stead a new, materialist-physicalist physiology.<sup>8</sup> Freud himself interpreted his transition from neurophysiology to psycho-analysis, and from the therapy of neurosis to an explication of the critical theory of society – upon which his procedure of psychoanalytic dialogue was based –, as a return to the philosophic interests of his youth: „After the life-long detour via the natural sciences, medicine and psychotherapy, my interests [after 1923] revived in those cultural problems which once held spellbound the youth in whom thought had only barely awakened.“<sup>9</sup> At the same time he never ceased to insist that the psychology of the unconscious which he founded on a therapy of neuroses – and which he gladly called a „technique“ – was a „natural science“. After explicating [im Anschluß an] his thesis according to which there are, in essence, only two sciences, one concerned with nature, and the other concerned with the soul<sup>10</sup>, he subsumes the science of the soul under that of nature: „Psycho-analysis also is a natural science.“<sup>11</sup> A formulation which does not entirely satisfy him. For he adds the perplexed question: „What else is it supposed to be?“<sup>12</sup> To this question there is, elsewhere in his work, an implicit answer. But he hesitated, with his new psychology of the unconscious (which made as much a break with the ‘natural’ attitude as it did with the traditional „conception of humanity“), to recognize explicitly the special status of a non-natural science, i.e. to ally himself with Nietzsche. The latter had distinguished, in 1886 (in aphorism 355, devoted to the genealogy of the concept „Knowledge“, in the expanded edition of *The Gay Science*) between „critical“ or „unnatural“ thought (the latter taking the ‘strangely-familiar’ [Nicht-Fremde] as its object), from „traditional“ thought as follows:

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- 8 C.f. Bernfeld, Siegfried (1949): „Freuds wissenschaftliche Anfänge.“ In: idem and Suzanne Cassirer Bernfeld (1981): *Bausteine der Freud-Biographik*. (ed. Ilse Grubrich-Simitis) Frankfurt am Main, p. 112-147.
- 9 Freud (1935): „Nachschrift zur ‘Selbstdarstellung’“. In: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. XVI, Frankfurt 1961, p. 32.
- 10 "Strictly speaking there are only two sciences, Psychology, pure and applied, and the Science of Nature [Naturkunde]." Freud (1933): *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*. In: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. XV, Frankfurt 1961, p. 194.
- 11 Freud ([1938] 1940): „Some elementary Lessons in Psycho-Analysis.“ In: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. XVII, Frankfurt 1966, p. 143.
- 12 Ibid.

„Is it not, perchance, the instinct of fear that bids us on to knowledge? Is the cheerfulness of the knower not perhaps a frolicking over regained security? [...] Oh this smugness of the knower! One should look at their principles and their solutions to riddles of the universe in this light! [...] Even the most thoughtful of their number are of the opinion that at the very least the familiar is more easily intelligible than the unfamiliar; it is held for instance to be methodically necessary to take one's point of departure from the 'inner world', from the 'facts of consciousness', since that is supposed to be the world which is familiar to us! Error upon error! What is known is the familiar; and what is familiar is the most difficult of all to 'understand', i.e. to see as a problem, i.e. to perceive as strange, far away, 'beyond us'... The big security of the natural sciences in relation to psychology and the critique of the elements of consciousness (unnatural sciences, one is tempted to call them) is based exactly on this, that it takes what is strange as its object: whereas it is almost contradictory and nonsensical to want to relate to what is un-strange in the first place.“<sup>13</sup>

Freud's „revolutionary“ discovery was the decoding of that prototype of all mental disease, hysteria, as a socially induced malady, a suffering from society (Ferenczi<sup>14</sup>). There is, in Freud's discovery – to formulate it metapsychologically – a twofold revision of existing boundaries. The first of these, the limitation and relativisation of the sphere of consciousness (the 'I') with respect to the sphere of what is psychically unconscious, is generally perceived as Freud's most important innovation. This tends however to obscure his second discovery, namely that no-man's-land between consciousness and the unconscious – or between „spirit“ and „nature“ – in which neurotic symptoms and cultural institutions (i.e. private and collective „religions“) are located. The neurosis-therapist and diagnostician of culture stumbled on a class of phenomena which, since they behave like facts of nature, are erroneously classified as „natural“, whereas in fact we're dealing here with masked [larvierte] products (or symptoms). More precisely: procreations [Hervorbringungen] whose genesis remain outside the consciousness of their authors. This second Freudian boundary revision makes visible a potential extension of the sphere of the conscious ego, now capable – under favourable circumstances – of remembering his/her own forgotten authorship, and that means: regain control over products which

13 Nietzsche, Friedrich (1882, 1887): *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* ('la gaya scienza'). Aphorism 355. In: Nietzsche (1980): *Sämtliche Werke (Kritische Studienausgabe)*, vol. 3, Munich, p. 593 pp.

14 Ferenczi, Sándor (1908): „Psychoanalyse und Pädagogik.“ Ibid. vol. III, Bern, Stuttgart, p. 22. Ibid. (1928): „Über den Lehrgang des Psychoanalytikers.“ Ibid., p. 426.

have taken on a life of their own and have come to exercise a peculiar compulsion. Freud, a modern Oedipus, sought to solve the riddle of hysteria. He discovered in it, serendipitously, the riddle of culture. To challenge it the pupil of Ernst Brücke had to break out of the „scientific“ frame of reference of his teachers – the physicalist-oriented medical establishment – from within which social suffering (the suffering of socialization) is derived either from an as yet undetermined organic defect or is denounced as malingering. The (re-)discovery of a class of pseudo-natural institutions of the soul and of culture, the genesis of which lie in the shadow of consciousness, and whose resultant compulsion over individuals and cultures can be broken by anamnesis – i.e. the uncovering of their genealogy – was Freud’s real achievement. Psycho-analysis is hence neither a natural nor a social science, but instead an ‘un-natural science’ which, critically combining explanation and understanding, confronts head-on that in ourselves and in our culture which is alienating and ominous. Psychoanalytic understanding starts with the estrangement of the apparently familiar (in the „analysis of defense-mechanisms“<sup>15</sup>) and leads to the discovery of the familiar in the strange (as in *Totem and Taboo*<sup>16</sup>).

‘Critical’ theories are critical inasmuch as they distantiate themselves from common sense. Their ‘reception’ turns out, mostly, to be a process in which the new insights which they formulate are watered down and reappropriated, step by step, by the common-sense attitudes they originally rejected. The history of psycho-analysis is the history of such an erosion, a history of the forgetting of the non-conformist insights of Freud, i.e. those ‘exaggerations’ which make up what is true about the new theory of the soul and its history. (Adorno<sup>17</sup>) The history of the group of intellectuals calling themselves the „Psychoanalytic Movement“ is the history of the transformation of an „underground movement“ (Bernfeld) – „small scientific clubs, consisting of a couple of outsiders, refugees from the medical

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15 C.f. Reich, Wilhelm (1933): *Charakteranalyse*. Technik und Grundlagen für studierende und praktizierende Analytiker. New edition, expanded, Cologne 1970. Fenichel, Otto (1941): *Probleme der psychoanalytischen Technik*. Giessen 2001.

16 Freud (1912/13): *Totum und Tabu*. Einige Übereinstimmungen im Seelenleben der Wilden und der Neurotiker. In: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. IX, Frankfurt am Main 1968.

17 Adorno, Theodor W. ([1944] 1951): *Minima Moralia*. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben. Aphorism 29 („Zwergobst“). In: *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, Frankfurt 1996, p. 54.

profession and a couple of people from the non-medical avant-garde“<sup>18</sup> – into a closed shop of medical specialists whose central interest in life is not the struggle for Freudian Enlightenment, but rather the making of a living from its therapeutic instrumentalisation.

The First World War destroyed the hopes of the liberal European intellectuals – hopes which to a degree were shared by the neurosis-therapist Freud – in non-violent progress towards a society of „eternal peace“ (Kant). Freud’s reaction to this experience was the explication of that theory of culture upon which his neurosis-therapy had been based from its beginnings in the eighties and nineties of the 19th Century. We term this theory ‘critical’ since in its cultural history in its entirety as well as the culture of our own time is presented from the perspective of the victims – i.e. from the perspective of the overwhelming majority of the human race, that of the oppressed and the humiliated.<sup>19</sup> Since our own culture perpetuates scarcity and inequality no less than its predecessors did – is as unable to fulfill the hopes of its members for compensation for the drive-renunciation demanded of them – the individuals which make it up are ‘virtual’ enemies of the selfsame culture to which they owe their very survival.<sup>20</sup>

Freud’s literary production in the years 1920 to 1939 was devoted to the explication of that theory of culture on which his psychology and psychoanalytic therapy was based. On the ‘nature-philosophy’ foundations of this theory of culture to be found in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*<sup>21</sup> there follows, in 1921, Freud’s text *Mass Psychology and Ego-Analysis*<sup>22</sup>, in which he seeks, firstly, to work out, for himself and his generation, a theoretic ex-

18 Bernfeld, Siegfried ([1952] 1962): „Über die psychoanalytische Ausbildung.“ In: *Psyche*, vol. 38, (1984) Stuttgart, p. 444 f.

19 "Whosoever has emerged, to this day, victorious, marches along in the triumphal procession which takes those who are now in power over the bodies of the slain. The loot is, as usual, born along in this triumphal march. One usually terms this loot culture [Kulturgüter]. They will have to deal, as far as the Historical Materialist is concerned, with a dispassionate [distanzierten] observer. For what he discerns of culture is for him of a genealogy [Abkunft] which cannot be thought of without a shudder. It thanks its existence not only to the effort of the great genii which created it, but also to the anonymous servitude of their contemporaries. There is never a document of culture which is not, at the same time, a document of barbarism." Benjamin, Walter ([1942] 1949): „Über den Begriff der Geschichte.“ In: Benjamin (1974): *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. I.2, Frankfurt, p. 696 (Thesis VII).

20 Freud (1927): *Die Zukunft einer Illusion*. *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. XIV, Frankfurt 1963, p. 327 and 333.

21 Idem (1920): *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*. *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. XIII, Frankfurt 1963, p. 1-69.

22 Idem (1921): *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*. *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. XIII, Frankfurt 1963, p. 71-161.

planation for the emergence of the nationalistically oriented „anti-mass mass movements“ of the year 1914; secondly, the experiences with the revolutionary masses which – belatedly, but nevertheless successfully – ended the war; and lastly, the post-war experiences with the masses mobilised by the counter-revolution, seeking to reverse the progress which the revolutions had inaugurated. On the critique of Mass Psychology follows, 1927, a sketch – in the vein of an anti-religious dialogue, indebted to Ludwig Feuerbach – of a systematic theory of culture, *The Future of an Illusion*. In the text *Civilization and its Discontents* (from 1930<sup>23</sup>) the implication of the (third) drive theory, as developed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, were worked out for a theory of cultural institutions. This culminates in the Moses-tracts of 1934-1937, in which the problem of tradition is treated as the core of a critical theory of culture.<sup>24</sup>

These cultural-theoretical writings of Freud make up – besides the pre-analytic texts from the eighties and nineties of the 19th century, and the psychological texts of the first and second decades of the 20th Century – the third thematic group in his writings. Just as the significance of the pre-analytic texts (which were excluded from the *Gesammelte Werke*, e.g. the study on Aphasia<sup>25</sup>), for psychoanalytic metapsychology was not understood by the Freudians until the publication of the letters to Wilhelm Fließ in 1950<sup>26</sup>, so the significance of Freud’s culture-theoretical texts have not been seen by the psychoanalytic mainstream to this day. Even the theorists from the left-wing of the psychoanalytic movement – interested as they were in the mediation of Sociology and Psychology (Fromm, Reich, Bernfeld, Fenichel and others) – were nonplussed by these texts.<sup>27</sup> Freud’s late works were regarded as marginal and problematic; their significance for an understanding of Fascism and Stalinism was not seen. The purpose of the text on mass psychology (Freud’s theory of nationalism) was misunderstood; the Moses-tracts have not had an adequate reception until very recently, by authors such as Yerushalmi<sup>28</sup> or Assmann.<sup>29</sup>

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23 Idem (1930): *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur. Gesammelte Werke*, vol. XIV, Frankfurt 1963, p. 419-506.

24 Idem (1937-39): *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion. Gesammelte Werke*, vol. XVI, Frankfurt 1961, p. 101-246.

25 Idem (1891): *Zur Auffassung der Aphasien. Eine kritische Studie*. Frankfurt 1992.

26 Idem ([1887-1904] 1950): *Briefe an Wilhelm Fließ 1887-1904*. Frankfurt 1986.

27 C.f. Dahmer (1973): *Libido und Gesellschaft. Studien über Freud und die Freud’sche Linke*. Frankfurt 1982, part III.

28 Yerushalmi, Yosef H. (1991): *Freuds Moses*. Frankfurt 1999.

29 Assmann, Jan (1998): *Moses der Ägypter*. Munich, Vienna.

That in capitalist development progress and barbarism go hand in hand is something thoughtful observers had already noted at the time of the counter-revolutions and the colonial wars of the 19th Century. In the First World War however the most modern forces of production transformed themselves into forces of destruction for all the world to see. The crisis of bourgeois society also raised a question mark over the foundations of psycho-analysis itself. Freud's structural model of the psyche was oriented towards a specific historical situation. In the macrocosmos of bourgeois society more and more people who had been economically independent were transformed into dependent employees; small and middling property ownership lost its importance. Fewer and fewer people were able to realize that ideal of the liberal epoch, personal autonomy.<sup>30</sup> That corresponded, in the microcosm of the soul, to that precarious balance between a conscious ego oriented towards survival in the 'ananke' world, and its opposite number, the internalized deposit of societal compulsion and reality-blind drive-fulfillment. In Freud's texts the 'ego' hence does not act – as it does in the 'ego-psychology' of a subsequent generation of psychoanalytic theorists – as a quasi-autonomous agency (with desexualized drive energy at its disposal), responsible for compromise and decision-making, but as a clown which merely simulates autonomy.<sup>31</sup> A clown for all that forced to mediate – on the one hand – between the powers within natural and social reality which inculcate fear, and – on the other – the conscience and the drives. The ideal of autonomy is done justice to in as much as it is simulated. Inasmuch however as the market – the central institution of modern society (and those modeled upon it: parliamentary democracy, a pluralistic public sphere, academic freedom) – is encroached upon by the increasing power of the multinationals and by state intervention (as indirect socialization via exchange is replaced by direct forms of economic and political domination) so is the 'inner market', the psychic forum, subject to a process of regression. When the ego-clown capitulates his/her 'conscience' – representing internalized, individualized social domination – it loses control. Casting about for a source of support, the weakened ego delegates its conscience to external powers. The individuals, long since socialized via the market rather than via the community or the land, capitulate before the new

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30 C.f. Horkheimer, Max (1947): *Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft*. [Eclipse of Reason] In: Horkheimer (1991): *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6. Frankfurt, p. 19-186. Chap. 4: „Aufstieg und Niedergang des Individuums“, p. 136-164.

31 C.f. Sigmund Freud (1914): *Zur Geschichte der psychoanalytischen Bewegung*. *Gesammelte Werke* X, Frankfurt am Main 1963, p. 97.

social forces and their political representatives; they regress, i.e. they abandon an ideal of personal autonomy they are no longer able to emulate. They flee before an extended freedom which has become objectively possible – before self-emancipation – and join instead ranks with the (ethnically and religiously defined) macro-communities of nation, block, and party; they follow blindly (namely unscrupulously) the orders of those who have arrogated to themselves the leadership of such new cohorts. Organized as masses, they storm the cultural sphere, instrumentalise its technical and organizational apparatus in order to impose the particular interests of an ethnic or religious group, nation or a class by means of pogroms, massacres or genocides against ostensible inner or outer enemies.

The crisis of contemporary culture is, according to Freud, a result of the modern secularization of the world, which came hand in hand with an enormous expansion in human productive power while at the same time destroying all faith in a religious or other meaning of human life. While societal wealth is growing immeasurably – heralding perhaps a new ‘Golden Age’ – the antiquated rules of (mal)distribution of this new wealth persist. The confrontation of minorities already living in an earthly paradise with pauperized majorities is becoming intolerable, in the first instance, because once faith in a better hereafter has disappeared, the venerable extraction of consolation from this-worldly misery no longer functions. With their lives seemingly worthless and without prospect for change in sight, the luxuriating drives of the socialized individuals begin to dissociate. „Drive de-differentiation“ leads to the release of destructive impulses difficult to control. With that the hour of the demagogues has struck, who then canalize the destructive energies of de-individualized masses against „strangers“ within and without, against traitors and enemies of the state within, and against „mortal enemies“ beyond the borders of the land. Once the destructive rage of the masses and their ‘leaders’ avail themselves of modern technology, the self-destruction of the species has become an objective possibility.<sup>32</sup> A brief decade before the Second World War Freud saw European civilization heading for destruction – if „the eternal Eros“, as he puts it, „does not make an effort“ to oppose its equally eternal foe thanatos.<sup>33</sup> This mythologically formulated way out of the dilemma of modernism is something which a quarter of a century later Herbert Marcuse is to reformulate socio-

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32 “The human race has now advanced in its domination of the forces of nature to the point where, through their utilization, it has become easy to eradicate itself to the last man.”  
Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, *ibid.* p. 506.

33 *Ibid.*

logically.<sup>34</sup> In *The future of an Illusion* (1927) Freud explores the idea of a principled anti-religious education as a way out of the cultural dilemma. If an anti-religious education were to be combined with a reduction of societal inequality, a novel, consensually based social morality could replace the religiously based morality of compulsion. In his text against the regression of mass psychology of 1921 he sketches a third possible way out of the labyrinth of culture. Here the idea is that a culture which no longer needs a compulsive integration of masses of unequal and unfree individuals can also relinquish a repressive sexual morality. Such a culture no longer needs to fixate the frustrated sexual desires of its members on the creation of illusionary collectivities; is hence no longer parasitic upon the partial drives: „We could quite easily imagine a society [Kulturgemeinschaft] consisting of [...] ‘double’-individuals [Doppelindividuen] who, in themselves libidinally sated, are bound to one another by work and the common weal. Under such circumstances culture would need no longer to withdraw energy from sexuality.“<sup>35</sup>

Psycho-analytic therapy is bound to the specific setting of the ‘cure’. It creates for the therapist as much as for the patient a protected space in which the predominant societal taboos are temporarily weakened or suspended. Such a weakening of censorship facilitates the emergence of „free associations“, i.e. ‘prison messages’ smuggled out of the ghetto of the individual and collective subconscious. On the basis of such messages the interpretive community of two gradually builds up a picture of what it is that has been censored – of the secret history of that which is in need of a cure – and in so doing paves the way for a revision of his/her life practice. Whether the suspension of the repulsive is permanent or remains wishful thinking is determined once the patient, whose relationship to him/herself has become a freer one, can do without the therapy and, under conditions of regained independence, make a new start in life. Like the individual patient, so the community of Freudian analysts – as well as the „Psychoanalytic movement“ – are dependent upon social institutions and on the real potential for political emancipation.

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34 Marcuse, Herbert (1955): *Triebstruktur und Gesellschaft*. Ein philosophischer Beitrag zu Sigmund Freud (Eros and Civilization). In: *Schriften*, vol. 5, Frankfurt am Main 1979. Idem (1956, 1967): „Aggressivität in der modernen Industriegesellschaft“ in Dahmer, Helmut (ed.): *Analytische Sozialpsychologie*. Frankfurt am Main 1980, p. 452-470.

35 Freud: *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, ibid. p. 467.

From archival material – especially from Freud’s letters, which have been published only within the last 15 years, i.e. since the third psychoanalytic „weltanschauung-debate“<sup>36</sup> – it has become clear that Freud’s hope, namely that the transformation of progress into barbarism can be arrested (by anti-religious education, egalitarian politics and sexual revolution) is something he gave up about a year before the formation of the Hitler government. In the spring of 1932 he came to the view that the institutions upon which freedom was based – the market, the public sphere, parliament and the universities – would succumb to the self-destructive mass movements of the time. The international organization which he had created to defend the new insights of the psychoanalytic Enlightenment was faced i.e. with the most deadly danger.

To Marie Bonaparte he wrote in the summer of 1933:

„You have yourself described the political situation exhaustively. To me it seems that not [even] in wartime have mendacity and clichés reigned as supreme as they do today. The world is becoming an enormous jail, and the worst cell is Germany. [...] They started over there with mortal antipathy towards Bolshevism, and will end up with something indistinguishable from it. With this difference perhaps that Bolshevism has indeed incorporated revolutionary ideals, whereas Hitlerism [by contrast] merely the medieval-reactionary kind. Myself lacking in life-enhancing powers, this world seems to me to be doomed to imminent destruction.“<sup>37</sup>

In Freud’s view, there was only one way to save psycho-analysis, its ideas and its institutions: they had to be kept out of the newly inflamed European civil wars. How? By renouncing the obvious relationship between the psychoanalytic Enlightenment and the critique of society, the relationship between the psychoanalytic, political and cultural avant-garde, by depoliticizing, i.e. by ‘re-scientising’ psycho-analysis. Once (re)cloaked in the garb of a ‘normal’ science, it could, like the other natural sciences, lay claim to ‘value-neutrality’. Perhaps in this way its adherents could survive,

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36 The first of the ‘world-view’-[Weltanschauung]-debates amongst psycho-analysts was fought out by Putnam, Ferenczi, Reik, Tausk and Freud on the eve of the First World War. At its core was the question of the relationship of psycho-analysis and Philosophy. The second debate took place during the closing years of the Weimar Republic. The third was triggered, firstly, by the way in which the international Students Movement of the sixties invoked Freud, secondly by the epistemological controversies on the logical status of psycho-analysis reaching new heights of intensity, and thirdly when the inglorious history of the psycho-analysis during the Third Reich came to public attention.

37 Freud, Sigmund (1933): “Brief an Marie Bonaparte”, summer 1933, quoted by Ernest Jones (1957): *Das Leben und Werk von Sigmund Freud*, vol. 3, Bern 1962, p. 217 f.

incognito, the attacks of the neo-barbarians and save, for more propitious times, at least part of the novel insights they had gained.

On the question: what kind of science psycho-analysis is meant to be, what its relationship to the bourgeois parties, to the fascistically mobilized intermediary classes and to the various factions of the working classes is to be, is what the „weltanschauung“-debate fought out by the psychoanalysts internally in the years 1928-1933 was all about. According to Siegfried Bernfeld (1928) psycho-analysis was a science of a „peculiar kind“: it does indeed „supply all world views [Weltanschauungen] with facts“, is however of the most varied utility for the different world views, since „for the one it means a weapon, for another [it means] an attack.“ „If one were to use it seriously at all – as opposed to enjoying it as a pure science – it becomes destructive. It reveals religion, culture, art, philosophy and morality as something derivative, mediated.“<sup>38</sup> Carrying on from where Bernfeld had left off, Wilhelm Reich wrote, in 1933:

„The nature of its discoveries“ makes psycho-analysis a „mortal enemy of the political reaction. One could hide behind an illusion like the one which proclaims the ‘apolitical’ (i.e. from politics entirely disparate) nature of the science [of psycho-analysis]: that will not in the least hinder the powers that be from sniffing out the danger where it does indeed lie, and to combat it accordingly.“ „I hence see the most important task before us at present not in the protection of the analysts at all costs but in the safeguarding of psycho-analysis and its future development.“<sup>39</sup> The counterposition was taken by Heinz Hartmann, who in his 1927 book *Die Grundlagen der Psychoanalyse*<sup>40</sup> had embarked on an ambitious attempt to press the Freudian enlightenment into a neo-Kantian conception of science. „Science“, according to this conception thereof, merely thematised the rationalisation of means with respect to given ends – the latter being beyond, i.e. not themselves capable of scientific validation. That was an indirect attack on Freud’s critique of religion, and was tantamount to the „scientisation“ (i.e. the instrumentalisation) of psycho-analysis. Freud’s own position on the worldview-debate converged, in essence, with that of Hartmann: in his *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* he wrote (1932) that

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38 Bernfeld, Siegfried (1928): „Ist Psychoanalyse eine Weltanschauung?“ in: idem *Ausgewählte Schriften* vol. 2, *ibid.* (footnote 4) p. 207.

39 Reich, Wilhelm (1933, 1934): „Brief an den Internationalen Psychoanalytischen Verlag vom 17.3.1933. In: *Internationale Zeitschrift für politische Psychologie und Sexualökonomie* II, (1935), p. 60 f. (English in idem *Reich speaks of Freud*. New York 1967, p. 159 ff.)

40 Hartmann, Heinz (1927): *Die Grundlagen der Psychoanalyse*. Stuttgart 1972.

inherent in psycho-analysis there is „no special“ worldview – it merely represents the scientific, i.e. the anti-illusionary position.<sup>41</sup>

With that he began to implement the rescue of psycho-analysis along the lines he had envisaged: through mimicry of the scientific establishment. Freud did not ever acknowledge with as much as a comment the psychoanalytic ‘Right Wing’ – the adventurous psychoanalytic excursions into social theory of a Kolnai, Laforgue or Glover notwithstanding. The latently nationalistic-anti-Semitic worldview of some of his followers is not something he ever raised. Yet when Reich – who had become an activist of the SPÖ and the KPD in Vienna and Berlin and had founded a pro-communist youth organization (the ‘Sexpol’) – argued, in an article in the *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse*, then edited by Otto Fenichel, against the death drive, Freud suspended Fenichel as editor, moved the office of the *Zeitschrift* to Berlin, and gave the editorship to Heinz Hartmann and Paul Federn. In a letter to Lampl de Groot he wrote, at the time, that he had to have a “cleansing of the press” “against the bolshevik attackers Reich, Fenichel.”<sup>42</sup> Reich and Fenichel’s ‘bolshevism’ consisted, in essence, in their wish to extend Freud’s biological (or: anthropologically-Feuerbachian) materialism in a historical direction, which meant, in effect, the historical concretization of Freud’s general (critical) theory of culture. In short: they wanted to rethink the relationship of Psychology to Sociology. The interests of the ‘Freudian Left’ of the time undoubtedly converged – even if they themselves hardly saw it that way – with Freud’s own interest in an explication of his theory of culture. But the rescue of psycho-analysis through bowdlerization, as he envisaged it, required a sacrificial pawn. In an abrupt turn away from the Reich he had valued both as interlocutor and as clinician as recently as the late twenties – who was now supposed to be a ‘Bolshevik’ and a security risk for the “*Psychoanalytische Vereinigung*” – he entered into an alliance with two German-nationalist Berlin psychoanalysts in April 1933. He promised Felix Böhm and Carl Müller-Braunschweig (who shortly after formulated the notorious “memo-

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41 Freud, Sigmund: *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*. Ibid. footnote 9, p. 170 f. and 197.

42 Idem. (1932): „Unveröffentlichter Brief an Lampl de Groot“, 17.1.1932. C.f. idem (1929-1939, 1992): *Tagebuch 1929-1939*. Kürzeste Chronik. Basel/Frankfurt 1996, p. 208. (“Reinmachung im Verlag”).

randum”<sup>43</sup> in which he amalgamated psycho-analysis with National Socialism<sup>44</sup>) that he would, after the ‘non-Aryan’ executive of the DPG had been fired, accept them as a replacement on condition that they kept Harald Schultz Hencke at bay and “freed” him from Reich.<sup>45</sup> Whereupon Reich, unbeknownst to him, was de facto excluded from the DPG and the IPV with immediate effect – to be formalized a year later, in 1934. In 1932 Freud also broke contact with the subversive avant-garde of the Paris surrealists gathered around André Breton.<sup>46</sup> Breton saw in Freud – after the Marquis de Sade and Charles Fourier – the third great emancipator of human drives, who had recognized desire and longing to be at the centre of all human endeavour, therewith inaugurating a wide-ranging revision of our conception of ourselves: „The magnificent discoveries of Freud have come at exactly the right moment to plumb for us that chasm which has opened up with the capitulation of logical thought and as a consequence of the doubts which have arisen concerning sense certainty.”<sup>47</sup> Freud’s newly developed procedure, the encouragement of the patient’s ‘free associations’ – which, like subversive jokes, circumvented internalized societal censorship – was the model for the „écriture automatique”<sup>48</sup> favoured by Breton and Soupault (1919), enabling the authors to invent quite unheard-of literary metaphors. Breton sent Freud a copy of his book *Les Vases communicants* [The communicating vessels]<sup>49</sup>, published in May 1932, which was a long essay on the mutual interdependence of day and dream, reality and possibility, art and politics.<sup>50</sup> „We had reached the point [in April 1931], my friends and I, where we were discussing the details of a specifically anti-re-

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43 Müller-Braunschweig, Carl: „Psychoanalyse und Weltanschauung” in: *Reichswart. Nationalsozialistische Wochenschrift und Organ des Bundes Völkischer Europäer/Organe de L’Alliance Racistes Européenne* Berlin, vol. 14, no. 42, 22.10.1933, p. 2 f. – reprinted in: *Psyche* 37, 1983, p. 1116-1119.

44 C.f. Dahmer, Helmut (1983): „Kapitulation vor der Weltanschauung“ in: idem *Pseudonatur und Kritik*, Frankfurt am Main 1994, p. 147-169.

45 Boehm, Felix (21.8.1934): “Ereignisse 1933-1934” 11-page typed manuscript. Reprinted in: Brecht, Karen et. al. (eds.) *Hier geht das Leben auf eine sehr merkwürdige Weise weiter...* Hamburg 1985, p. 99-109.

46 C.f. Dahmer, Helmut (1983): „Psychoanalyse im Surrealismus (André Breton)” in: idem. *Pseudonatur und Kritik* *ibid.* (footnote 43, p. 108-135.)

47 Breton, André (1936-1953): *Das Weite suchen. Reden und Essays* (Partial edition of: *La Clé des champs*). Frankfurt am Main 1981, p. 11 f.

48 Idem, Soupault, Philippe (1919): *Les Champs magnétiques/Die magnetischen Felder*. Heidelberg 1990.

49 Idem : *Die kommunizierenden Röhren (Les Vases communicants)*. Munich 1973, 1980.

50 C.f. idem (1952): *Entretiens – Gespräche. Dada, Surrealismus, Politik*. Amsterdam, Dresden 1996, p. 202 f.

religious campaign we were planning to wage, and to which we were constrained because [within the framework of the French Communist Party] no other form of joint action seemed possible anymore. [...] I for my own part was disturbed how thoroughly such a project would pass by my own life and my own specific interests. One day it will become recognized that the a priori for the existence of Surrealism, as we as a group understood it over many years, lay in the rejection of a division of labour. In my view the very best that it represented lay in its attempt to re-establish contact between the separated worlds of wakefulness and sleep, external reality and inner reality, reason and madness, dispassionate knowledge and love, living life for its own sake and for the revolution. [...]"<sup>51</sup>

Freud – author not only of the *Traumdeutung*<sup>52</sup> and the social-psychological analysis of the literary form of the joke,<sup>53</sup>

but also of the important poetry essay „Der Dichter und das Phantasieren“ (from the year 1908)<sup>54</sup> – raises in the two letters with which he answered Breton, first of all the quite peripheral question whether Volkelt or Scherner were the discoverers of dream symbolism and whether Volkelt's book was listed in the bibliography of all of the editions of the *Traumdeutung*. To go on to brush off the Surrealist with: „Much evidence has reached me on how greatly you and your friends value my research, but I for myself am unable to clarify what Surrealism is and what it strives after. Perhaps there is for me, standing so far removed from art, no real need to understand it. Most sincerely yours, Freud.“<sup>55</sup> At the end of 1932 it seemed to Freud that he was going to need quite different allies.

51 Idem: *Die kommunizierenden Röhren*, *ibid.* (footnote 48), p. 73 f.

52 Freud, Sigmund (1900): *Die Traumdeutung. Gesammelte Werke*, vol. II/III, Frankfurt am Main 1968, p. 1-642.

53 Idem (1905): *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten. Gesammelte Werke*, vol. VI, Frankfurt am Main 1969.

54 Idem (1908): *Der Dichter und das Phantasieren. Gesammelte Werke*, vol. VII, Frankfurt am Main 1966, p. 211-223.

55 In the same view, in a 1937 rejection letter [Absagebrief] of Freud to Breton (who had asked him for a contribution to the anthology *Trajectoire du rêve*) Freud writes: “The superficial aspect of dreams, that what I term the manifest dream, is of no interest to me.” “I’ve always been concerned instead with the ‘latent content’, which is derived from the manifest dream by means of psychoanalytic interpretation. A collection of dreams devoid of associations of any knowledge of the context in which they were dreamed I find meaningless, and I find it difficult to imagine what they could mean for someone else.” Freud to Breton, 8.12.1937. Quoted after Polizzotti, Mark (1995): *Revolution des Geistes. Das Leben André Bretons*. Munich, Vienna 1996, p. 553 (resp. 988.)

Its scientific camouflage has done little to benefit and much to harm psycho-analysis. The majority of psychoanalysts were driven out of their training institutions in Berlin and Vienna; in the Berlin „Reichsinstitut für Psychologische Forschung und Psychotherapie“ [Imperial Institute for Psychological Research and Psychotherapy] (as it was called in the final years of the war) the remaining ‘Aryan’ and non-socialist psychoanalysts eked out a wretched catacomb-existence; the emigration also meant – as the clandestine „Rundbriefe“ which Otto Fenichel wrote for a small group of kindred spirits between 1934 and 1945 show<sup>56</sup> – that the project of a sociologically enlightened psycho-analysis petered out; in Hitler’s political sphere not a few psychoanalysts were persecuted and murdered. (I remind here of Edith Jacobson, Sabina Spielrein, John F. Rittmeister, István Hollós and Karl Landauer.)

That the „Deutsche Psychoanalytische Gesellschaft“ and the Psychoanalytic International expelled Wilhelm Reich in 1933/34 is something the office-bearers and historians (Ernest Jones and others) have suppressed right through to our own times. This exclusion of and separation from sociology and politics, which Jones symbolizes, has been the official line in the official history of psycho-analysis ever since. Freud’s „cleansing“ of 1933, his attempt to rescue psycho-analysis by parting from its cultural-revolutionary aspects, was codified by his successors. They made of the necessity of 1932 a virtue for all times. We listen to Ernest Jones at the Zurich postwar IPV congress of 1949:

„Since the last congress took place eleven years ago great and terrible events have shaken the world, and our own analytical community has not been spared. [...] The terrific social and political movements and changes we have witnessed of recent years compel more urgently than before a consideration of the relationship between the layers of the mind that are the object of our special study and the powerful ideational and emotional accompaniments of those social movements. [...] The temptation is understandably great to add socio-political factors to those that are our special concern, and to re-read our findings in terms of sociology, but it is a temptation that, one is proud to observe, has, with very few exceptions, been stoutly resisted.“<sup>57</sup>

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56 Otto Fenichel (1934-1945): *119 Rundbriefe*. Ed. By Johannes Reichmayr, Elke Mühlleitner. Basel 1998.

57 Ernest Jones: „Report on the Sixteenth International Psycho-Analytical Congress: Opening Address by the President, Dr. Ernest Jones“ (Zurich, 15.8.1949). In: *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 30 (1949), p. 178 ff.

The political decision which Freud made in the early thirties has had a decisive influence on the subsequent history of psycho-analysis. The psycho-analytic critique of culture has been divorced from psychoanalytic therapy and thus become a theory without a practice; it has become relegated, in the meantime, more or less to the history of ideas. Attempts to combine sociology and psycho-analysis or to use each as a corrective for the other have more or less ceased since Parsons'<sup>58</sup> rather willful modifications of Freud's theory.<sup>59</sup> Psycho-analysis has isolated itself as much from the emancipatory movements in art and politics as it has from the sociological and cultural mainstream. The „fanciful psychologisms“ (Adorno) which Fenichel had once tried to fight<sup>60</sup> could sweep the board unopposed. A critical reception of the „Frankfurt School“, the members of which concentrated on the social-philosophical dimension of psycho-analysis – much etiolated since the thirties – was neglected; the same thing is to be said of the work of Georges Bataille. Important reformers such as Lacan were, like Reich before him, impugned as deviants and cast from the fold. In the meantime an amputated or „medicinalised“ (Paul Parin) psycho-analysis no longer knows what it is and what it once represented. It still heals, it still helps countless patients to patch up their tattered biographies. Its adepts however regard political abstinence and docility – a few black sheep notwithstanding – as a professional virtue. The sleep of reason is seldom disturbed by the present generation of Freudians.

A reconstruction of the history of psycho-analysis in the thirties and and fourties is much impeded by the way in which the major players – Jones in England and Müller-Braunschweig in Germany – covered their tracks through the invention of official myths and by the destruction of documents. This symptom does at any rate indicate that they had a good idea of what it was that they sacrificed to save psycho-analysis as an institution. To this day the official historians are caught in the spell of the old legends, tending to justify the highly symbolic expulsion of Reich and to minimize the significance of Freud's about-face in 1932.<sup>61</sup> In their view of things psycho-analysis survived the dark ages of the Third Reich, after which it successfully picked up from where it had left off. The only question still

58 Talcott Parsons (1964): *Sozialstruktur und Persönlichkeit*. Frankfurt am Main 1968.

59 C.f. Jeffrey Prager, Michael Rustin (eds.): *Psychoanalytic Sociology*. Vol. I and II. (Schools of Thought in Sociology, vol. 10). Aldershot 1993.

60 Otto Fenichel: *Aufsätze*, vol. I and II. Ed. by Klaus Laermann, Olten and Freiburg i. Br. 1979 and 1981.

61 C.f. Helmut Dahmer: „Psychoanalytische Vereinsgeschichte, ‘anders’ erzählt.“ In: *Werkblatt, Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und Gesellschaftskritik* 40 (1998), p. 106-123.

open – from this point of view – concerns the „scratches which National Socialism left on the post-war history of psycho-analysis.“<sup>62</sup>

Whether or not National Socialism demolished the history of psycho-analysis – as opposed to merely ‘scratching’ its surface – or whether, on the contrary, psycho-analysis since the thirties and fourties has lost all resemblance to what it had once been, is a question which the official historians of psycho-analysis are not able even to formulate.<sup>63</sup>

Fascism destroyed, in the thirties, the European worker’s movement as a revolutionary force – a defeat from which the latter never recovered. It also halted the „Psychoanalytic Movement“. The revived hopes during the eighties in a reform from within of the professional associations – by setting up new types of organisations, returning to ‘lay analysis’, an opening up with regard to the social sciences, a repoliticisation of psycho-analysis – were dashed. The „Psychoanalytic Movement“ is history. The Freudian enlightenment however is still good for many a twilight of the gods [Götzendämmerung] and many a social revolution.

[Transl. Frederik van Gelder]

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62 Regine Locket: *Die Reinigung der Psychoanalyse. Die Deutsche Psychoanalytische Gesellschaft im Spiegel von Dokumenten und Zeitzeugen (1933-1951)*. Tübingen 1994, p. 9.

63 C.f. Helmut Dahmer: „Psychoanalytiker in Deutschland 1933-1951“. In: Karl Fallend, Bernd Nitzschke (eds.): *Der ‚Fall‘ Wilhelm Reich. Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Psychoanalyse und Politik*. Frankfurt am Main 1997, p. 167-189.