Siegfried Bernfeld
and the Spirit of Psychoanalysis

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Forgotten Analysts and their Legacy: Siegfried Bernfeld
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Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I’d like to open by thanking Dr. Joe Reppen and Dr. Zvi Lothane for the invitation to share with you my research into the life and work of Siegfried Bernfeld. Thank you, gentlemen. It is, indeed, an honor for me to be here.

We are remembering Bernfeld today in order to be inspired by the scientific, creative and socially committed spirit of this exemplary psychoanalyst. We will trace his life and work from Vienna to Berlin to Menton, France and finally to San Francisco. We will reflect on the ecumenical spirit that characterized the early history of psychoanalysis in San Francisco and also remember, so as not to repeat, a history of exclusion and divisiveness.

Siegfried Bernfeld was born May 7th 1892 in Lemberg, Galicia then part of the Austrian Empire. He grew up in Vienna where his father was an importer, manufacturer and distributor of cloth. His mother, like Freud's mother, was considerably younger than her husband. He had a younger brother and a younger sister.

Interested in psychology, he became familiar with Freud’s "Interpretation of Dreams" in 1907 while still at the Gymnasium.

Completing his studies in 1910, Bernfeld entered the University of Vienna where he began studying plant physiology and pursuing his interest in psychology.

He was active in both the socialist and Zionist youth movements and worked for a time as secretary to Martin Buber.

Bernfeld was a prolific writer.

His first professional article was published when he was only 20 years old.

The following year, 1913, the International Journal of Psychoanalysis published his second article "Unconscious Determination of the Thinking Process: A Self Observation." His early psychoanalytic interests included the stories and poems of adolescents.

He married Anne Salomon, in 1914. They were both active in left wing politics and the Zionist movement. The Bernfeld's had two daughters, Rose Marie (born in 1915) and Ruth (born in 1919). Bernfeld served in the army as a translator from the end of 1914 until the end of the First World War and was initially stationed in Vienna where he continued his studies. At the University he changed his major from botany to pedagogy and psychology, and completed his Ph.D. in 1915.
After completing his doctoral studies he was re-stationed by the military to a number of other locations including Turkey. On May 12th 1915 he joined the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society as a "guest" and became a full member in 1919 at the age of 27.

On October 15, 1919, Siegfried Bernfeld opened the doors to his Kinderheim Baumgarten, a Children’s Home, for Jewish war orphans in the aftermath of the First World War. It was a school and demonstration center for progressive education based on socialist conceptions of the importance of trade apprenticeships, Stanley Hall’s work on adolescence, and the psychoanalytic principles of Sigmund Freud pertaining to preventive measures. The educational influences came from Maria Montessori, Berthold Otto and Gustav Wyneke. Working in close collaboration with Willi Hoffer and a sizable staff, he took on 240 children between the ages of three and sixteen (40 of them under five years of age). Some had disabilities, all were hungry, undisciplined, and traumatized. The structure was anti-authoritarian and oriented to the creativity and freedom of the young people. Bernfeld was a restless, rebellious, creative and frankly revolutionary character himself and the revolution he set out to effect was one, which confronted the limits of the older generation’s falsehood and hypocrisy and called on youth to stand up to the challenge of creating a better world. Willi Hoffer said Bernfeld was not a dreamer and a talker but a hard worker. The Kinderheim Baumgarten was only open for six months before it shut its doors due to a number of complications. As an institution it had failed but it was the model of psychoanalytically informed residential care and treatment that inspired Anna Freud’s nurseries in Vienna and London and could be fairly described as the original inspiration behind the subsequent history of psychoanalytically informed residential treatment.

Bernfeld didn’t conceive of father, mother and children as a unit but rather “wise men and great women” whom the children could look up to. Willi Hoffer, describing Bernfeld’s vision, wrote, “To develop a sense of self-reliance in earliest childhood, the mother herself has to be provided with everything, so that she can dedicate herself to her children; then comes the ‘children’s house’ which is locally but not emotionally segregated from the parental community. At school the child lives in an environment, which gives full scope for self-education in small communities. Education means living in an environment completely adjusted to the young who one day will want to be fully adult themselves; the pace of development and for reaching adulthood will be controlled by the child’s innate capacities, not prescribed by adult society.” If this vision sounds in some way familiar to you, it is because these ideas that originated with Bernfeld did in fact become a part of the original Kibbutz education in the 1920s in Palestine and continue to this day, in various forms, in the Israeli kibbutzim (Hoffer, 1965)
In 1922 Bernfeld told Freud of his intention to open an analytic practice in Vienna and asked if a training analysis was advisable, as was being suggested in Berlin. Freud replied, “Nonsense. Go right ahead. You certainly will have difficulties. When you get into trouble we will see what we can do about it.” A week later Freud sent him his first patient an English professor in town for one month who wanted to experience a bit of analysis. Bernfeld, anxious about the arrangement went back to Freud who said, “You know more than he does. Show him as much as you can.” (Ekstein, 1966, p. 418)

This was the story as Rudolf Ekstein reported it but Bernfeld told Bryce Boyer a slightly different and more elaborated version of the story. Boyer wrote, “The following day, an English clergyman… can my memory be right that the clergyman was an archbishop? … appeared, with his wife, saying he was to be in Vienna for three months and wanted to undergo psychoanalysis. Since he had no secrets from his wife, he would expect her to remain in the room with him. The stunned and confused Bernfeld brought him an extra couch and had the clergyman lie on one while his wife, who was to be silent, lay on the other. During the first week or so, the clergyman periodically turned to his wife to have her affirm what he had told Bernfeld. However, soon thereafter, one day he said to her, “My dear, I believe things would progress better if you stayed away from the interviews henceforth.” Dr. Bernfeld told me no more of the story except to say that he felt that the clergyman was pleased with his analytic experience.” (Letter March 23, 1991)

As a socialist and Zionist, Bernfeld was a leader of youth and as a psychoanalyst he was interested in the diaries and poetry of young people. He presented his ideas in the Wednesday Meetings of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society.

In one of these psychoanalytic meetings Bernfeld observed Freud drawing and writing on a slip of paper. After the meeting Bernfeld retrieved the paper and found it covered with doodles and the names of some of those in attendance including Bernfeld’s. Incidentally, one of Freud’s doodles, on that slip of paper, subsequently became the logo for the Freud Museum in London and another became the logo for the San Francisco Center for Psychoanalysis. (Sigmund Freud: His Life in Pictures and Words" by Ernst Freud, Lucie Freud, and Ilse Grubrich-Simitis)

Bernfeld’s contributions to psychoanalysis were highly regarded. He was recognized, from the beginning, as an inspiring and eloquent lecturer, an advocate of progressive education and a prolific writer.
In 1925 he published a major volume entitled Psychology of the Infant (Psychologie des Säuglings). It is not often cited in the literature but it was a pioneer study in the psychoanalytic interpretation of infancy (English translation 1929) and it appeared long before psychoanalytic infant observation, as we know it today. In order to make a sweeping survey of the field, Bernfeld drew on the infant observations of researchers outside of psychoanalysis and framed these observations psychoanalytically. He defined infancy as the time between the trauma of birth and the trauma of weaning and attended primarily to infant behavior as an expression of various aspects of libido development.

Also in 1925 he published his Sisyphus or the Limits of Education (1973) (Sisyphos oder die Grenzen der Erziehung). In Sisyphus Bernfeld brought together his socialist political views with his psychoanalytic perspective and described the limits of education as the limits of the political system as well as the psychological limits of the child and the teacher (English translation 1973). The teacher then was seen as a kind of Sisyphus working at the impossible task of teaching between these two ever-present sets of limitations.

In 1925 the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society's Training Institute was established with Helene Deutsch as Director, Bernfeld as Vice Director and Anna Freud as Secretary.

While Bernfeld remained a socialist, his wife became a communist and this was among several other reasons for their separation and divorce in 1926. She moved to Russia and left their two children with him.

Bernfeld moved to Berlin, married actress Liesl Neumann, re-established his practice as an analyst, and began to teach at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute.

There too, he was acknowledged as a brilliant and dedicated teacher. In a letter of recommendation, written in 1931, Freud said of Bernfeld:

"He is an outstanding expert of psychoanalysis. I consider him perhaps the strongest head among my students and followers. In addition he is of superior knowledge, an overwhelming speaker and an extremely powerful teacher. Thus I can say all in all only the very best about him and we deeply regretted it when he left for Berlin."

Though most photographs of Bernfeld appear very serious, he was said to have been very witty and I imagine quite playful based on some photos he had of himself that he marked up in some amusing ways.
Within the emerging positivist culture of the Vienna Circle and logical positivism in the 1920s and early ’30s there was an effort to anchor psychoanalytic theory in the physical sciences.

This led Bernfeld, with his background in botany and mathematics, to collaborate with Sergei Feitelberg in a series of physiological studies proposing to measure libido. In 1930 they published Energie und Trieb.

Bernfeld’s daughter, Ruth Goldberg, was a subject in his libidometry experiments and recalled, “I would sit still and they would have some apparatus to touch the skin to see when I started feeling it. … to measure the energy, I suppose, that was needed till the subject would feel it” “one of those sensory experiments where some needle came toward the skin and you said when you could feel it.”

But Bernfeld was not alone in the concrete interpretation of libido as a real form of energy. It was reified as a real energy by many psychoanalysts and of course Wilhelm Reich had his own version, which he called Orgone energy.

George Gero, M.D. (1901-1993), the Hungarian analyst, said that when Bernfeld told Freud about his project to measure libido, Freud was unimpressed and said, "Well, my friend Bernfeld, I believe I will die with unmeasured libido."

My understanding is that this effort to measure libido ultimately led Bernfeld and Feitelberg into a dead end after which I presume, the concept of libido was allowed to return to its place as an energetic metaphor for the location, direction, and intensity of desire. Ruth Goldberg recalled, “He didn’t pursue it because it was fruitless. It was just not an approach that gave results.”

In 1930, eight years after he began practicing and teaching psychoanalysis, Bernfeld entered into his first and only analysis with Hanns Sachs.

He was in analysis for two years.

Wilhelm Reich was one of the major clinicians in Berlin at that time. Reich was also actively involved in integrating Marxist and psychoanalytic concepts, and proposed that the death instinct was actually a function of the capitalist system. Freud was thoroughly annoyed with Reich’s attempt to misuse the psychoanalytic journals for his political propaganda. In 1932 Reich’s ideas on the integration of Freudian and Marxist concepts were published, but so was a refutation of those ideas by Bernfeld, who was both an
analyst held in high regard and also extremely well versed in the Marxist literature. With Bernfeld’s refutation, Reich became increasingly marginalized by the psychoanalytic establishment.

Horacio Etchegoyen referred to Bernfeld as “one of the great thinkers of psychoanalysis” and he summarized Bernfeld’s 1932 article on the three types of interpretation. He described the “final interpretation,” “the functional interpretation” and highlighted “reconstruction”, as the third type of interpretation and the one that properly belongs to psychoanalysis. Reconstruction is what establishes the genetic link of a phenomenon that has remained separated from the manifest object of interpretation. (Etchegoyen, 19XX, p. 333 - 335) Etchegoyen noted, “Freud purposely compared the work of the psychoanalyst with that of the archeologist who also reconstructs from traces or vestiges. This is why Bernfeld says that a better term for the analyst’s work is “reconstruction” rather than interpretation.” Etchegoyen observed that Freud took the same view as Bernfeld five years later in his article, Constructions in Psychoanalysis. Though Freud did not cite Bernfeld, Etchegoyen says “it is logical for us to assume that Bernfeld’s article left traces in him.” And here Etchegoyen is playing with Bernfeld’s statement that psychoanalysis is a Spurenwissenschaft - a science of traces. Etchegoyen says that even if Freud didn’t read Bernfeld’s article, the two were clearly very much in contact at this time and it is likely that Freud may have just picked up the idea along the way. (Etchegoyen, 1995, pp. 10-2 – International Psychoanalysis)

In 1932 Hitler was receiving popular support, Siegfried Bernfeld and his second wife divorced, and Bernfeld left Berlin to return to Vienna to practice and teach. He also brought together his scientific mind and libido theory to reconsider adolescence and wrote important papers on various types of adolescence based on the typical conflicts between the instincts and the external and internal forces which call for renunciation in the context of the adolescent’s early childhood environment and the adolescent’s present environment. Using this strategy Bernfeld described the rebellious adolescent that disregards prohibitions, the extremely compliant adolescent that represses his impulses and a mixed type. Bernfeld’s types of adolescents are interesting and evocative but I believe their evocative quality is what has lived on in so far as they have directly stimulated others to think further about adolescence.

As a member of the second generation, Bernfeld's cohort included Willi Hoffer, Anna Freud, and August Aichhorn.

The four of them conducted a weekly study group on Psychoanalytic Pedagogy, which was open not only to candidates in training but to schoolteachers and social workers as
well. In conjunction with this study group was their work on the Journal of Psychoanalytic Pedagogy (Zeitschrift fur Psychoanalytische Padagogik).

It will be recalled that Bernfeld’s first wife went off to Russia and left their two girls with their father. Bernfeld then sent them off to boarding schools. His daughter, Ruth, emphasized that as a result of this arrangement she didn’t really know her father very well. She would see him when he visited and it sounds as though the relationship was a good one but she made it clear that it certainly was not a close relationship. But he was playful and more than anything else, tolerant. On one occasion she told him she needed a signed excuse from him to return to class after their visit. He readily agreed but then said it would be a far better arrangement if she had some prepared excuses and could leave whenever she wanted. They then got to work writing excuses on every page in a small tablet beginning with physical ailments of the head and working their way through the body and down to the toe.

In Vienna two young men inspired by Bernfeld and his work on the diaries and poetry of adolescents and his typology of adolescents were Erik Erikson and Peter Blos who would later become two of the most important contributors to the psychoanalytic understanding of adolescence. Erikson described Bernfeld as a “very inspiring teacher” (Erikson, Life history, p. 38) and Blos wrote, “Siegfried Bernfeld became an idealized personality of mine.” (Personal communication check date)

Bernfeld remained in Vienna for only two years during which he practiced analysis and taught at the institute. In 1934 he married once again. His third wife was a former supervisee from Berlin - Suzanne Cassirer Paret.

She had studied some philosophy and medicine, was the daughter of Paul Cassirer a well-known art dealer in Berlin, and the niece of the Kantian philosopher, Ernst Cassirer. She was analyzed by Hanns Sachs and Sigmund Freud.

In the 1930s fascism and anti-Semitism were spreading through Europe at a feverish pace and Bernfeld began making plans to go to the United States. This, however, had to be done in stages. At the end of 1934, Bernfeld moved to Menton, France with Suzanne, his daughters Ruth and Rose Marie and Suzanne's two children, from a previous marriage, Renate and Peter Paret.

In France he saw only a couple of patients and was investigating topology, the study of the geometric structures of biological organisms and their relation to function. After two and a half years in France the family obtained visas to go to England. They were in
England from January 1937 to the beginning of August when they obtained their visas and work permits to go to the United States.

On August 15th 1937 they arrived in New York where the psychoanalytic establishment urged him to go west. The family visited in Chicago and then moved on to Los Angeles where Frances Deri, Otto Fenichel, and Ernst Simmel had settled. There were thoughts of settling in Santa Barbara but Bernfeld was asked to fill the need to establish psychoanalysis in San Francisco. Bernfeld agreed to go and arrived there in September 1937.

Before discussing Bernfeld’s work in San Francisco I want to mention that some of the major biographical sketches and obituaries about Bernfeld were written by people that only knew him in Vienna and they all expressed a shared idea that Bernfeld became pessimistic after the failure of the Kinderheim Baumgarten and his emigration to the States. They described him as “overcome by pessimism” (Ekstein) said he’d “arrived too late to start afresh” (Hoffer) and they had little to say about his work in San Francisco about which they knew little. They give a somewhat depleted impression. And yet, people that knew Bernfeld in San Francisco never described him in this way. He was pessimistic in the way of many eastern European intellectuals of that time but beyond that he was described as passionately committed to psychoanalysis - analyzing, researching, teaching and writing with sustained enthusiasm. He wore a smile on his face and had a ready wit. San Francisco was not the sad place where he ended up. It was the last vital chapter of an inspired life. And it was a rich and full chapter.

It seems Siegfried Bernfeld arrived in San Francisco on September 1st 1937 and that evening he attended a lecture by a visiting analyst - Franz Alexander.

Siegfried Bernfeld was one of the early analysts in San Francisco but he was not the first analyst to practice here. He was preceded by five little known American-born analysts and Bernhard Berliner, an émigré analyst who trained at the Berlin Institute.

San Francisco's first psychoanalyst was Alfred Kroeber the world famous anthropologist who wrote extensively on the Native Americans of California. Following the deaths of his first wife in 1913 and his close friend, "Ishi", the so called "last wild Indian in North America" in 1916. Kroeber became interested in psychoanalysis and went to New York in 1917 to be psychoanalyzed by Dr. Gregory Stragnell.

Kroeger returned to San Francisco a year later and began practicing psychoanalysis at the Stanford Clinic in 1918. He maintained a private practice in psychoanalysis from 1920 –
1923 and then made the decision to close his practice and dedicate himself full-time to his anthropological work. Nonetheless he continued to be interested in psychoanalysis and wrote two important papers on Freud's *Totem and Taboo*.

In 1930 Kroeber's childhood friend and colleague Dr. Joseph Thompson opened a psychoanalytic practice in San Francisco. Thompson was an M.D., a surgeon, a former Naval officer, a veteran of four wars. He published articles on salamanders, fish and snakes; and donated 16,000 snakes to the San Francisco Zoo. He was a celebrated cat breeder and all Burmese cats in this country are believed to have descended from Wong Mau, a cat that Thompson personally brought from Asia.

He was trained at the Washington-Baltimore Institute and analyzed by Dr. Philip Gravens. He wrote articles on psychoanalysis for the popular press and scholarly papers on the symbolism of Egyptian, Sumerian and Chinese written languages. He also wrote on the Psychology of Primitive Buddhism, Tropical Neurasthenia, and so on. He was passionately committed to the cause of lay analysis, eventually broke affiliations with all M.D.s and trained three lay analysts here in San Francisco.

One was a man named Earl W. Nilsson who later moved to Beverly Hills where I presume he continued to practice.

Another was a major art deco and cubist sculptor named Jacques Schnier. He was the founder of the sculpture department at U.C. Berkeley, one of the founders of the Psychoanalytic Education Society, and the author of more than 20 articles on psychoanalysis and art. He practiced psychoanalysis from the early 1940s until 1955. He was analyzed by Thompson and supervised by one of Thompson's other students, Mr. Aaron Morafka.

Aaron Morafka began his analysis and training with Thompson in 1932 and practiced until 1987. He was a co-founder of the Psycho-analytic Education Society, a group of former analysands of Joe Thompson that sponsored lectures and discussion groups as ways to continue their study of psychoanalysis.

Bernhard Berliner was a psychologist and psychiatry who began his analytic training in 1928 at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute where he was analyzed by Wilhelm Reich and Karl Muller-Braunschweig. In 1936 Berliner and his family arrived in San Francisco. He made a brief and unfruitful contact with Thompson and his group, did a residency at Mt. Zion to get licensed in this country, established a practice, and along with his wife served as a welcoming committee for Bernfeld and the other analysts as they began to arrive from the continent in 1937, '38, and '39.

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In addition to these early analysts, San Francisco also had visits from Abraham Arden Brill, Geza Roeheim, Clarence Oberndorf, Alfred Adler, Otto Rank, Oscar Pfister, and Rudolf Von Urbantschitsch.

When the émigrés began to arrive in San Francisco they were welcomed by Drs. Bernard Kaufman Sr., Ernst Wolff and Leona M. Bayer. Kaufman, a medical doctor at Mt. Zion, was instrumental in helping get many of the émigrés situated here on the west coast.

Dr. Ernst Wolff was a pediatrician with a passionate interest in psychoanalysis, which he incorporated into his work as head of the Child Guidance Clinic at Mt. Zion Hospital. His wife Dr. Leona M. Bayer was an internist who specialized in treating adolescents and young adults at the Stanford University Hospital, which was located where the Pacific campus of the California Pacific Medical Center is located today. Incidentally, if you want to know why so many psychoanalysts and psychotherapists have their offices located in Pacific Heights it is quite simply because of the warm welcome that Drs. Kaufman, Wolff and Bayer offered the émigrés.

Ernst Wolff quickly became a close personal friend of Bernfeld, and promoted him by bringing him into Mt. Zion to offer lectures.

Soon after the Bernfelds arrival, Siegfried Bernfeld organized a monthly study group. They would enjoy some good wine and talk about various psychoanalytic topics of interest, usually with Siegfried Bernfeld leading the discussion. Topics included basic psychoanalytic ideas, the issue of lay analysis, contemporary psychoanalytic controversy, psychoanalytic research, and so on. The group’s uniqueness was not its structure or the topics they discussed but rather the interdisciplinary group of people assembled for these meetings. This group included Siegfried and Suzanne Bernfeld, Bernhard and Hildegard Berliner, Anna Maenchen, Emanuel Windholz, Erik H. Erikson, Jean Macfarlane, Donald Macfarlane, Josephine Hilgard, Ernest Hilgard, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Egon Brunswik, Edward Chace Tolman, Harold Jones, Olga Bridgman, Alfred L. Kroeber (anthropologist), Robert Lowie (anthropologist), Ernst Wolff (pediatrician), and J. Robert Oppenheimer (the theoretical physicist and father of the atomic bomb). There was no institute and no consistent site for meetings to be held. Instead they met in people’s private homes both for seminars and, of course, for parties.

Bernfeld’s patients recall his therapeutic stance as kind, careful, attentive, relaxed, and quiet. One of his analysands, Nathan Adler, recalled that Bernfeld, like Freud, typically
made an interpretation in the form of a metaphor or Yiddish proverb. His interpretations were not formulations, explanations or any other kind of cognitive appeal that might encourage rationalizing or intellectualizing. He used metaphors as a vehicle to interpret the resistance.

One of his offices was recalled as being a large comfortable living room at his home on Jefferson Street in the Marina District across from the duck pond at the Palace of Fine Arts. It had the couch, his chair, oriental rugs, a large table covered with books in many languages and some chocolates for his patients.

Along with Erik Erikson, Jean Macfarlane, Leona M. Bayer and many others, Siegfried Bernfeld worked on the longitudinal studies at the Institute for Child Welfare on the campus of the University of California at Berkeley. Bernfeld worked specifically on the investigations underway to study the methods used by asthmatic children in dealing with psychological problems.

In 1942 the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Society and Institute was established as a constituent member of the American Psychoanalytic Association, which meant that in accordance with the 1938 resolution, senior analysts without medical degrees were grandfathered in as lay analysts but not allowed full membership in the society and others without M.D.s were blocked from training. This and the tendency toward the bureaucratization of the Institute did not sit well with Bernfeld. He voiced his opposition eloquently, quietly, and consistently but in keeping with his character he kept most of his frustration inside.

The issue of lay analysis was a painful one for most of the Institute members as it meant the partial exclusion of analysts such as Bernfeld, Erikson, Maenchen, Nevitt Sanford, and others but there were at least three pressures continuing to push for the exclusion of the lay analysts. The first was a pressure to legitimize psychoanalysis under the umbrella of medicine. The second was a pressure to help the émigrés with M.D.s get established professionally and, not incidentally, financially. A third, uniquely American factor was the pressure to maintain a medical monopoly on psychoanalysis. While many are well aware of this third pressure and are quick to vilify or defend the medical monopoly of psychoanalysis, the first two pressures that I mentioned should not be underestimated. Psychoanalysis was popularly viewed, at that time, as comparable to occult practices and émigrés recently uprooted from Nazi Germany and Austria had families to feed. The need to make psychoanalysis legitimate was urgent and attempts to do so were often desperate.
Bernfeld, who was head and shoulders above the other analysts in San Francisco was permitted only an Honorary Membership under which he continued to teach, supervise and conduct training analyses. His eloquence as a teacher and lecturer made him just as famous in San Francisco as it had in Vienna and Berlin.

He is said to have been a tall, gaunt man who was missing most of his teeth. He has been described as an Ichabod Crane character, an Abraham Lincoln, a Savonarola, and as a Don Quixote type. Anna Maenchen recalled that his eloquence in Vienna earned him the title "the Caruso of the Psychoanalytic movement." Joseph Wheelwright considered him to be “Freud’s last protégé”. Edith Buxbaum said he was “a fascinating person who cast a spell on adult audiences in the same way in which he was the undisputed leader of youth whenever he chose to be.” (Buxbaum, 1969, p. 28-9) E.B. Spiller considered him “second only to Freud”. And Haskell Norman, described Bernfeld as “a very impressive lecturer … he seemed like the closest thing to Freud at the time.”

Bernfeld smoked three packs of cigarettes a day – Tarrytons - had total command of the English language, was caring toward his students, and is said to have been playful and witty.

Shortly after arriving in San Francisco Bernfeld was asked how his analytic practice was coming along. Bernfeld replied, “Great! I work from morning till night. One patient in the morning and one at night.”

Joseph Wheelwright recalled Bernfeld saying, “The only problem with self-analysis is the countertransference.”

Nathan Adler recalled Bernfeld spread out on the lawn, face down and saying ironically, “I am lord and master of all that I survey.”

Many described Bernfeld of being very tolerant or even too tolerant or too permissive. Though he had a highly disciplined mind, he did not insist on that for others. Nathan Adler said he was a quiet supervisor and if one were to say something stupid Bernfeld would be inclined to say something like, “Well, that is a very interesting idea.” In which case one knew one had just blown it. His daughter Ruth recalled his tolerance saying that when she started smoking as a teenager, Bernfeld simply responded by offering her a cigarette along with all the other adults in the room. On another occasion, when she was struggling with some fears, her father told her, “Life is a dangerous thing. You’re liable to end up dead.”
Francis Carter remembered, “He always walked with a long hurried stride because he was very tall – always with a tremendous amount of enthusiasm telling jokes and smiling. He was a very charming person.”

Estelle Weiss was an analysand of Bernfeld’s and recalled, “He didn’t wear his psychoanalytic identity like a coat of armor. He was always human and always open. … He was a gentleman. Very humane. He had great perspective on analysis. He took a long view. He saw things in historical perspective including what he was doing and what you were doing and I think that very thing may have threatened some of the people for whom psychoanalysis was more an identity. “

She said that as an analyst he was “very gentle and very meticulous… he handled an analysis as though you were a … delicate specimen … something he was working on with great precision and gentleness. He was not in any way flamboyant. He was quiet. He didn’t talk much and when he did talk you were aware that he was acutely aware of your feelings. He was very careful not to hurt you or upset you. He made the situation very comfortable... He made interpretations obliquely sometimes by analogy in apt but indirect ways but always very clear ways.”

Like Joseph Thompson, Bernfeld collected cats and became very involved in breeding them and distributing the kittens to his friends. He had a cattery in Fairfax where he conducted experiments to cross a Burmese cat with an Abyssinian cat. Other accounts say it was a black longhaired Persian with a Siamese.

Bernfeld gave public lectures on psychoanalysis that were very well received and he continued to teach within the Institute. By 1944, however, only two years after the Institute became a constituent member of the American Psychoanalytic Association, Bernfeld and the establishment of the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute were in open conflict. From what I’ve been able to gather, the substance of the conflict included
1) The exclusion of lay analysts from the membership,
2) His “honorary” membership status,
3) The concept of a separate Training Analyst status as opposed to a general membership from which candidates might select a training analyst,
4) The reporting rule for training analysts,
5) The Institute's tendency toward more rules, regulations, and bureaucratization,
6) The plans to build a building for the institute instead of using the money for a low fee clinic and research
7) Bernfeld’s distaste for the stony interpersonal kind of technique being taught and
8) The Institute's refusal to grant membership to his wife Suzanne Bernfeld.

Suzanne Bernfeld had been analyzed by Hanns Sachs and Sigmund Freud.

Though her medical training at the University of Berlin had been cut short by the Nazis, she received analytic training in Berlin and Vienna and was an active participant in Siegfried Bernfeld's on-going seminars. She was clearly acknowledged as a talented analyst but was also an outspoken, free wheeling, spirited woman with strong opinions who seems to have rubbed enough people the wrong way that they resisted her entry into the Institute as a full member.

These were Institute-wide conflicts and debates but they quickly became personified in something of a battle between Siegfried Bernfeld and Emanuel Windholz. More than half a century later there is a tendency to reduce this battle to nothing more than a personality conflict but this would be an error. There were specific ideas and values that were in conflict. It is important to bear in mind that the theory and values underlying Bernfeld's view of Institute training were consistent with his views on child education and Institute training as he had been describing and practicing them in the 1920s and 30s in Vienna and Berlin. I can only assume that Windholz had his reasons for maintaining his position as well - though I have far less insight into those. About all I could say is that he was trained in the more formal Berlin Institute and Prague study group, was an MD and it was in his family’s best interests that he make a career under the umbrella of the American Psychoanalytic Association rules. When the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Society was founded it included analysts in Seattle, Washington, San Francisco, Tucson Arizona and Los Angeles. If we examine Otto Fenichel’s Rundbriefe we discover that Ernst Simmel, in Los Angeles, was the first president of the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Society and that he pushed through the society’s application to the American with the required different membership categories for MD analysts and Lay analysts much to Fenichel and Windholz’s dismay.

That said, those close to Bernfeld recall the unkind actions of Windholz, Reider and others who avoided sending patients to the lay analysts, were personally rude and refused to cover for lay analysts when they went on vacation. So their verbal support for Lay analysis and their day-to-day actions appear to have been at variance. Even those that loved Windholz and were indebted to him, admitted he and Reider and others close to them had not been kind toward Bernfeld. The hostilities were intense and personal relationships deteriorated entirely. I have mentioned several specific reasons for the conflict but perhaps we should also remember that Bernfeld was a stellar figure, a gifted teacher, natural analyst, a first rate intellect. He was dynamic, creative, a maverick and
extremely appealing. So would we be surprised if envy, jealousy and resentment also played a role in this controversial chapter of psychoanalytic history? I think not. Hildegard Berliner was married to Bernhard Berliner was very fond of Bernfeld and had a special relationship with Windholz late in life. When I asked about these issues, her sympathies were clearly with Bernfeld but she stopped short of criticizing her husband and Windholz simply saying, “I’d rather not comment.” She then went on to explain the difficulties of emigration and the desperate measures taken to get established that were often at the expense of their friends and colleagues.

Nonetheless, Bernfeld, frustrated with the Institute's policies regarding membership, institutional hierarchies, and some of the other typical pitfalls of bureaucratization, maintained his affiliation with the Institute and continued to teach there. In 1944, however, he started his own informal training program with a few students at his home. This unauthorized training, clearly in violation of the rules of the American, began with a small group that included Suzanne Bernfeld, Nathan Adler, Agnes Ain, Steven Pepper, Marian Russell and a couple of others. They had reading seminars and discussed cases. After a time the group disbanded, but the Bernfeld's continued to supervise and refer cases to Adler and Ain.

Nathan Adler said, “Bernfeld was one of the most eloquent speakers I've ever heard. He identified with Freud so he smoked too much, and also, like Freud, he lectured without notes. His extemporaneous lectures, though not in his native language, would be in the most precise, elegant, and exquisite prose! I sat at the edge of my seat listening not only to what he said, but to the way he spoke. It was an aesthetic experience.”

Incidentally, Nathan Adler, as a committed leftist, found common ground with Bernfeld not only in psychoanalysis but in politics as well. And Adler was quick to contradict Russell Jacoby who argued, in his book Social Amnesia: A Critique of Contemporary Psychology from Adler to Laing (1975), that the left wing analysts involved in political and social action in Europe, sold out when they came to America. “He's being naive.” Adler said. “They didn't desert their principles when they came to America. Fenichel, Bernfeld, Fromm, Horney and the rest had all been radicals and left-wingers. When they came to the USA they just fell in love with America and were delighted with FDR. They'd been accustomed to a culture of violent confrontations and encroaching fascism, where arrest meant flight into the underground. They arrive here and Roosevelt makes a speech about "My dog Falla" and the Bernfeld's purred about that story again and again! In the New Deal world they found a responsiveness that made it unnecessary to have to move further left. In the U.S. they found room to move, to criticize, and to adjust. There was enough openness in the country to change policy, to have influence. What happened
to this group was not that they sold out to America but rather that they fell into a great love affair with the America of the New Deal.” (Benveniste, 1992d, p.307)

In addition to his analytic work, his teaching at the Institute, and his seminars and supervision of the small group he gathered at his home, Bernfeld also continued to write. In 1938 he published, "Types of Adolescence," and in 1940 "Camp and the Emotional Development of the Child."

In 1941 he published "The Facts of Observation in Psychoanalysis" in which he described psychoanalysis as a method of personal investigation based on the model of an "ordinary conversation" in which the analyst listens and removes the obstacles to disclosure enabling the analysand to say what is difficult to say.

He schematized the psychoanalytic process as a movement from the patient's usual discourse, to the development of a secret, to the analyst’s interpretation of the resistance, to the patient's confession of the secret, and a return to the usual discourse. Bernfeld emphasized that it is not the content of the secret or confession to which the analyst should be attending but rather to the nature of the obstacle to disclosure - the nature of the resistance. This important paper was republished in 1985 as a classic in the International Review of Psychoanalysis along with a preface by Victor Calef and Edward Weinshel. In 1995 Joseph Weiss reported that he and Harold Sampson, using formal empirical psychotherapy research methods to study the sequence of events leading up to and following the patient’s confession of a secret, had found support for Bernfeld’s observations and his suggestion that understanding this sequence throws light on the science of psychoanalysis (Weiss, 1995 Psychoanalytic Quarterly LXIV).

In 1944 Bernfeld and his wife, Suzanne, began their biographical project, researching and writing about Freud's early development. Their findings figure prominently in the Ernest Jones biography of Sigmund Freud.

Bernfeld suffered a coronary thrombosis in December 1951. In June of 1952 he had surgery to remove a tumor from his right lung.

On November 10th 1952 Siegfried Bernfeld delivered a lecture before the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Society and Institute entitled 'On Psychoanalytic Training.' Along with his presentation he also resigned either his position as a training analyst or from the Society altogether. I’m not really sure which. He had resigned from the education committee some years before so I am unsure about the nature of his resignation in 1952. In any case, his presentation ‘On Psychoanalytic Training’ was a well thought out
challenge to some of the consequences of Institute training that he had encountered. Bernfeld, as a particularly inspired teacher, an eloquent lecturer, and a passionate idealist remained committed to the primary prerogatives of students and their freedom to grow despite the encroachments of bureaucratic institutions. He was concerned about his students and was caring toward them. He had the passion of a political reformer, the discipline of a mathematician, and the temperament of an artist. He abhorred authoritarian administration-centered institutions that stifled students and their creativity. He had flourished in the Vienna and Berlin Institutes primarily because they were new, unstructured, and he was free to teach as he saw fit. With the establishment of the American Institutes, psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic training became formalized and Bernfeld felt these institutions as a constriction of the psychoanalytic ethos. In his lecture, which was posthumously published, he discussed his experiences in the Vienna and Berlin Institutes, raised his concerns with the then current teaching practices, and presented a vision of another kind of a psychoanalytic institute.

He described an institute that would be student-centered and progressive in its teaching approach. There would be few formal requirements for admission other than a passionate interest and talent for psychoanalysis. Potential students would be followed in an informal way and if they showed further promise would be invited to meetings of the Psychoanalytic Society. Study would take place in small groups and the focus would largely be on the interests of the individual students. At some point a student would be taken into a training analysis, begin work with a control analyst, and, after a time, be confirmed as a member and analyst. The focus would not be on formal admission requirements or the fulfillment of prescribed educational tasks but on the interests and talents of the student, the relationship with a teacher, and the pursuit of creative psychoanalytic work. This vision of a new kind of psychoanalytic institute was actually quite similar to Bernfeld's own psychoanalytic training and his mentorship under Sigmund Freud. It was also the model he used in recruiting and supervising practitioners outside of the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute.

Bernfeld, suffering various ailments, died on April 2nd 1953 at the age of 61.

Siegfried Bernfeld was a natural analyst, a superlative teacher, an important psychoanalytic theorist, a voluminous writer, a careful scientist, and a scholarly biographer. He was an intellectual with no pretensions. As Estelle Wesiss said, “He didn’t wear his psychoanalytic identity like a coat of armor.” He was kind and caring toward his patients and students. He was a man of warmth, integrity, intellectual honesty, and a ready wit. He was and remains an analytic point of reference – a fine example of the spirit of psychoanalysis.
Biographical References on the Life and Work of Siegfried Bernfeld


**Articles And Books By Siegfried Bernfeld Published In English**


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**Articles by Suzanne C. Bernfeld**


