Psychoanalysis

by J. Edgar Bauer

"Psychoanalysis" is used in a variety of meanings that range from psychic therapy to a method of cultural analysis.

Definitions

First and foremost, the term designates the method of psychiatric treatment created by Sigmund Freud, who coined the term in two publications of 1896: *Weitere Bemerkungen über Abwehr-Neurupsychoosen* (Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defense) and *L’herédité et l’étiologie des névroses* (Heredity and the Aetiology of the Neuroses), the latter a treatise written in French, in which he depicts "a new method of psychoanalysis."

As a specific method of psychotherapy, psychoanalysis presupposes a relation between the psychoanalyst and the patient in which the patient manifests the contents of his unconscious through free association, and the psychoanalyst engages in the interpretation of these contents. In the psychoanalytic situation as described by Freud, there is no attempt to influence the patient by suggestion or hypnosis. Rather, the session takes the form of a conversation between two awakened people. During this conversation, the patient must avoid any bodily effort or sensorial impressions that would distract him or her from concentrating on his or her own psychic activity.

In the history of psychoanalysis, the clinical treatments that Freud undertook or supervised and then related, have attained a paradigmatic status. Besides the clinical histories presented in *Studien über Hysterie* (Studies on Hysteria, 1895), that Freud wrote with Josef Breuer, the psychoanalytical cures of Ida Bauer ("Dora"), Ernst Lanzer ("Rat Man"), and Sergei Constantinovitch Pankejeff ("Wolf Man"), all conducted between 1905 and 1914, constitute the core of the Freudian clinical corpus. Highly relevant in this connection are also the analysis of "Little Hans" undertaken by his father, Max Graff, with the assistance of Freud, as well as the study of the memoirs of Daniel Paul Schreber, whose case Freud considered to be one of paranoia.

Freud's therapeutic method rests on what he termed the five theoretical "pillars" of psychoanalysis: the unconscious, the Oedipus complex, resistance, repression, and sexuality. According to Freud, their acknowledgment should be the condition for being accepted as a psychoanalyst.

While Freudians generally agree upon the fundamental status of these tenets, their views on psychoanalytical technique and didactic have often diverged. All through its history, psychoanalysis has been deeply marked by dissidents, who questioned or contested the centrality of one or more of these "pillars."

Psychoanalysis also designates a worldwide movement that encompasses all schools of Freudian thought and therapy. Freud himself designed an institutional framework that would ensure the internal unity of doctrine and practice of psychoanalysis and at the same time provide the means for its expansion.
Early History

Along with Alfred Adler, Wilhelm Stekel, Rudolf Reitler, and Max Kahane, Freud created in 1902 the so-called Mittwochsgesellschaft (Wednesday Society), the first discussion circle in the history of the movement. In 1907, it was replaced by the Wiener Psychoanalytical Vereinigung (WPV) (Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society), which in its turn was transformed in 1910 into the Internationale Psychoanalytische Vereinigung (IPV). Founded by Freud and Sandor Ferenczi, this society functioned under its German name until 1936, when it adopted its current English designation, International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA).

Since Freud’s disciples in the formative years of psychoanalysis in Vienna were mostly Jews with an Austrian or Hungarian cultural background, the first sphere of expansion and influence of psychoanalysis as a movement was the German-speaking world. Thanks to the efforts of Marie Bonaparte, Freud’s analysand, disciple, and translator, psychoanalysis was subsequently introduced and established in France. Ernest Jones, the author of Freud’s canonical three-volume biography, played a similar role in establishing psychoanalysis in Great Britain.

With the rise to power of Nazism, many Jewish analysts sought refuge in America in the 1930s, and thereby paved the way for the most extensive reception of Freudian ideas in the history of psychoanalysis. Thanks to its popularization in America, psychoanalysis soon attained worldwide recognition as a therapeutic method, and eventually as a new conception of humankind.

Psychoanalysis and the Arts

Beyond its therapeutic relevancy, psychoanalysis became, along with Marxism, structuralism, and phenomenology, one of the intellectual driving forces of the twentieth century. As early as the 1920s, psychoanalysis exerted a distinctive influence on the avant-garde art world through André Breton’s surrealistic applications of the Freudian theory of the unconscious.

Thanks to its increasing scope and diffusion by orthodox and dissenting interpreters alike, psychoanalysis became a powerful method of analysis of works of art, literary texts, and social phenomena. Among the plurality of methods employed in post-modern philosophy and deconstructionism, psychoanalysis offers a distinct approach to the central issues of gender constructions and their resulting power distribution.

Psychoanalysis and gbtq Concerns

The extensive use of psychoanalysis in gay, lesbian, and transgender studies is all the more significant if one considers the ambiguities and uncertainties in the psychoanalytical assessment of homosexuality. Although Freud did not classify homosexuality as an illness, he did regard it as a “certain arrest of sexual development.” Assuming Freud’s views on heterosexual teleology, mainstream psychoanalysis has regarded homosexuality either as a sexual perversion not susceptible to psychoanalytical treatment or as a curable illness, with the assumption that the cure results in the patient’s reorientation toward heterosexuality.

The Historiography of Psychoanalysis

To a large extent, the general perception of psychoanalysis has been determined by the way its main protagonists presented their official history. Freud himself published the first historical treatises on psychoanalysis. In Zur Geschichte der psychoanalytischen Bewegung (On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, 1915), Freud presented himself as the leader of the school of thought he created and as its protector against the dangers posed by the two main dissidents at the time, Alfred Adler and Carl Gustav Jung.

Ten years later, in Selbstdarstellung (An Autobiographical Study, 1925), Freud traced his intellectual
development and emphasized that the invention of psychoanalysis represented a radical break with the unscientific worldview of the era he left behind.

Freud's self-idealizing tendencies were reinforced by the official historiography after World War II that began with the three-volume biography written by Ernest Jones. Despite its import as an indispensable source, the biography misrepresents, among other things, the role Wilhelm Fließ played in the early history of psychoanalysis and the issues related to the estrangement of Wilhelm Reich. Jones deployed his talent to substantiate the legend of Freud as the solitary, self-confident creator of psychoanalysis, who coped with the obscurantism of his age and the disloyalty of his most famous disciples.

In quite a different spirit, Henri F. Ellenberger analyzed the origins and development of psychoanalysis within the framework of the history of dynamic psychiatry. His book *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (1970) marks the beginning of the "revisionist" historiography of psychoanalysis by exploring Freud's personal uncertainties and scientific ambivalences.

With a series of studies and monographs that appeared in the 1970s and eventually led to the publication of *The Historiography of Psychoanalysis* (2000), Paul Roazen inaugurated a clearly dissident version of the development of psychoanalysis that reevaluates the oral, non-official traditions of the movement as an integral part of its intellectual history.

Among other things, this new approach facilitates a more adequate understanding of the role that Anna Freud (1895-1982) played when her father's tolerant views on homosexuality were discarded by the psychoanalytical movement. If it is true, as some sources maintain, that she had a lesbian relation with her close friend Dorothy Burlingham, an unresolved psychological conflict might have influenced her view of homosexuality as a disease and her decision against admitting homosexuals as psychoanalysts.

The sometimes flagrant differences between the official and dissident versions of the history of psychoanalysis reflect the tensions caused by the disputes about the preservation of authentic Freudian doctrine in a movement constantly expanding its theoretical scope and geographic limits.

**The First Dissidents**

Alfred Adler (1870-1937), who became a member of the Wednesday Society in 1902 until his definitive separation from Freud in 1911, initiated the first great schism in the history of the psychoanalytic movement. Never having been Freud's disciple or an adherent of his main teachings, Adler soon began to develop the principles of his own individual psychology, which emphasized the importance of social relations and personal adaptation, and rejected the Freudian theses regarding the unconscious and the central role of sexuality.

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) was not only the second great dissident in the history of psychoanalysis, but also the only Freud disciple whose originality and productivity could be compared to that of the founder. Although Freud suspected Jung to be anti-Semitic, he saw in him a possible successor who, on account of his Gentile extraction, could help psychoanalysis free itself from the charge of being a "Jewish science."

At the time of his first encounter with Freud in 1907, Jung already disagreed with the master’s conception of child sexuality, the Oedipal complex, and the libido. After having tried in vain to convince Freud to downplay the role of sexuality, Jung parted with Freudian psychoanalysis by 1914.

After World War I, Jung began the elaboration of his own analytic psychology, the theoretical system on which his psychotherapeutic method is based. The most relevant concept in his theory is that of archetype, which designates an unconscious preexisting form that determines psychic life and originates the symbolic representations that appear in dreams, art, and religion. With his psychological sanction of the religious imagination, Jung rejected the Enlightenment spirit that pervades Freudian psychoanalysis.
Second Generation Dissidents

Among the members of the second generation of psychoanalysts who emerged after 1918, Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) was the most prominent dissenter. He was the founder of Freudian Marxism, the current of thought also represented by theoreticians such as Otto Fenichel (1897-1948) and Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979).

In his influential analysis of fascism, Reich contended that its cause was not economic or political, but the sexually unsatisfactory lives led by the masses. Criticizing traditional psychoanalysts for their attempt to adapt psychoanalysis to the demands of bourgeois capitalism, Reich propounded a conception of sexuality that stressed biological genitality as a means of attaining an orgiastic sense of happiness, which was not limited by the late Freudian postulation of Thanatos, the death drive. Because of his radical ideas and Communist allegiance, Reich was rejected by Freud, excluded from the International Psychoanalytical Association, and defamed by Ernest Jones.

Unwilling to revise their own anti-homosexual prejudices, the early dissidents of psychoanalysis undertook no noticeable effort to question heterosexual normativity. While Alfred Adler regarded homosexuality as inimical to culture and pleaded for laws requiring compulsory treatment of homosexuals, Wilhelm Reich is reported to have refused to treat a homosexual, remarking that he did not want to deal "with such filth."

Freud's Close Collaborators

The development and expansion of Freudian psychoanalysis could hardly be assessed without taking into consideration the theoretical and organizational work of Freud's closest collaborators.

Sándor Ferenczi (1873-1933) was the most original clinician in the history of Freudian psychoanalysis and the master's preferred disciple, whom he called his "paladin" and "secret grand vizier." Ferenczi became one of the driving forces of the Hungarian psychoanalytical movement, where some of the most creative theoreticians (such as Melanie Klein and Geza Roheim) initiated their work.

From early on, Ferenczi openly challenged prejudices against homosexuality. In his article "Sexuális átméneti fotozatokról" (Sexual intermediary stages), which he presented at the Medical Association of Budapest in 1905, Ferenczi pleaded for a biological and sociological study of the homosexual problem. He supported the petition of Magnus Hirschfeld's Scientific Humanitarian Committee calling for the repeal of the anti-homosexual Paragraph 175 of the German penal code.

In 1919, Ferenczi was awarded the short-lived chair of psychoanalysis at the University of Budapest, at that time the only one of its kind. In his book Versuch einer Genitaltheorie (Thalassa. A Theory of Genitality, 1924), Ferenczi contended that since intra-uterine life reproduced the conditions of existence of living beings in the ocean, the nostalgia for returning to the womb of the mother was also an attempt to revert to the fetal state in maritime depths.

Ferenczi was not alone in his theoretical efforts to abandon the Freudian overemphasis on the role of the father for the sake of a primary and decisive relation to the mother. In 1924, Otto Rank (1884-1939), another brilliant theoretician and innovator of psychoanalytical technique, published his famous treatise Das Trauma der Geburt und seine Bedeutung für die Psychoanalyse (The Trauma of Birth and its Meaning for Psychoanalysis), in which he asserted that the individual attempts to overcome his birth trauma by unconsciously trying to regain the motherly womb. Drawing attention to the role of femininity and motherhood, Rank pleaded for downplaying the import of the Oedipal and castration complexes. By so doing, he anticipated one of the major contentions of British psychoanalysis.

In the history of the psychoanalytical movement, Karl Abraham (1877-1925) is associated with the growing
importance of Berlin in the years following World War I until the rise to power of the Nazi regime. In 1908, Abraham—along with Magnus Hirschfeld, Ivan Bloch, Heinrich Körber, and Otto Juliusburger—established a Freudian circle that was replaced in 1910 by the Psychoanalytic Society of Berlin. Ten years later, Abraham created, with the aid of Max Eitington and Ernst Simmel, the Psychoanalytic Institute of Berlin, a clinical and educational organization that was considered by 1930 to be the heart of the international psychoanalytical movement.

In 1921, Rank opposed, with the support of Freud, the views of Karl Abraham and his Berlin circle regarding the unsuitability of homosexuals to become psychoanalysts. However, the anti-homosexual position, also supported by the influential Ernest Jones, eventually became the official policy of the IPA.

Psychoanalysis in Britain and the United States

Two years before the publication of the treatises by Ferenczi and Rank, the British psychoanalyst Ernest Jones (1879-1958) had already initiated the debate on feminine sexuality at the 1922 congress of the International Psychoanalytical Association in Berlin. Having introduced and promoted psychoanalysis in Great Britain, Jones supported the work of Melanie Klein (1882-1960), who propounded a feminist-oriented revision of Freudian teachings concerning the Oedipal complex and the psychosexual differentiation of male and female children. In time, Klein became the founder of a new school of psychoanalytical thought in Great Britain comparable to that founded by Jacques Lacan in France.

In New York, German-born psychoanalyst Karen Horney (1885-1952) propounded an even more radically critical assessment of Freudian tenets. The revaluation of feminine sexuality and of the pre-Oedipal relation of the child to motherhood that Horney undertook eventually led her to abandon Freudian psychoanalytical theory altogether.

Without the emigration to America of the vast majority of West European analysts between the two world wars and the eager reception of their ideas, Freudian psychoanalysis would hardly have achieved its present-day worldwide recognition as a relevant cultural force. Although most psychoanalytical currents have developed in America, however, nothing comparable to the schools of thought of Melanie Klein or Jacques Lacan has emerged on American soil.

Being more interested in therapeutic effectiveness than in systems of thought, American psychoanalysis stressed, from early on, the need to adapt the individual to her or his societal context. As is perhaps best shown by American Ego Psychology, the pragmatic and adaptive ideals prevalent in most American versions of psychoanalysis have often ignored the critical and emancipatory impulses in Freudian thought and in the work of his immediate followers. Early on, American psychoanalysis influenced and supported the IPA in its discriminatory policy against homosexuals seeking to become members of the organization.

Jacques Lacan and the École freudienne de Paris

In the history of post-Freudian psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) is the only great interpreter of the Freudian corpus whose intention was not to supersede its basic contentions, but to regain its original meaning and scope within a philosophical framework. Recurring to the existential analysis of Martin Heidegger, the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, and the anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Lacan sought to replace the biological anchorage of Freudian thought with a theory of the subject and the unconscious that was structured according to a linguistic model.

Under the guise of an interpretive return to the Freudian texts, Lacan developed an original system of psychoanalytical thought that included a distinct terminology and an original cure technique. Against the social adaptations of the ego propounded by what he termed somewhat disdainfully “American psychoanalysis,” Lacan stressed the relevance of the unconscious and the id, and developed a deeper and more universal understanding of the Oedipal complex and the incest prohibition than the one propounded
by Freud himself.

Free to a large extent from sexual prejudices, Lacan pleaded for a revitalization of Freudian tolerance with regard to alternate sexualities and consequently rejected the anti-homosexual discrimination prevalent in mainstream psychoanalysis.

In 1964, Lacan created the École freudienne de Paris (Freudian School of Paris) based on the ancient model of the Platonic academy as an alternative to the associative model of the official Freudian organizations, whose legitimacy was challenged by the EFP and other Lacanian-oriented groups. Lacan's oeuvre has become an indispensable point of reference of post-modern discourse, his texts having been closely discussed by philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze.

**Feminism and Psychoanalysis in France**

Although not a pansexualist, Freud placed sexuality in the center of psychic life and regarded the acknowledgment of sexual difference as a condition of psychosexual maturity. Thus, not surprisingly, his body of work became a constant source of inspiration for those authors generally considered to belong to the core canon of women's, gender, and queer studies.

Tellingly, Luce Irigaray (born 1932), one of the most distinctive figures within feminist thought in the late twentieth century, is a psychoanalyst by profession and at the same time a keen critic of psychoanalysis. Although Jacques Lacan had initially been her mentor, Irigaray lost her university post soon after the publication of *Speculum, de l'autre femme* (1974), a work propounding radical feminist positions.

Her main objection against Freudian psychoanalysis is that it has been incapable of examining critically the genesis and claims of its own patriarchal and phallocentric discourse. Since, according to Irigaray, the sexual regime of patriarchy is one of disregard for the sexual difference of women, Western civilization is based not on parricide (as Freud taught), but on matricide.

Opposing basic Freudian (and Lacanian) tenets from her own emancipatory version of a psychoanalysis of culture, Irigaray seeks to unearth the socio-politically repressed connection to feminine difference as a means to achieve a general feminization of human sexuality.

Despite her commitment to women's empowerment, however, Irigaray is far from subscribing to the theses of radical lesbianism as propounded by authors such as Adrienne Rich or Monique Wittig.

Another seminal author exploring the relation between psychoanalysis and feminism is Julia Kristeva (born 1941), a practicing psychoanalyst and cultural theorist, who, like Lacan, has approached the Freudian theories of the unconscious and sexual difference with the aid of a semiological theory originating in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure.

A key conceptual opposition in her work is the distinction between the Symbolic (which includes the articulations of the psychic and social dimensions indispensable for the maintenance of life) and what she terms "the Semiotic" (which encompasses the undifferentiated, nearly unstructured drives and impulses underlying pre-Oedipal sexuality). In Kristeva's account, the Semiotic is not only transformed into the Symbolic through repression and sublimation, but remains a permanent source of the transgressions that disrupt the closures of the Symbolic.

Having correlated the Semiotic with the regimes of maternal relatedness and instinctual corporeality, Kristeva focuses on how these regimes initiate a destabilization process that affects the Symbolic overlay in the signifying systems of literature, visual arts, and music. In this context, Kristeva attempts a reevaluation of religion as one of the few cultural sites in which a sense of pre-Oedipal, unrestrained relish ("jouissance") may still be perceived. Kristeva's analysis of the cultural overcoming of patriarchal Law by
the Semiotic potential of religion implies a fundamental revision of the Freudian depreciatory verdict on religion as wishful thinking.

Guy Hocquenghem: The Freudian Text and Gay Liberation

Guy Hocquenghem's (1946-1988) radical theory of gay liberation constitutes a landmark in the brief history of gender and queer studies. Like Reich and Marcuse before him, Hocquenghem attempted, in his approach to human sexuality, a philosophical reconciliation of Marxist thought and Freudian psychoanalytical doctrine. Differing from most interpreters of Freud, however, Hocquenghem sought theoretical support for his emancipatory endeavors within discursive levels of the Freudian texts that seem to disrupt the overall design in which they are contextualized.

In his study *Le désir homosexuel* (Homosexual Desire, 1972), Hocquenghem makes clear that his philosophical debunking of Western phallogocentrism is linked to the deconstruction of Freudian normative heterosexuality and the resulting Oedipal family. This notwithstanding, Hocquenghem proceeds to an empathic reading of Freud's theory of pre-Oedipal polymorphous perversity with the intention of incorporating this theory within the libertarian project of *Le désir homosexuel*.

In this context, Hocquenghem seeks to articulate the idea of a "perverse" sexual continuum that contradicts the "interruptions" of binomial categories ("male," "female"). Since the internalization of the sexual binomium leads to the exclusion of sexual alternatives once present in the psyche and then repressed in the process of genital organization, the recovery of "perverse" possibilities within the polymorphous range of the sexual continuum demands the reversal of Oedipal teleology and of the dimorphic sexual construction on which it is grounded.

In the last resort, Hocquenghem's move from the final phase of sexual organization back to its richer "perverse" antecedent occurs along the lines of a subversive reading of the Freudian text aiming at explicating and reinforcing the text's own emancipatory potential.

Psychoanalysis and Cultural Critique

The numerous dissidences, schisms, and interpretive conflicts in the history of psychoanalysis created, from its very beginnings, a critical and self-critical atmosphere, which, on the whole, fostered its vitality. The new theoretical perspectives that psychoanalysis developed seem to be prefigured in Freud's own propensity to revise and revisit his own standpoints and texts.

Unfortunately, psychoanalysis has also been deeply marked by Freud's authoritarian style of leadership and by the rigid policies of legitimacy conducted by the institutional frameworks he created. The exclusionary strategies deployed by Freud and his followers, however, proved to be an indispensable requisite for granting the movement as a whole clear theoretical and organizational contours.

From a historical perspective, the advancement of psychoanalysis is greatly indebted to the theoretical pursuits accomplished outside its official frameworks. The worldwide diffusion and acceptance of psychoanalysis was dependent, to a large extent, on its capacity to overcome the narrow limits of a therapeutic procedure in order to become one of the most powerful methods of cultural analysis and critique of the twentieth century.

In this respect, psychoanalysis played a decisive role in the emergence of women's, gender, and queer studies, and they, in their turn, evinced the continuing relevancy of the psychoanalytical approach for post-modern discourse. Because of the critical work accomplished in these domains, psychoanalysis is not merely re-examining its own Freudian "pillars" and re-inscribing its new insights in broader interdisciplinary and intercultural contexts, it is also helping create the conditions for conceptualizing the human beyond gender dichotomization and for examining the societal consequences of inexhaustible sexual diversity.
Psychoanalysis, Freud, and the “Western Canon”

Over the years, psychoanalysis, and the work of Sigmund Freud in particular, have been rebutted from a variety of perspectives and with diverse theoretical aims. While psychiatrist and existential thinker Karl Jaspers rejected Freud’s “scientistic superstition” (Wissenschaftsaberglaube), philosopher of science Karl Popper has seriously questioned the epistemological cogency of psychoanalysis.

Further, the therapeutic efficacy of psychanalysis has been in dispute (Adolf Grünbaum), and the personal ethics of its founder has been called in question (Thomas Szasz, Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson). Against the backdrop of a growing skepticism toward psychoanalysis, it is significant that literary historian Harold Bloom includes Freud in his opus The Western Canon on account of his being “the great mythmaker of our time, fit rival to Proust, Joyce, and Kafka as the canonical center of modern literature.” Conceding that, as a therapy, “psychoanalysis is dying, perhaps already dead,” Bloom contends that the canonical survival of Freud is linked with his “description of the totality of human nature.” In his view, Freud “is the mind of our age, as Montaigne was the mind of Shakespeare’s.”

Bibliography


About the Author

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