Dr. Faimberg, fellow panelists, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a great honor for me to be speaking to you today. I thank the IPA and Dr. Sebek, the organizer of this panel, for this opportunity. Also, before I begin, I am most grateful to and want to thank the Austen Riggs hospital in Massachusetts and their Library, which generously allowed me to borrow the entire collection of the Rundbriefe, and to Dr. Arnold Richards who introduced me to the personal characteristics of Otto Fenichel. I am also extremely indebted for all historical material to Russell Jacoby’s book on the Repression of Psychoanalysis, as well as George Makari for his Revolution in Mind and to Martin Bergmann’s review of the RundBriefe.

I will ask for your indulgence while I momentarily diverge to tell you that when my friend and colleague, Dr. Sebek, asked me to participate in this panel, he and I
knew that it would be a very emotional experience for me. Drs Sebek, Knutsen and I share the fact that we are speaking about Fenichel's achievements in the countries where we now live. In my case, I also share with Fenichel his immigrant status and experience, which clearly colored his work in the United States. He left Prague in 1938 for the USA, to escape the Nazi regime and impending WWII. 10 years later, having miraculously survived the war, I emigrated as a child to Canada and later to the United States. I was eyewitness to the trauma experienced by my parents, and other post WWII immigrants to North America, as well as my own generational transmission effects of the Holocaust and the immigration, which I still see in my own children. Neither in my childhood fantasies nor in my adult dreams did I ever imagine that I would be speaking as a psychoanalyst on a podium about these issues in Prague, which remains my beloved hometown. As I reviewed Fenichel's life in the USA, I perceived the embodiment and foreshadowing of what some of us experienced in order to maintain our identities. Some who came when we did, just like those who arrived earlier with Fenichel, quickly became Americanized, to the detriment of passing on history and ideas. With regard to the wave of immigration in 1938, I refer of course to the survival of personal identities of individual analysts, but also to the identity of psychoanalysis itself.

It is with this background and the political context of the time that I learned to appreciate the integrity with which Fenichel conducted himself throughout the years, which to him always felt like exile to a foreign land. He remained true to himself, to psychoanalysis and in many ways to Freud, and struggled valiantly
not to succumb to the expediency of total assimilation, as he saw others do in the United States. Nevertheless, he kept some of his values hidden, as I will demonstrate later.

To write about Fenichel’s seminal contributions to psychoanalysis would take a doctoral thesis or another book. I will therefore limit myself to just a few significant details.

In line with the title of this Congress, trauma is the foundation of psychoanalysis in the USA. Even now, 74 years after Fenichel arrived in the U.S.A., a Franco-American conference was held in Paris entitled: The Wanderings of Transmission. Organized by Association de psychanalyse Encore and Après-Coup Psychoanalytic Association it took place in November 2012. The topic was the transmission of psychoanalysis to different countries, in different languages, beginning with Freud’s voyage to the United States, and the implications and impact of the vicissitudes of transmission and translation of Psychoanalysis. This question remains as alive today as it was for Fenichel in 1938.

Several waves of immigrant psychoanalysts came to NA in the 1930s. Apart from Brill, who came to the US as a child, and Rado, who was sent by Freud to be the education director of NYPI, most came in trepidation of the Nazi regime. The first wave founded the APsaA. Fenichel along with 150 psychoanalysts and psychiatrists, who arrived in 1938, represented the second wave of immigrants fleeing the probability of personal as well as professional annihilation in Europe. This group included Berta Bornstein, Edith Jacobson, Mariane Kris, Margaret Mahler, Gustav Bychowski, and others.
Despite the fact that most professionals were in dire straights during the Great Depression of that decade, the psychoanalysts in New York with their affluent clientele were prospering financially and were well aware of their privileged status. - They were explicitly worried about competition from the European immigrants (many of whom were NOT physicians) and from psychologists who were only just beginning to enter the world of private practice of psychotherapy. Arriving in NYC, Fenichel was therefore welcomed ambivalently by the established analysts. Even such prominent individuals as Sandor Rado and Karl Menninger criticized him for his poor English and his reluctance to assimilate and reject his European background. Fenichel’s mission was the preservation and dissemination of classical psychoanalysis. It was his only important raison d’etre. Because the immigrant analysts who created unwelcome competition to the already established psychoanalysts were saturating the east coast, he soon left on a lecture tour of Boston, New Haven, Topeka, and San Francisco ending in Los Angeles where he had secured a contract with his friend, Ernst Simmel, to teach at the Psychoanalytic Study Group of Los Angeles. Simmel, and those friends there whom Simmel had convinced to provide finances for his escape to the USA, arranged this position. The APsaA never recognized the Psychoanalytic Study Group of LA, which during Fenichel’s lifetime, included non-MDs. He ardently advocated for the Study Group’s inclusion, while watching in disbelief the medicalization of psychoanalysis. Although he was a physician, he supported inclusion of lay analysts, and only towards the end did he finally comply and restarted his own training in order to qualify for practice as an MD in
California. I will elaborate on this later. He became a well-loved teacher at the Center and replicated the Wednesday group meetings, which Freud had established in Europe. Those who attended commented that it was the only place where the German language was used for an entire evening and gave them a temporary feeling of being back home and a sense of belonging. Fenichel and others thus found themselves again struggling for survival and inclusion with already divided colleagues. He had not anticipated the discord in the US psychoanalytic circles or the exceedingly anti-Marxist political climate in the USA. Having given up his roots, his country, and his language, he fought for survival of psychoanalysis. His immigrant status and accent subjected him to ridicule by psychoanalysts, and he was suspect to the US authorities because of his leftist beliefs, which he, along with others who fled with him, had to hide and deny. He believed that his naturalization process was most likely delayed by the fact that his name appeared in an FBI file. Thus first and foremost he was dealing with a loss of personal identity - new home, new language and having to learn to survive under difficult circumstances. At the same time just as psychoanalysis was suppressed in Europe, it was suffering from an almost complete identity change in the USA.

As George Makari put it and I quote:

“American psychoanalysis was forged from a critical encounter between analysts who shared the same name but differed intensely over their identity.”

To this I would add that American Psychoanalysis was born from the trauma of the political situation of the time. Fenichel's first psychoanalytic survival challenge
was therefore a theoretical one. He was torn between the Orthodox Freudians including Heinz Hartmann, Ernst Kris, Rudolph Loewenstein and others, who became assimilated very quickly and insisted on the medicalization of psychoanalysis in order to be accepted by the country and basically survive financially and on the other hand the neo-Freudians like Karen Horney, Eric Fromm, Harry Stack Sullivan, and Clara Thompson who were more interested in the theory of psychoanalysis and how it dovetailed with societal forces rather than its roots in the unconscious, thus differing with the orthodox Freudians. Very reluctantly, Fenichel joined the orthodox group. Though personally opposed to Hartman’s ego psychology, and agreeing more with Horney, he urged his leftist colleagues to keep their underground sociological ideas quiet in the USA. He disagreed with Horney and the other neo-Freudians, who, he felt, rejected Freud’s libido theory, the Oedipus complex, narcissism, inner drives, feminine psychology, instincts, the ego, superego, the theory of anxiety, significance of guilt, masochism and transference. Horney spoke of the centrality of the girl’s instinctive knowledge of the vagina and of the significance of culture to development. Fenichel was faced with his own ambivalence. On the one hand he agreed with Horney regarding women and the influence of culture, firmly resting on his Marxist views, and on the other hand he was loyal to Freud’s phallocentric drive theory and the existence of influence of the unconscious. The RundBriefe, which he continued as previously noted by my fellow panelists, became a monumental historical chronicle of his own evolution and that of psychoanalysis in the USA. He urged all participants to keep it secret and to
destroy the letters. Fortunately the letters survived thanks to Annie Reich who had kept them in her possession. It seems that Henry Lowenfeld, who lived in the same building as Annie Reich, actually stole them from her apartment, as he was afraid that the FBI would find them. He hid them, only to return them to Annie Reich many years later. They were eventually published. Only 2 copies exist in the US – one in the Library of Congress and the other at Austen Riggs. The original group of participants dispersed for political reasons, but the American letters circulated between at least 6 individuals. Although it was difficult for me to ascertain the exact composition of the participants, the core group included Edith Jacobsen, Annie Reich, Kate Friedlander, George Gero, Barbara Lantos, Edith Ludowyk Gyomroi, Henry Lowenfeld, and possibly Berta Bornstein. Fenichel eloquently described his need to not just perpetuate the Freudian concept of the biologically determined, drive oriented, theory of psychoanalysis, but its application to society as envisioned by Marx. For several years he wrote letters some of them more than 10 pages long, resulting in a phenomenal historical diary of all that he encountered in the American psychoanalytic world. He described the views of the neo-Freudians, and his responses to them, as well as his struggles with the APsaA. Remarkably, I could only find one comment about his personal loneliness. The need for the survival of psychoanalysis surpassed all his other needs. Although he was inclusive of non-MD analysts, he explained to his group that in order for analysis to thrive, the APsaA was correct and had to impose the MD restriction. For the same reasons he critiqued Karen Horney and Fromm for their rejection of
Freud’s theory, and also for their close ties to sociology and the social sciences which undermined the position of psychoanalysis in the medical community. The strong Marxist tie between the correspondents was weakened by the war and immigration. Feeling a lack of interest on the part of the others, Fenichel voiced his concern in 1944, but his colleagues, probably mostly out of loyalty to him, responded that the group is very important to maintain. He continued to have his doubts, especially after no one suggested a group meeting on a visit he made to NYC, and in his one page, profoundly sad, final letter he announced that this would be his last, as he felt that the important issue has ceased to be the cultural and societal one but now had become the survival of psychoanalysis itself as they had known it in Europe.

At that time he finally acquiesced to the law of the USA and decided that he had to become a licensed M.D. in California, in order to be considered “legal” in the psychoanalytic world, namely in the eyes of the American Psychoanalytic Association. He felt that he could only fight to perpetuate Freudian psychoanalysis as he taught it if he were seen as a legitimate entity. Fenichel continued to be an exceedingly prolific writer of original papers and rebuttals to papers of others. He published separately in addition to his theoretical ideas and critiques of others included in the RundBriefe. His writings are too numerous to mention but to cite the breadth of those published from 1938 to 1946, let me say that they ranged chronologically from Ego Disturbances and Their Treatment to papers on Anorexia, Psychosomatic Disorders, an elaboration on a previous paper entitled Elements of a Psychoanalytic Theory of Anti-
Semitism and ending with Some Remarks on Freud’s Place in the History of Science. I’d like to briefly mention his paper published in the Psychoanalytic Review in 1944, entitled Psychoanalytic Remarks on Fromm’s Book *Escape from Freedom* – one of Fromm’s most well-known and seminal books. In this paper Fenichel mentions various papers published concerning the psychology of the masses - for instance Reich’s view on the social significance of Fascism redirecting the rebellious tendencies of discontented masses into another direction. Both Fromm and Horney saw this as adaptive therefore positive escape from an unbearable situation in which the masses, as mentioned by Reich, became unable to perform independent actions and instead longed for receptive substitute gratification. Instead of killing their real enemies, they gladly accepted the permission to kill scapegoats whose killing united them with the omnipotent leader of the fatherland. Rather than adaptive, Fenichel saw it as a neurotic defense against a feeling of powerlessness. He gave Kardiner and Fromm credit for initially remaining in the fold and accepting Freud’s libido theory. However, eventually he decimated Fromm’s as well as Karen Horney’s arguments when they theorized that only social pressures come to bear on a person’s developing personality. He summarized Fromm’s thesis as “in the course of history revolutionary and evolutionary changes in economic conditions have created deep changes in the position of (all or certain) individuals in society, brought liberation from old chains, prejudices, limitations, frustrations; people have become free from something which had bound them hitherto”. The high price of this freedom was a loss of a sense of belonging, an anxiety and fear.
of loneliness and a regressive longing. Fenichel’s objection was that both Fromm and Horney completely denied Freud’s drive theory and the Oedipal complex. They also had what he called an “unsexual” theory of masochistic and sadistic behavior as adaptive to escape an unbearable situation (in Horney’s case to anxiety, in Fromm’s to isolation), thus ignoring a Freudian position that there are neurotic phenomena that are a failure of adaptation “which happens to the ego from the part of the unconscious drives.” Also, like Reich, they saw Fascism as power, whereas to Fenichel, who believed in the unconscious drive theory, it was a reaction formation or defense against powerlessness, rooted in weakness. Time does not permit me to discuss the full impact of this paper, but I urge you to read it, as it exemplifies Fenichel’s struggle to preserve Freud’s ideas even while he agreed with the enormous force of societal change on the individual. He gave credit to Horney, Fromm and Kardiner for writing sociological books from the view point of psychoanalysis even if, in his opinion wrongly applied.

I end this presentation by commenting on Fenichel’s Magnum Opus, the Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis, read by many generations of students, residents and professionals for decades following his death. Because his biggest concern was the survival of analysis, despite his sociological and leftist leanings, the book, the breadth of which was unimaginable to his colleagues, described every possible neurotic diagnosis and its origins. It is unfortunately considered extremely conservative, offers minimal comments about social realities and is an accurate reflection of the life he led in the US – namely
keeping his real liberal views secret. Only in the very last few pages of the book, In a section entitled “Prophylaxis”, did he say, for instance “Special social institutions cause the development of special counter-instinctual forces in its members,” and at another point he opined: “we do not know whether under different social conditions there would not also be neuroses, but we do know that under the present circumstances social factors make the beginnings of a prophylaxis of the neuroses a task of Sisyphus.” He thus ultimately did not do himself and his very adamant real views justice. In his effort to become “legal” in the US, this enormously creative and multifaceted intellectual giant, most probably succumbing to stress, died of a ruptured cerebral aneurysm while finishing his residency at the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital in LA on Jan. 22, 1946 at the age of 48. He never witnessed that what he feared, namely the exclusion of non-MD’s, was perpetuated and eventually allowed American psychoanalysis to flourish for several decades and for psychoanalysts to be leaders in most psychiatry departments in the country. This has subsequently come back to haunt us in recent years, as he might have foreseen.

Despite the enormous personal hurdles of immigration that he had to deal with, his indefatigable energy, intellect, memory, his remarkable protectiveness of his private life and his feelings resulted in an awesome productivity as evidenced by his teaching, his papers, reviews, the RundBriefe, all of which are remarkably devoid of his feelings and are completely impersonal. Thus in that sense my comments are incomplete as I did not seek out his family to gain more details of his personal life. Again I thank you for listening to my presentation of the life and
contributions of this remarkable man in his final years in the United States.

References:


