

## A Critical Psychoanalysis Project<sup>1</sup>

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The author, founding member of the new Psychoanalytical Seminar Zürich (PSZ), demonstrates by his own experience how much the metapsychology of freudian psychoanalysis needs to be revised. Furthermore he promotes an important translating effort necessary in order to make it possible, that the different „dialects“ of psychoanalysis (as Freud, Klein, Lacan etc.) converge again in a common language based on clinic practice.

### 1.

We psychoanalysts are used, by long experience, to fighting against *negative biases*; again and again, old and new prejudices from the most varied ideological angles are held against us: whereas, in the past, we were accused of pansexualism to try and discredit us and alarm the public, we are now – in the age of repressive desublimation – being accused of a lack of efficiency and sustainability. It would be tempting, for fear of losing patients to rival therapies and the interest of the public to more obliging theories, to “close ranks” and escape to a defensive position. In such a position, however, it would hardly be possible to discuss our internal contradictions openly and further our science in a self-critical manner. Instead, I would advocate going on the offensive and adopting a critical attitude, and would like to initiate, right now, at the transition to a new millennium, an analysis of a *positive bias* towards psychoanalysis. I am convinced that working over its prerequisites and consequences can promote our presence in society and only enhance our resistance to our adversaries left and right.

I can say that I – like many of my generation – grew up with such a positive bias. In my family, psychoanalysis was seen as a progressive and emancipatory science that had countered the puritanism of the early years and the double standard of a decadent society with the exploration of the

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unconscious motors of behaviour and sexual enlightenment. At the age of fifteen, seeking a peer group, I had joined the communist “Free Youth” and, from then on, presented a bold and self-assured front on political issues; in matters of love, however, I was quite bashful and inquisitive, so that the prospect of psychoanalytical enlightenment fascinated me. Paul Parin and Fritz Morgenthaller, the leading psychoanalysts of those days in Zurich, further impressed me by their adventurous-sounding field trips to Dark Africa. And in 1968, with their firm commitment in the *Zürcher Manifest* [Zurich Manifesto], they stood on the side of our youth movement of the time, so that, to me, the theory and practice of psychoanalysis seemed to coincide. Later also, further input, first from Wilhelm Reich (*Dialektischer Materialismus und Psychoanalyse*, 1929) and Siegfried Bernfeld (*Sozialismus und Psychoanalyse*, 1926), followed by Erich Fromm (*Über Methode und Aufgabe einer Analytischen Sozialpsychologie – Bemerkungen über Psychoanalyse und historischer Materialismus*, 1932a) and Otto Fenichel (*Über die Psychoanalyse als Keim einer zukünftigen dialektisch-materialistischen Psychologie*, 1934), concerning the relationship between Marxism and psychoanalysis – despite frequent criticism of details and the fundamental controversy surrounding Freud’s death-wish hypothesis – confirmed the positive bias that Freudian thinking was *materialistic and dialectical* and its method, therefore, particularly appropriate for exploring the inner life of socialized individuals (W. Reich).

Disillusionment set in immediately after entering the Psychoanalytical Seminar (PSZ) on Kirchgasse in the beautiful Old Town of Zurich, 1968/1969. To be free and independent in my life decisions and professional practice, I had rejected the “long march through the institutions,” done without psychiatric training, and established myself as an independent physician with a small general practice – and now I was to assume the status of a “candidate” and bow to the yoke of the teaching committee of the Swiss Psychoanalytical Society (SPS)! In the opposition group *Plattform*, under the influence of my older brothers and sisters in analysis (Piero Galli, Pedro Grosz, Berthold Rothschild, Judith Valk, Ilka von Zeppelin) with time I learned to understand that institutionalization had caused a *dogmatic sect* to spring from the psychoanalytical movement, within which pure doctrine was handed

down, as unchanged as possible, from one generation to the next (cf. *Das Interlakener Lehrstück, Plattform*, 1974). With other words: as in the communist world, orthodoxy, the bureaucracy of national and international associations stood in the way of creative further development of the discipline. However, the theory and practice of psychoanalysis and the person of the brilliant founding father remained above suspicion for me for many years. At the time I differentiated between the emancipatory science and its bourgeois appropriation (Modena, 1980) and felt all the more justified in this by the works of Paul Parin that were being published just then, in which he examined his experiences in ethno-psychoanalytical research in Africa (done together with Fritz Morgenthaler and Goldy Parin-Matthèy) and transposed them to our Central European conditions. Those works – especially *Gesellschaftskritik im Deutungsprozess* (1975) and *Das Ich und die Anpassungsmechanismen* (1977) – as well as Enzo Codignola's *Il vero e il falso* (1977), von Blarer/Brogle's *Der Weg ist das Ziel* (1983), and Fritz Morgenthaler's *Theorie der Technik* (1978) and his dream diagnosis (1986) represented, in my opinion, genuine further development of the theory towards a *critical psychoanalysis* in contrast to the religiously faithful mainstream. This also appeared to me to be true for Kernberg's formulation of the borderline-personality theory (1975).

With a certain degree of delay the women's movement had however, in the meantime, given rise to feminist criticism of psychoanalysis (e.g. Kate Millet, 1971; Juliet Mitchell, 1974; Luce Irigaray, 1979; Carol Hagemann-White, 1979). Under the influence of the women close to me then, especially Esther Modena Burkhardt, Ursula Hauser, and Maya Nadig for my generation, Marie-Claire Boons and Marie Langer for the older one, it was not particularly difficult for me to absorb the main aspects of this criticism intellectually, all the more so because Sigmund Freud's image of women had appeared to me a patriarchal mystification (changing practice appropriately was more difficult...) – *but with that, the whole structure of Freudian theory began to shake*. I had already had my problems with the aggression theory and had rejected the death-wish hypothesis (Freud, 1920) as being completely out of it, but then became reconciled to psychoanalysis again with the help of the concepts of Hartmann, Kris, and Löwenstein (1949), Alexander Mitscherlich (1969), and

Erich Fromm (1973a), already mentioned earlier; but now another spate of rethinking key theory areas was necessary if it was true that women represented “half of heaven.” I tailored myself a formula according to which Freud remained the pioneer of exploration into female sexuality, but had not been able to divest himself entirely of the patriarchal blinkers of his era. I considered the concepts of penis envy and primacy of genitality in relative terms and, from then on, viewed the Oedipus complex as a development crisis that was universal, though proceeding differently from culture to culture, upon a child’s entry into society (into the latency phase for us). This entailed a revaluation of the pre-genital fates of the libido up to the “oceanic feeling.” In my *Pregnant Man* (Modena, 1984) I postulated, as a counterpart to male phallic development and “phallicity,” a “clitoridal-vaginal” line of development with “vaginality” to match. From Mario Erdheim (1982) I then adopted the idea of “liquefaction” of the psychological structures that had been frozen during latency under the surge of drives in puberty; and in so doing, took up the hypothesis of the central significance of adolescence upon the entry of the individual into the working world.

The self psychology of Heinz Kohut (1971) could be seen to a certain degree as the consolidation of a narcissism theory already begun by Freud; however, his attempt to replace drive psychology with self psychology “in the wider sense” (1977) was met by the resolutely closed ranks of the *Plattform* group (PSZ ed. 1981). Still, as I see it now, we in *Plattform* were excessively united in our rejection of major deviations at the time: both the biologism of Melanie Klein as well as the existentialist reinterpretation of Freud by Jacques Lacan seemed intolerable to us. Although I myself, thanks to friendly talks with Marie Langer and Armando Bauleo, was informed about Kleinianism in Latin America; and with Marie-Claire Boons, about Lacanism in Paris, and knew, therefore, that a progressive, even revolutionary professional practice as a psychoanalyst could be combined with a commensurate perception of the theory, I nevertheless preferred to *deny* that knowledge. Denial was possible for some years, but became increasingly difficult with the penetration of both theories into the German-speaking region. In confrontation with the “*Vernetzungsbewegung*” [**network** movement] (cf. PSZ ed. 1987) we Zurichers had initiated, denial became utterly impossible for me. There we

were, meeting entirely like-minded, critically-Marxist oriented professional colleagues from France and Great Britain who were pursuing an approach very similar to our own, but who reflected on their dedicated psychoanalytical practice using completely different theoretical terms. And soon our younger colleagues at the PSZ also began increasingly to understand and practice psychoanalysis in Kleinian and Lacanian ways. I was and still am convinced of the critical ego psychology orientation learned at the Utoquai [site of the PSZ] from Parin and Morgenthauer, but had to acknowledge over violent inner conflicts that there were evidently other directions – theoretically incompatible with our concepts – with which one could work at least as successfully. And I began to criticize and quietly regret the blunt rejection of those divergent ideas by some proponents of our own group just as I did the frequently intransigent attitude of the other colleagues towards us. In my opinion, the “*Vernetzungsbewegung*” ultimately failed because of that intolerant confusion of language, even though the positions of the various groups on how to evaluate National Socialism in Germany manifestly appeared to play a more important role (Modena, 1993).

## 2.

In recent years, finally, I have become increasingly aware of *depoliticization* within the PSZ. Opportunism, consumerism, and eclecticism were taking up more and more space within the rival institution, overall quite a successful, self-administered one; so that I eventually began asking myself whether there was a connection between depoliticized practice and subjective arbitrariness in formulating and adopting theory: a link that, aside from the previously mentioned religious transmission of doctrine, must be traced back to the person and the thinking of the founder himself. I tested my hypothesis using Freud’s drive theory and had to revise my positive bias permanently (Modena, 1996): as the more recent Marxist philosophers Lichtman (1990) and Wolfenstein (1993), who have closely investigated psychoanalysis, have shown, Freudian thinking is *dualistic* at its core, not *dialectical*. That means that only those theory segments of the overall work stand up to dialectical scrutiny that – like the theory of symptom formation emphasized by Wilhelm Reich – derive directly from clinical experience. Only where Freud worked

close to his “material,” where he stood in the direct dialectics of transference/countertransference with his patients and drew theoretical conclusions from that work, did he grasp the real dialectics of human inner life *intuitively*, against his otherwise consistently dualistic, fundamental view.<sup>i</sup>

Now, if Freudian psychoanalytical theory can make no claim to being consistently dialectically planned, is it at least consistently *materialistic* in orientation? As a physician shaped by natural science and a secularized Jew, Freud is basically materialistic in the philosophical sense. However, the material he studied – the inner life of the socialized individual – simply blows apart the restraints of the positively scientifically explainable, because this individual is just an abstraction that, in reality, does not and cannot exist separately from relationships, from productive and cultural contexts (cf. Habermas’s ‘scientistic mis-selfperception’ of psychoanalysis). Of necessity, therefore, in following its object – the subject – psychoanalytical examination must cross the limits of natural science towards communication, society, and culture. Freud the physician is fascinated by that crossing of borders and remains true to the object of his examination. He follows closely on his object’s heels in all his or her vital manifestations, but is not methodologically equipped for understanding either society and history, or art and literature. On leaving the clinical field he loses the frame of reference and the truth criterion of his interpretation technique. That which appears plausible to the philosophically untrained “healthy common sense” of the border crosser frequently proves, under proper, methodically correct examination of the respective field of knowledge, to be a projection. The speculative idealism of the “*Kulturschriften*,” in other words, establishes a *world view* – *weltanschauung* – that can no longer claim to possess any scientific foundation, whether empirical or hermeneutic. In the process, the conceptions of persons and families found in Central European society at the turn of the century are projected on the whole world and on world history, which leads to a form of Freudian metaphysics I called “Freudism” (Modena, 1996) in allusion to I. Sapir (1929/30). What is more, the empirically supported, dialectical and materialistic sub-theories and the idealistic and speculative projections are so intermingled in the total opus that Freudian psychoanalysis as an overall system is imbued with a certain degree of arbitrariness, indeed

even hubris. It is this *conglomerate of science and world view* that has become dogmatized in the psychoanalytical community based on a specific way of handing down knowledge (Modena, 2000). And it is this consistently enthralling, ingenious, yes, but also megalomaniac example by the founding father that beguiles many of his students into emulating him. In the best case they imitate him quite deliberately, as Peter Passett, Peter Schneider, and Olaf Knellessen do in their “*Freud-Deutung*” [interpreting Freud] at our *PSZ* (1994); mostly, however, it happens unconsciously, due to identifications used without thinking, “bequeathed” from one generation to the next.

### 3.

To my knowledge, the concrete work of psychoanalysts has not been further examined from a Marxist perspective since Alfred Lorenzer (1972, 1973, 1974) and Fritz Morgenthaller (1978). Today I would like to emphasize only one specific difficulty of our work; while, as a rule, there is no room in psychiatric and psychological-pedagogical institutions for psychoanalytical treatments, in private practice we are obliged to accept a multitude of very dissimilar patients. The entire array of psychopathology, combined with assorted social handicaps – such as emigration, unemployment, poverty – is at our doors. And every “case” is different. Certainly I, despite almost 30 years’ experience, never cease to be amazed; the people opposite me or on the couch continually astound me with unexpected twists, startling remarks, sophisticated forms of resistance, and creative leaps. We must acknowledge that we frequently reach the limits of our knowledge, cannot progress, are uncertain, even desperate. We have to bear this uncertainty and need direction to do so. As Fritz Morgenthaller recognized, that is the purpose of the theory of technique in the cure, and – when even that no longer helps – of metapsychology: the technical commandments and metapsychological knowledge are our signposts, our guide rails when the fog is so thick we no longer know where we stand or whither we go. When we have managed, with their help, to advance successfully and the sun is shining on us again, so to speak, we believe that we were able to toil our way out of the danger zone only thanks to those specific concepts, and feel ideologically reaffirmed in our theoretical and technical assumptions. That is why I think that the function of

theory in the concrete field of transference/countertransference is only partly one of content (where it is quite indispensable, if one is to arrive at correct interpretations with “mutative effect” [Strachey, 1934]). Additionally, however, it serves to shield analysts from their self-doubts, and thus enables them to deal with the difficulties of the patients and maintain their relationships with the patients to further the analytical process. In that second function the specificity of the theory plays a subordinate role. The way I see it, you can often, for example, achieve clinical success with ego psychology concepts as well as with Kleinian ones or others; the main thing is that the patient feels understood, regains confidence in us and can, in consequence, tackle a further awkward or frightening facet of **himself**.

Now one could make a virtue out of necessity, deny the significance of the specificity of a psychoanalytical theory entirely, and put the case for eclecticism, as is being advocated by modern-day proponents of general psychotherapy (e.g. Grawe, 1998); quite similarly to what was happening at the Göring Institute in Berlin at one time. Indeed, the other therapy approaches are successful at the symptomatic level, suggestive methods included – from modern hypnosis to homeopaths, natural healers, chiromantics, and conjurors of all kinds. We cannot then employ the healing of symptoms as an argument and use that to measure the truth of the former’s underlying theory, but must apply *ethical and aesthetical* standards in spite of the neo-liberal zeitgeist. If we take seriously such values as personal freedom and autonomy, responsibility, a spirit of resistance, and a straightforward attitude, as well as critical awareness, we cannot very well heal our patients through prayer or render them permanently dependent on chemical substances that affect the physiology of the brain. And if we are convinced that symptoms are always the expression of repressed conflicts, we cannot seriously content ourselves merely with cosmetic treatment of symptoms, or with faith healing (quite aside from the circumstance that, due to repetition compulsion, any escape into health avenges itself sooner or later with a relapse or a change of symptoms; genuine spontaneous recovery is rare and occurs when, more or less by chance, the sick person stumbles onto outside circumstances that match his or her personality structure exactly, so the symptoms vanish for as long as the change in the environment lasts). In



aesthetic terms a theory should be as spare and unembellished as possible and consistent in itself (here we must concur with Kurt Eissler, in his reply to Franz Alexander, cf. Eissler, 1950) and harmonize, in every case, with the contemporary state of knowledge.<sup>ii</sup> Such plausible attempts at explanation as Melanie Klein's paranoid-schizoid and depressive position (Klein, 1962) or Margareth Mahler's autistic and symbiotic phase (Mahler *et al*, 1978) must be revised when they have proved to be the projections of adults onto infants (Stern, 1983; Dornes, 1997). (The fact that there may "be something to it" anyway in theories whose design was faulty or obsolete from inception is a point I shall get back to later.) In summary, one can say that in constructing a theory, clinical experience plays an important but not exclusive role. *The empirics of our private test laboratory first need to be brought into accord with the findings of neighbouring disciplines while satisfying moral criteria and meeting the requirements of the logic of science.*

#### 4.

On the assumption that our logic of science should be dialectical and materialistic – which I do not intend to go into further within the scope of this manifesto – a whole series of problems presents itself to us in the requisite general overhaul of contemporary psychoanalytical theory. One, the consistency of the Freudian opus needs further testing, and the separate parts of the theory must, in terms of both current knowledge as well as their inner logic, be reviewed, assessed, and, when necessary, developed. Two, we should attempt to untangle the previously mentioned language confusion among psychoanalysts; that is, examine the various "dialects" to find a common denominator and guide them to a common language. My working hypothesis is that drive psychology, ego psychology, and self psychology as well as Klein and Lacan each grasped certain aspects of the complicated dialectics in the lines of development of drives, ego, self, and object relationships but proceeded, in the course of formulating their theories, to *overemphasize or completely generalize* those aspects and neglect the rest. Therefore it is a matter of exploring more closely which elements in the various systems are universally valid, and which represent the unproductive private logic of individuals or of rivalling groups. It is only in the course of such

a “secular” effort (to revive Berthold Rothschild’s expression [1988]) that compatibility or incompatibility can be proved. I call this undertaking of the years to come, which should be seen as a radical one, the “**Critical Psychoanalysis Project**” and rely on Marxistically oriented colleagues from all over the world to participate. In this light I was especially pleased that Robert D. Hinshelwood (London), a Kleinian, made a start of his own accord, in his lecture on repression and splitting in Zurich in 1999, with a “translation” of Kleinian terms into the language of ego psychology. In Zurich we can consider ourselves lucky to have the *Foundation for Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis* and the *Psychoanalytical Seminar*, rival institutions that can foster the process through colloquia, individual lectures and series of lectures. I am convinced that such a collective debate, promoted in a non-sectarian spirit but confrontational nonetheless would, over time, be suitable for changing joint practice in clinics and cultural work and for socially enforcing the position of *critical psychoanalysis* vis-à-vis the mythologizing mainstream already mentioned. I will use three examples to try to make my meaning clear. For the moment, they are concerned with demythologizing Freudian drive theory; resolving the question of neurosis selection, respectively the dialectics between inside and external realities; and prolonging a serious discussion of Kleinian concepts from the viewpoint of ego psychology<sup>2</sup>.

## 5.

The “Critical Psychoanalysis Project” was designed to be a work in progress and to serve as a guideline for action. Thus the invitation to participate was not meant rhetorically, and various colleagues understood it properly. Following the initial publication in our own *Journal (PSZ)* the paper was translated into French (organized by Bernard Sigg, Paris) and Spanish (organized by Ursula Hauser, San José de Costa Rica). So far, three conferences have taken place on the premises of the Foundation: two on Melanie Klein and ego psychology with Dani Bischof, Bob Hinshelwood (London), and Rosemarie Petruschkat, and one with Berta Roth (Paris) on the necessary extension of the setting by involving non-acoustic levels of perception in the cure. Further events will follow.

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<sup>2</sup> in this paper it is not possible to explicate the three examples for lack of internet place, the full text,

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<sup>i</sup> Johannes Reichmayr pointed out to me the following lines by Freud:

*“Ich habe mich von der Wahrheit des Satzes, dass der Streit der Vater aller Dinge sei, nicht überzeugen können. Ich glaube, er stammt von der griechischen Sophistik **her** und fehlt, wie diese, durch Überschätzung der Dialektik.”* (Freud, 1917, p. 246; emphasis mine, E.M.)

<sup>ii</sup> At the Symposium mentioned previously (p. 1), Mario Erdheim convincingly defended the statement that any work on a theory leads to dead ends that could nevertheless be indispensable for the further development of thought. This cannot mean, however, that dead ends should be allowed for in advance or subsequently – when progress has been made – justified or even idealized (as has often been done in the case of the Freudian “*Kulturschriften*”).

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