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FORUM: TEXTS, CONTEXTS, AND THE HISTORY OF PSYCHOANALYSIS: FORUM ON DAGMAR HERZOG, *COLD WAR FREUD: PSYCHOANALYSIS IN AN AGE OF CATASTROPHE*

INTRODUCTION

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Dagmar Herzog, *Cold War Freud: Psychoanalysis in an Age of Catastrophes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016)

The title of Dagmar Herzog's exciting new book, *Cold War Freud: Psychoanalysis in an Age of Catastrophes*, immediately raises a series of questions. If we understand the Cold War as a particular moment in history ranging from the 1940s to the 1980s, but also as a time of intense politicization, we might wonder about the juxtaposition of "Cold War" and "Freud"—the juxtaposition of history and politics with psychoanalysis. When Freud invented psychoanalysis at the end of the nineteenth century, his primary motivation was to treat individuals in their idiosyncrasy through the "talking cure" and the process of transference with the analyst. In that sense, psychoanalysis, at least as Freud exposed it in his initial case studies, had little to say about collective phenomena such as politics. Furthermore, in his more theoretical writings, one of Freud's explicit goals was to develop a theory of subjectivity that went beyond historical specificity. Of course, social and familial configurations affected the psyche in distinctive ways, but neurosis, psychosis, and perversion were subjective *structures* rather than historical developments. Freud's main concepts—whether it be the unconscious,

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the drives, desire, the Oedipus complex—characterized human subjectivity in general. They pointed to the uniqueness of the self as opposed to the animal who was ultimately governed by nature, biology, and instincts. In other words, at first glance, Freudian psychoanalysis was not meant to be historical or political.

And yet, as soon as Freud began publishing and building his institutional realm, politics and history seemed inevitable. Towards the end of his life, Freud himself appeared more interested in collective phenomena as he made clear in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). In these works, however, Freud tended to treat the collective as analogous to the individual—which raised the question of how these two formations differed. Many of Freud's colleagues and followers embraced the challenge and took on the task of revising these psychoanalytic principles and techniques in the hope of making their discipline more historical and more explicitly political. As Herzog puts it, if Freud imagined psychoanalysis as "a therapeutic modality, a theory of human nature, and a toolbox for cultural criticism" all at once, then "the irresolvable tensions between the therapeutic and the cultural-diagnostic potentials of psychoanalysis would be argued over not only by Freud's detractors but by his disciples" (2). Some, like Ernest Jones, urged psychoanalysts to stay away from politics. Others, including many of the characters in Herzog's book, responded that psychoanalysis could in fact offer a privileged lens into politics by paying attention to the role of fantasy, identification, and the imaginary in collective phenomena. Some, like Jacques Lacan, fought against the historicization of Freud and proposed to "structuralize" psychoanalysis one step further. For others, it was obvious that Freud's thought was in many ways framed and limited by his nineteenth-century Viennese patriarchal and bourgeois upbringing and, thus, that psychoanalysis needed to evolve and adapt.

Cold War Freud centers on these debates around psychoanalysis, politics, and history in the aftermath of World War II by asking precisely what it means, historically and conceptually, to juxtapose Freud and the Cold War. The Cold War, Herzog tells us, represented a "golden age" for psychoanalysis, "the heyday of intellectual and popular preoccupation with psychoanalysis" (1). People turned to Freud first to try to make sense of fascism in the aftermath of the Holocaust and, later, to understand the sexual revolution, the rise of women's and gay rights, and decolonization. To be sure, Herzog points out, it was not always the same "Freud" that was invoked. In fact, "there was not one Freud circulating in the course of the Cold War era, and not even only a dozen, but rather hundreds" (7). In all cases, however, it was clear not only that psychoanalysis *could* be used for political purposes, but that it *should.* This was especially true in two domains, fascism and sexuality, both of which appeared to call for this "turn to the psyche" in the postwar years.

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Since Herzog's book seeks to put in conversation text ("Freud") and context ("Cold War"), I will organize my comments along these two lines. First, the context. As Herzog argues, psychoanalysis emerged as an appealing framework to explain the success of authoritarian right-wing movements during the 1930s. From Herzog's narrative, we can also infer that psychoanalysis offered an alternative (and a corrective) to the two major political models of the twentieth century: liberalism and Marxism. By the end of World War II, neither seemed able to account for fascism or to propose a viable social and political alternative. Liberalism, on the one hand, assumed that voters would ultimately act as rational beings motivated by clearly defined interests. In this context, the "irrationalism" of fascism, its appeal to a transgressive and sublime violence, and its promise to regenerate the social body, made little sense. Marxism, on the other hand, continued to dismiss fascism as a displacement of a more accurate material reality, whether it be class interest, capitalist hegemony, or social structure. Yet, by 1950, it had become increasingly difficult to maintain that ideology was exclusive to the ruling classes or that it would disappear with the advent of the revolution, once the working classes acquired the means of production, as the Soviet example indicated.

Psychoanalysis allowed political thinkers (and actors) to move beyond rationalism and false consciousness and to take desire seriously. If European voters had embraced fascism in the 1930s, it was not *despite* its irrationalism but *because* of it. The point was not to oppose the psychic to the political but rather to understand how the two intersected and overlapped. In Herzog's book, the main spokesperson for considering libidinal economy and political economy as one is Félix Guattari, the philosopher, psychoanalyst, and political activist who in 1972 cowrote with Gilles Deleuze *Anti-Oedipus*. The fascism that Deleuze and Guattari targeted in their work was not only the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini but also, as Michel Foucault put it in his preface to the book, "the fascism in us all, in our heads and our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us."[1] For Guattari, the effects of this "fascism in our heads" were especially visible throughout May 1968, which Guattari considered an aborted revolution. Indeed, the desire that had sparked the revolt, a desire that was palpable in the students' initial demands, was immediately crushed—and not only by the right but, more significantly, by the left itself, by the unions and the parties that preferred to settle and negotiate with the government rather than taking the revolution to its full consequences. In this context, psychoanalysis offered a framework to understand what had happened but also to prevent it from happening again. Although Guattari's

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[1] Michel Foucault, "Preface," in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, 1983), xi–xiv, at xii.

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analysis was anchored in the French context, his attention to the libidinal and the unconscious dimension of politics resonated with much of the left in other countries. As Herzog puts is, "the New Left was, simply, *the* major motor for the restoration and cultural consolidation of psychoanalysis in Western and Central Europe and for the further development of psychoanalysis in Latin America as well" (7, original emphasis).

One interesting question raised by Herzog's book is when and why the left abandoned this interest in the psyche—its interest in understanding it but also in mobilizing it for political purposes. The absence of any reflection on the psyche in most of the left today is especially puzzling given that so much of the New Right—and certainly the so-called "alt-right" in the United States—appears to have embraced the politics of desire to promote authoritarian identifications, forms of fanatical intoxication, and radically transgressive violence. Was it the neoliberalism of the 1980s that ultimately forced the left to give up on the unconscious, especially if we understand neoliberalism, as Foucault and Wendy Brown have taught us, as a governing rationality which also interpellates desire, fantasy, and identification, but in new insidious ways?[2] Was it the "turn to the brain" within the neuro-disciplines that made psychoanalysis and Freud's theoretical apparatus seem so irrelevant or outdated? Or was it rather something intrinsic to these leftist politics of desire themselves—perhaps their deconstructive or anarchic inferences—that was ultimately at the root of their exhaustion after the 1970s?

Herzog's careful historicization of psychoanalysis also raises questions about the text itself, the conceptual framework put forth by Freud. As Herzog concludes, there is nothing intrinsically conservative or socially progressive about psychoanalysis as such (2)—its political message depends entirely on the context. In Herzog's words, "The history of psychoanalysis in general, it seems, has been one of countless delayed-reaction receptions, unplanned repurposings, and an ever-evolving reshaping of the meanings of texts and concepts. In the history of psychoanalysis, what a particular reading, a particular understanding has facilitated . . . has often been more important than what was said in the first place" (14). I want to pause on this last statement in order to raise two methodological questions pertaining to the history of psychoanalysis more generally. First, is there a correct way to read Freud? My intention here is not to ask whether Freud's texts resist the "death of the author" but rather to wonder about the foundational status of "Freud" given that psychoanalysis is unimaginable—perhaps impossible?—without him. Does Freud's originary act, his own desire to found this new science

[2] On these forms of identification see, for example, Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York, 2017).

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of psychoanalysis, confer a certain transcendence on the theory, a transcendence that we find in the more conservative uses of psychoanalysis?

Second, are all of Freud's concepts historicizable? For instance, in a fascinating chapter, Herzog traces the emergence of PTSD to a debate in the 1950s and 1960s over financial compensation for mental health damages among Jewish survivors and follows the popularization of the concept during the Vietnam War. How does this highly contingent understanding of trauma relate to the more structural understanding of trauma that Freud puts forth in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, for example, the kind of trauma associated with the death drive of the young child? And if PTSD is indeed contingent, what about sexual difference, which in many ways underpins Freud's entire conceptual apparatus? Herzog's point is that psychoanalysis can serve homophobic or anti-homophobic purposes just as easily. Yet, what do we make of the fact that so many of Freud's concepts—especially the Oedipus complex—are anchored in a structural (as opposed to historical) understanding of sexual difference? Even if certain readings of Freud consider sexual difference an enigma rather than an empirical reality, how can psychoanalysis avoid the kind of transcendence that I previously mentioned? Unlike the notion of "gender," which focuses on the political and historical construction of masculinity and femininity, Freud's understanding of sexual difference can be reduced neither to anatomy nor to convention. In fact, one of the most interesting critiques of "gender" has come from the field of psychanalysis, from scholars such as Leo Bersani, Tim Dean, Joan Copjec, or Tracy McNulty, all of whom have resisted the idea that sexual difference can be historicized like any other concept. As Charles Shepherdson has put it to insist on this foundational status of sexuality, "To think sexual difference is to think the end of historicism."[3] Or, to quote Jacques-Alain Miller's sharp reply to Foucault, "there isn't a history of sexuality in the way that there is a history of bread."[4] How should we understand these claims in light of Herzog's history? Which of Freud's concepts are historicizable and which ones resist this process by their very nature?

The following contributions by Todd Shepard, Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, Regina Kunzel, and Michal Shapira focus on the context or the text in *Cold War Freud* or on the articulation of the two. By foregrounding these methodological considerations and by mapping this captivating history, Dagmar Herzog has given us an important book to think through not only the history of psychoanalysis, but also intellectual history more generally.

3 Charles Shepherdson, *Vital Signs: Nature, Culture, Psychoanalysis* (New York, 2000), 93.

4 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York, 1972), 194–228, at 213.

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