The Left and Far Left in American Psychoanalysis: Psychoanalysis as a Subversive Discipline

This paper explores the political commitments of the Europeans born émigré psychoanalysts and a group of American born psychoanalysts who had a far left (Communist or Fellow Traveler) past. It described the national and local struggle for power and ascendency in these two groups. It explore the impact that Marxism had on the theory and practice of what I have called the American Communist Psychoanalytic Thought Collective, specifically their pragmatic optimistic and dialectical theory. The downside was rigidity, a sense of certainty, lack of tolerance of dissent and organizational authoritarian structures.

The paper ends with a please to restore the balance between control and risk in order to restore the vitality of psychoanalysis and assure its growth. After years of repression, exclusion, and schism, we need to subvert entrenched power and advance the thesis of roles and the antithesis of insurgency.

"If we want things to stay the same, things will have to change," Giuseppi Tomasi di Lampedusa observed astutely in The Leopard, his great sociohistorical novel of 19th century Sicily. For the last 50 years, maybe more, psychoanalysis has been struggling to keep things the same—to maintain the influence, prestige, and security of its "golden age"—by not changing. We cling doggedly to our pet analytic traditions and to the new shibboleths of professionalism that burnish what we have lately been taught to call our "brand." But no matter how tightly we hang on, psychoanalysis is getting less and less respect. It is being evicted from our universities and our medical schools. Insurance
coverage for psychoanalytic therapies has been drastically curtailed. Our pool of patients (and of candidates) is drying up. If we want things to stay the same, something has to change. But what? Buried in our history lie some clues, and with them some hope for the future.

I am going to indulge here in what R.G. Collingwood (1946) termed an act of historical imagination. In search of the cultural roots of American psychoanalysis and particularly those aspects of it—the ideological rigidities and resulting estrangements—that have gotten us into trouble so consistently and for so long.

Why look backward rather than forward? Two reasons. One is that psychoanalysis has taught us, if nothing else, to respect the power of an unacknowledged past. The other is my abiding interest in the sociology of science—the contextual hows and whys of scientific development. The father of this field was Ludwik Fleck, the Polish physician and immunologist whose 1935 book, *The Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, inspired Paul Feyerabend, author of *Against Method* (1975), and Thomas Kuhn, author of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Fleck got his ideas about the sociology of knowledge from Karl Manheim, who founded the field. Fleck's great contribution was the recognition that science does not develop in pure culture, and that there is no such thing as immaculate perception, as philosophers put it. Scientists (and therefore the facts they discover and the movements they inspire) are influenced by historical, cultural, social, economic, and psychological factors. The study of this phenomenon is now called the sociology of scientific knowledge, and it applies as much to psychoanalytic knowledge as to any other kind.
For example, we know that the development of psychoanalysis in late 19th-century Vienna was "not the brain child of a single isolated genius, but rather the result of complex cultural, political, and social factors operating in a particular historical setting" (George Makari, 2008).

Yet we tend to forget that 21st century American psychoanalysis, with all its promise and all its troubles, is a similarly complex product of place, time, and history. I am going to look at the ways, for good or ill, that Marxist theory and ideology influenced American psychoanalysis as it developed in the middle of the last century. I will pay special attention to its effects on our perilous balancing act between creative innovation and repressive bureaucracy.

At first glance, the weltanschauungen of Marx and Freud are incompatible. Both were visionaries who addressed the question of how individual consciousness is determined by social existence, but Marx completely neglected the dynamic and subjective factors, while Freud equally ignored the economic and environmental ones. Superficially, they espoused two very different ways of looking at the world. Still, beneath the surface, their two philosophies had a lot in common, and many people found them both compelling. I've discussed the similarities between Marxist and Freudian thought at length elsewhere (Richards 2013). In brief, however, both movements arose out of the intellectual ferment of 19th century central Europe (Marxism in 1848 with the Communist Manifesto, and the psychoanalytic movement in 1895, with Studies in Hysteria). Both were original and subversive challenges to received understandings of society and history. And both attracted a following of adventurous thinkers and social critics. In fact, many psychoanalysts were Marxists before and while they were Freudians;
what Fleck would call their characteristic "thought styles" were influenced by both Marx and Freud, as was their science.

The study I'm reporting on here is a work in progress. For obvious reasons, documentary evidence of the left-wing affiliations of American analysts of the 1950s is scarce and hard to come by. I am still waiting for materials I've requested under the Freedom of Information Act, and have been told that some of these documents have been transferred into "more secure files" because they contain "sensitive information." There are few still living who can supplement with their memories the hard information I've been able to acquire to date. But I have a wealth of anecdotal information from the mid-century analysts themselves, their families, and their close colleagues. And these preliminary results are worth sharing, because our past holds an important cautionary lesson for our future. History has shown us repeatedly that when a subversive philosophy is colonized by an authoritarian establishment, it loses its creative vitality and sometimes its viability. We have seen this happen to communism. I hope it will not happen to us.

The connection between Marxism and psychoanalysis in Europe is well known, and has been thoroughly delineated by Elizabeth Danto, Paul Robinson, Russell Jacoby, Eran Rolnik (Danto 2005; Robinson 1993; Jacoby 1983; Rolnik, 2012), and others. In the United States, however, it has been obscured by political, economic, and institutional circumstances, and remains largely unrecognized even today. This overlooked aspect of the sociology of American psychoanalytic knowledge matters because the ideas, friendships, and associations of the influential analysts of the 1950s and 1960s were shaped by their political convictions, and in turn shaped their analytic theory and policy.
Thus the politics of the people I will discuss here live on in the traditions and institutions within which we operate to this day. But they make themselves felt more on the repressive end of the equilibrium than the creative one. Awareness could help remedy this. As Chistopher Lasch has written, “There is history that remembers and history that originates in a need to forget” (1984). The need to forget is sometimes too strong in institutional psychoanalysis, but, as in personal analyses, it can be countered with remembering.

Some background. "Establishment" American analysts sometimes lose track of this, but there was a radical political ethos deeply embedded in early European analysis. The first- and second-generation Freudians saw themselves not primarily as medical practitioners (or any other kind of therapeutic technicians), but as intellectuals, cosmopolitans, and often activists. Yes, psychoanalysis was a "treatment," but it was also part of a larger social project that sprang to life with other long-suppressed democratic and progressive aspirations as centuries of Habsburg rule came to an end. Austromarxism was one example: an attempt to reconcile socialist thought with nationalism as imperial structures dissolved, and to establish a sense of community based on personal rather than territorial bonds. Socialism was in the air, and psychoanalysis was not immune.

Many Europeans identified themselves as social democrats, socialists, Marxists, or communists. Danto (2005) gives a comprehensive inventory of the political affiliations of the early psychoanalysts, but even a brief overview shows how identified they were with left-wing politics. Sigmund and Anna Freud were social democrats, as were Bruno Bettelheim, Grete Bibring, Helene Deutsch, Paul Federn, Willi Hoffer, Karen Horney, my own analyst Henry Lowenfeld and his wife Yela, Annie Reich, and Ernst Simmel.
Berta Bornstein, Frances Deri, Otto Fenichel, Erich Fromm, and George Gero identified themselves as socialists. Psychoanalysts known to be communists included Anny Katan, Edith Jacobson, Edith Ludowik-Gyomroi, Edith Buxbaum, Marie Langer, Ludwig Jekels, and Wilhelm Reich. Margarete Hilferding, the first woman admitted to the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, was married to the eminent Austromarxist Rudolf Hilferding. These people, many of whom were driven to this country by the events of the 1930s, made contributions to psychoanalysis that were deeply colored by their politics. A few examples:

Otto Fenichel, who was closer to the Communist Party than most of his colleagues, published a paper on the connections between psychoanalysis, socialism, and Marxism. The text suggests that it was probably written during the years of World War II—perhaps in the early 40s—although it was not published until 1967 (Fenichel, 1967). After arriving in the United States in 1938, it was Fenichel who organized cautious contact among the scattered and sometimes threatened émigré Marxist analysts with a series of Rundbriefe, or round-robin letters. He was also a founder of the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society.

In *Freud’s Free Clinics: Psychoanalysis and Social Justice 1918–1938*, Elizabeth Danto (2005) writes about Ernst Simmel, who also ended up in LA: "The alliance between socialism and psychoanalysis was sealed in Berlin when Ernst Simmel was simultaneously awarded chairmanship of the Association for Socialist Physicians and the German Psychoanalytic Association" (p. 177). Simmel started the Schloss Tegel sanitarium near Berlin, which was the model for our Menninger Clinic.

Wilhelm Reich had the distinction of being thrown out of both the Marxist and the Freudian movements. He joined the Communist Party in 1928, but was expelled in 1933
for oppositionality. In 1934 he was asked to resign from the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA), also apparently for reasons of psychopathology rather than theory or politics (Chassaguet-Smirgel & Grunbacher, 1986). Reich founded the overtly Marxist Sex-Pol (German Society of Proletarian Sexual Politics) clinics. His dramatic personality gave him a high profile once he got here, too, and of all the European émigré analysts, it was he who was most fiercely hounded by J. Edgar Hoover and his FBI.

Many members of the so-called "Freudian left" subscribed to the wish to revise the old imperial social structure on more democratic lines; they believed, in the service of that wish, that psychoanalysis should be available to everyone. They thought that analysts should devote some of their time to low-cost or free treatment, and they put their money where their mouths were. Even Freud, who originally maintained that fees were essential to the effectiveness of analytic treatment, had come around to this view by 1918. “The poor man should have just as much right to assistance for his mind as he now has to lifesaving help offered by surgery,” he asserted at the Fifth International Congress in Budapest. (Richards, 2013).

And despite the resistance of the medical, financial, and governmental establishments of the time, eventually there were 12 Free Clinics scattered across Europe, a remarkable achievement. The between-wars generation of left-wing analysts, at least in their European homelands, shared a spirit of what Helena Deutsch called "revolutionism" (Danto 2005) which showed in this quiet subversion of capitalist expectations. And while no one ever said outright that psychoanalytic theory was Marxist when the Viennese Social Democrats rewarded Freud on his 68th birthday with a high profile civic tribute, making him “Staatsbürger der Stadt Wien”—an honorary citizen of the city of Vienna—they
were openly acknowledging a complementarity between psychoanalysis and the ideology of the Social Democratic Party.

Then came Hitler. At NYPSI, Lawrence Kubie and Bettina Warburg, over some American analysts' worries about competition, set up a committee to get threatened analysts out of Europe. Between 1933 and 1941, 40 migrated to the US. They quickly became training analysts wherever they settled, and many ended up in New York, where they proceeded to justify the worriers' fears. Their association with Freud gave them both personal cachet and ideological clout. As the arbiters of "classic" psychoanalysis, they became the ruling class, taking over and displacing even Kubie, who had championed them, from the Institute hierarchy.

Even socialists want to perpetuate their own power. Once the Europeans were in charge, they established structures to maintain their authority, such as educational committees that were responsible for their own succession. Those who allied themselves with their interests were allowed into the new central structure. Those who for whatever reason did not—including many of a rising generation of American analysts—found themselves on the outs.

Ironically, the out-est of the out-group were the very people who politically most resembled the émigrés. In Fleck's honor, I will call them the American Communist Psychoanalytic Thought Collective, or ACPTC for short. (The term "thought collective" is Fleck's). His group notably included Jacob Arlow, David Beres, Charles Brenner, Leo Rangell, and Ralph Greenson. Other members were Victor Calef, Ed Weinshel, Stanley Goodman, Eleanor Galenson, Milton Jucovy, Bernard Meyers, Victor Rosen, Lawrence Roose, and Phillip Weisman. All were physicians who were born in the U.S. and trained
as psychoanalysts after World War II. Before that, many had been members of the American Communist Party (CPUSA) or “fellow travelers.” They had congregated in such leftist physicians’ groups as the Medical Committee for Human Rights (MCHR) and the Physicians Forum. Many (but not all) had been openly engaged in far-left politics in the 1930s, the 1940s, and sometimes even into the 1950s.

The ACPTC analysts were young adults in the thirties, the so-called "Red Decade." Many of their generation had been radicalized first by the Great Depression, then by the horrors of National Socialism, and finally by such acts of indigenous injustice as the racially motivated legal railroadings of the Scottsboro boys (Aptheker, 2006). The Spanish Civil War further raised the anti-fascism stakes even as it deflected attention from the Stalinist purges in the Soviet Union. The need for workers to organize was getting clearer all the time. Old-style liberal solutions didn't seem to be working, and not everyone was convinced that the New Deal was the answer. For many, Marxist critiques of capitalism were persuasive.

I have no reason to believe that this group of Communist doctors was moved primarily by the abstractions of the Marxist worldview or by the goal of revolution, any more than the first-generation left-wing Europeans were. Whittaker Chambers thought that his American contemporaries were driven to Communism by “the problem of war and the problem of economic crisis” (Chambers, 1952). But that doesn't mean that they were indifferent to the ideological underpinnings of their political community. I asked David Shapiro (who had been a member of the CPUSA) what he thought had motivated them to join. “Two things,” he said. "Anti-fascism and Marxism. One was more emotional, the other was more intellectual.” I think Shapiro is correct in his assessment. I find it
inconceivable that thinkers and theoreticians such as Arlow, Brenner, and Rangell, whom I knew personally, would have made the political choices they did without familiarizing themselves thoroughly with Marxist philosophy, whatever their subjective feelings about current events. Furthermore, I think that familiarity is conspicuous in the analytic philosophy they developed as they matured as psychoanalysts and began challenging the ruling émigrés for control. Here is where things get murky, however, because as the post-war years became the 50s, these people began to downplay their political pasts. So did the émigrés. And they certainly had reasons.

I have little direct information about how much-emotional attachment to the Communist Party the European analysts retained once they got here, but Russell Jacoby asserts in his (1983) study of the Freudian left that most of them seem to have dropped their politics in the Atlantic Ocean on the way over. One reason for this was surely the overwhelming demands of settling into a new life after the trauma of immigration. Another was the ever-present threat of deportation as the political culture here turned steadily to the right. Most of the émigrés quickly came to love the American way of life and to idolize FDR. But that didn't matter to Hoover and McCarthy, whose paranoia and powers of surveillance were reaching ever deeper into American life. Otto Fenichel, Martin Grotjahn, Erich Fromm, and Wilhelm Reich were only a few of the analysts whom we know were-tracked by the FBI; Joseph Wortis's passport was revoked because he was or had been a member of the CPUSA.

The émigrés' fear of reprisal for their left-wing histories was not irrational, and the resulting suppression of their radical pasts was so complete that even their obituaries seldom mentioned their involvement. It may be that the danger also increased their
tendency to bond together against newcomers, such as the young Americans who began taking them on as the Hooverian clouds were forming.

The financial seductions of psychoanalysis as it exploded in the 1950s may well have been a third reason that they abandoned their early "revolutionism." George Gero, for instance, had been a member of Fenichel's *Rundbriefe* group. Though probably not a communist, he was definitely a Marxist and a socialist. But once settled in New York and a training analyst at NYPSI, he moved rapidly from refugee status to affluence. By 1966, when he was one of my supervisors, Gero owned a townhouse on 91st off Madison Avenue.

William Pike, another erstwhile radical, albeit an American who had been a physician in the Spanish Civil War, had a townhouse across the street from Gero. All of the far-left psychoanalysts, European and American, did very well financially, and maintained offices on Sutton Place, Central Park West, and Fifth and Park Avenues. But wealth and Marxism make uneasy bedfellows. And the Americans were as well as the émigrés supported the expanded government powers enacted ostensibly to protect the country from the dangers of communism. Use the preceding sentence as edited or leave it out. When David Shapiro got his own FBI file through the Freedom of Information Act, he was startled by its thickness. When the Feinberg Law made loyalty oaths compulsory for the faculty members of all New York State schools, Milton Jucovy decided not to leave NYPSI for the new Institute at Downstate, because he didn't want to sign.

It's easy to forget how quiet people had to be about their politics. Even in the radical 1960s when I was in training, almost no one knew about the political pasts of the
American group that I am recalling here. Their politics were known only to each other. It has been a vast surprise to me to learn how many of the people that my contemporaries and I knew back then had once been members of, or very close to, the Communist Party. They were survivors of a time when the articulation of Marxist beliefs could be really dangerous; even at its most benign, it would not have helped these young professionals draw capitalist patients into lucrative private practices.

For all these reasons it is not easy to follow the Americans' political histories once they began their analytic careers. Some of them abandoned communism and socialism early, disenchanted by what they saw in the Soviet Union. Some grew unhappy with developments in the American Communist Party. But as the red-baiting and witch-hunting of the 50s heated up, those who remained in the fold and even those who had left it learned to keep their politics carefully under wraps. In Weimar Europe and 1930s America, socialism had been one important thread of a popular and respected intellectual and cultural movement. But in 1950, J. Edgar Hoover published a guest editorial in *JAMA* warning American physicians to “kill the infectious deadly germs . . . of an alien ideology” (Danto, p. 213). President Truman, on September 6, 1939 and January 8, 1943 issued a directive that all "subversive activities" should be reported (Danto, 2005). Everyone with communist affiliations was in danger, no matter what, or when, those affiliations had been.

It is striking that neither the older European nor the young American analysts invested much in the ethos of social responsibility that had been so formidable in Europe. It was safer to treat psychoanalysis as a therapeutic technique than as a tool for social change, and their interest in reform did not make it into their psychoanalytic lives. The
Free Clinic movement died; low-cost treatment here was offered only to guarantee a pool of analysands for candidates. Analysts concentrated more on the establishment of their profession than on its significance, and on its demographics more than its vitality. The vision of a new and better society gave way to the enforcement of conformity and orthodoxy. The progressive convictions that might once have forged a bond of understanding between the older Europeans and the up-and-coming ACPTC group ended up silencing them.

In this silence, the intergenerational struggle came to a boil. A group of young analysts, tired of their exclusion and demanding entrée into the power structure, took on the ensconced émigrés. They were all members of the ACPTC or in close alliance with it. And they maintained that NYPSI was a self-perpetuating oligarchy refusing to share its authority with any colleagues not of its own choosing. However they never succeeded in obtaining power. The closest they came was with the Brenner amendment, which would have allowed nominations to the Educational Committee from the floor. But it was one vote short of a two-thirds majority.

Kurt Eissler's wife Ruth, for instance, herself once a member of the Communist Party, was an arch-conservative in NYPSI politics and wielded enormous power and influence there in the 1960s. More than any other member of the Institute, she controlled the appointment of training analysts, and there was controversy over her use of that control. In the 1970s, her committee refused appointment to Herbert Waldhorn, a close associate of Arlow and Brenner. Brenner, outraged, introduced an amendment to allow external nominations for NYPSI's Educational Committee. Passage would have opened
up the power structure dominated by the émigrés, and Brenner's challenge was an important and dramatic political event at the Institute. It lost by one vote.

Public jousts like that were rare, however. The abandonment of political ideology in favor of the psychoanalytic sort was so strong that even issues of NYPSI policy and governance were disputed covertly, in the guise of theory. The Europeans' lineage gave them a distinct advantage there, which they guarded closely. This was reinforced by everybody's reluctance to deal with psychoanalysis in its social or political aspects. The preexisting American stance against lay analysis further encouraged the preoccupation with establishing psychoanalysis as a medical specialty, not a social philosophy. Its broader social implications were disregarded even—perhaps especially—in its own organizations. Turf wars and autonomy struggles that should properly have been debated directly as issues of politics, power, or principle became instead matters for the orthodoxy police.

Sometimes the battles really were theoretical. The ACPTC group, who were beginning to elaborate what we now know as modern conflict theory, demanded that NYPSI expand the curriculum beyond its exclusive focus on the works of Sigmund and Anna Freud and include more contemporary contributions, including their own. The émigré oligarchs and their acolytes, holding fast to the word received from the Freuds, maintained that they alone could defend classical analysis in its full breath and depth. The upstarts on both coasts were foiled.

But sometimes theory was used as a stick to beat down autonomy. The ACPTC and its allies frequently found themselves on the receiving end then, too: like the time they collected money for a full-page *New York Times* advertisement protesting the Gulf of
Tonkin resolution permitting the use of military force in Southeast Asia. This effort was condemned by the NYPSI establishment on the grounds that it violated the principle of anonymity, an overt attempt to silence political expression within the analytic community on theoretical grounds. When Brenner sent a personal letter to the Times against the Vietnam War, the Educational Committee, in the person of Phyllis Greenacre, reproved him again, on the grounds that it would “destroy the transference.”

Battles like these served as theoretical cover on both sides for the struggle between a ruling oligarchy and a band of challengers determined to supplant it. For a while, Brenner and his group fought for autonomy and representation in the face of enormous ideological pressure to conform and to keep their heads down. Eventually, however, the ACPTC out-group gave up on NYPSI and began to concentrate on establishing a beachhead in APsaA instead. There they were much more successful. In fact, they were the ones who took over. Soon they controlled the nominating committee, and they made sure they had the votes to get elected. Six of them in succession became president—Arlow, Brenner, Beres, Rosen, Calder, Josephs—and three became chairs of the Board of Professional Standards (BOPS), the American’s powerful decision-making body. Once they were calling the shots, they proved themselves to be just as insistent as the European Freudians upon their exclusive possession of psychoanalytic Truth, and just as uncompromising in the ways they worked to institutionalize it. Like the émigrés, they tolerated no revisionism except their own. And it will probably surprise no one that they quickly established an oligarchy as domineering, as controlling, and as self-perpetuating as the one they had denounced at NYPSI.
Fleck's idea is that science develops out of the work of distinct "thought collectives" characterized by distinctive "thought styles." The members of a thought collective share assumptions that inform their choices about which facts to explore and promulgate (Fleck 1935). For the thought collective that I am calling the ACPTC, the preeminent assumptions that informed their thinking were that conflict was central and that anyone could be analyzed; with these came the meta-assumption that they were right in assuming this. Both the assumptions themselves and the single-mindedness with which the ACPTC insisted upon them suggest to a convinced Fleckian like me that there was a connection between their Marxism and their psychoanalysis. Marxist dialectic may be more comparable with democracy but the ACPTC belief that they were right is more insistent with "true believers" ideologues who didn't tolerate disagreement like members of the CPUSA or totalitarian Communist countries like The Soviet Union China and Cuba. The direct influence of Marx can be seen most clearly in the ACPTC's insistence on the centrality of conflict. For Arlow, Brenner, and their colleagues, psychodynamics were a process in which thesis and antithesis must lead ultimately to synthesis, or compromise formation. The parallel with the dialectical philosophies of Hegel and Marx is not obscure. These theorists objected to the very idea (proposed by the ego psychologists) of a "conflict-free sphere." I believe that Arlow and Brenner's notorious opposition to Hartmann's adaptational approach was shaped by their Marxist belief that confrontation was the driving force of change.

Marx's influence can also be seen in the therapeutic optimism so startlingly characteristic of the ACPTC, who believed that analysis could change anyone the way Marx believed that communism could change the world. They held prodigious
expectations of psychoanalysis that far surpassed the pessimistic ambitions of Freud and his more pragmatic followers. They never admitted certain limitations that other analysts accepted as realistic. Arlow and Brenner (1964) insisted, for example, that psychotic symptoms were cut from exactly the same cloth as slips, dreams, and other neurotic manifestations, and were therefore subject to exactly the same kind of understanding. They rejected out of hand the possibility that psychotic thought might be qualitatively different and not analyzable; when Ralph Greenson declined to accept that view at the 1969 APsaA conference, Brenner memorably accused him of thinking that some patients had "holes in their heads." The conflict theorists discarded the bedrock Freudian "instinct" in favor of the far more flexible "wish." In Brenner's hands, the concept of compromise formation itself had a positive and hopeful spin: Change was not only possible but probable in a properly conducted analysis. That belief in the ultimate changeability of individuals and societies is a characteristically Marxist point of view.

So was their conviction of ultimate rightness, in which they seem to have resembled the émigrés and which remains to this day a powerful aspect of their institutional legacy. Some analytic thinkers are willing, for example, to accept at least in principle theories different from their own as the natural result of different theories of pathogenesis. But the members of the ACPTC never really accepted that there are different theories of pathogenesis, or that we do not yet know, or have the tools to learn, which of them is correct. When an empirical question cannot be answered, some people respond with an attitude of benign skepticism, an interest in all the competing theories, and a willingness to keep an open mind until more information becomes available.
The ACPTC, however, responded by building pressures into their organizations, such as policies at *JAPA* and the *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, to oppose that approach and discourage any such breadth of interest. Had they absorbed, along with their optimism, the extreme absolutism of the 20th century communist culture? Certainly the APCTC analysts that I knew best—Arlow, Brenner, and Rangell—approached everything, theoretical or not, with certainty. They shared a conviction that their rightness would one day be beyond dispute. Realistic skepticism toward their own convictions was foreign to them, their modus operandi did not include disinterested intellectual skepticism, and humility was not their strong suit. They knew what was right.

In short, the ACPTC rejected self-psychology, interpersonal psychoanalysis, relational psychoanalysis, and all other theories that did not accord pride of place to the centrality of infantile instinctual conflict. This theoretical rigidity enabled them to make common cause with the émigrés occasionally, as when they sided together against Horney, Thompson, Fromm, Sullivan, and the other so-called neo-Freudians. They were also aligned against Sandor Rado and Franz Alexander, who had come to the US in search of a more “scientific” psychoanalysis. The same kind of absolutism that ACPTC members had once deplored in the émigrés' rule at NYPSI shaped the institutions that they themselves built into American psychoanalysis as the ruling oligarchy of the APsaA. It still shapes it—I would say, haunts it—today.

In achieving its suppressive goals, the alliance between the ACPTC and the émigrés continued another unhappy tradition, encouraging psychoanalytic schism as it extruded its targets not only from their Institutes, but from the APsaA altogether. This absolutism
was another step in the devolution of the psychoanalytic mindset from one of radical
innovation to one of classic conservative self-preservation.

However, there was never any real room for negotiation between the Freudian
standard-bearers and their challengers; they were too close in their rigid, doctrinaire, and
authoritarian styles. Despite its tremendous success on the national front, the ACPTC
remained a distinctly “out” group at NYPSI. The two factions continued to dig themselves
in, and when a threat arose, they both responded, as they always had, with repressive
measures lest they be undermined from without or within. The culture of American
psychoanalysis became more and more restrictive. Brenner and his group complained
about "thought control" at NYPSI, which they blamed on the fact that the Institute was
run (as they saw it) by a small and unrepresentative group. But in their own sphere of
power they just as decisively rejected the efforts of the European Freudians to explore the
aspects of Freud's work that derived from “French psychopathology, German biophysics,
and psychophysics” (Makari, p. 112). Complaining about other people's narrowness, they
never hesitated to impose their own.

There was one other area in which the European Freudian left and the American
Marxists made uneasy alliance out of a perceived common interest. This was their
mutual investment in what Kirsner (2009) called a "bureaucratized training process," and
which included, among many such aspects, the training analyst system and the way
training analysts were anointed. The Europeans had modeled their teaching structures on
their experience in Freud's not very democratic organization. The Americans had had no
such experience and generally responded to Freud as an authority more to be rebelled
against than obeyed, but they had spent their early years in the authoritarian hierarchies
of American communism. Old-world strictness and new-world rigidity came together in the governing styles of both groups. At NYPSI, the émigrés and their acolytes supported BoPS certification. Arlow and Brenner and their colleagues worked tirelessly to maintain the medical identity of psychoanalysis, and twice tried to establish a psychoanalytic section of the American Board of Psychiatry. The Europeans, of course, supported lay analysis. But although their instruments differed, both groups were deeply invested in conferring (and withholding) credentials and in enforcing ideological purity while they worked to preserve their own power and their own vision, to which each attributed the prestige of their profession. This preoccupation did nothing good for institutional flexibility or democratic process.

It is worth noting, however, that even those European analysts who called themselves "psychoanalytically conservative" with regard to the authority of Freud were not necessarily personally authoritarian in other ways; the rebellious Americans, for all their revolutionary credentials, often were. Even though they lived in a democratic country founded on Enlightenment values and principles they were radicalized by the depression and the rise of Fascism.

Kurt Eissler, for instance, argued against the idea that psychoanalysis should promote adjustment. Eissler was interested in maintaining the subversive leverage of psychoanalysis to safeguard individual freedom. “Society only evaluates behavior and does not care about motivations. But psychoanalysts should never make themselves the puppets of society and accept superficial behavior as indices of psychic reality” (1965). The dialectically-inclined younger analysts certainly preferred their conflict model to visions of adjustment or adaptation, and they were very invested in the malleability of
individuals. But they were not inclined to address the matter of how change, psychoanalysis, and society were related.

Eissler's statement also highlights the fact that psychoanalysis is itself a dialectic. It supposes a creative opposition between the individual and society that is probably a basic supposition of all psychoanalytic theories and schools. Which brings me, at last, to my point about our future.

Russell Jacoby (1983) called his book about Otto Fenichel and the Freudian left The Repression of Psychoanalysis. He was referring to the way our field has dismissed its political past. Jacoby finds it ironic that repression can be recognized as such a universal dynamic in clinical psychoanalysis, and yet remain so invisible to psychoanalysts in their profession's developmental context. We have always been more willing to consider our patients' histories than our own, especially the political and organizational history of psychoanalysis.

Jacoby argues that the need to repress and deny a leftist past resulted in an institutionalized conservatism—a theoretical one among the Europeans, and a structural one among the Americans. I see it somewhat less dichotomously: The structural conservatism is indeed, in my view, the aspect of our past that needs to be unrepressed and understood, because it has essentially foreclosed the subversive passion that gave psychoanalysis its original grip on the imagination. It seems to me that in separating themselves from the ardor of their youth, and in their struggle for ideological and institutional supremacy over an old-world establishment, the mid-century analysts somehow lost the subversive essence of the psychoanalytic identity. How can we reestablish our claim to the creativity, innovation, and vision—the magic—that is our birthright?
It is striking how very entrenched these erstwhile radicals became in protecting, perpetuating, and enforcing the authority and the dogmas of the psychoanalytic establishment, once it was in their hands. Their youth had been spent pursuing the vision of a freer and more equitable society, yet the psychoanalytic society that they enacted was a repressive one that brooked no dissent. Where did this extraordinary philosophical and characterological split—the one duality that they would never allow to be dialectically resolved—come from? I think it was a remnant of their days in a rigid and prescriptive political movement. Whatever our theoretical preferences, and whatever our institutional and political resistances may be, as analysts we know that our political histories are one factor that shapes the way we think about and experience the world.

Psychoanalysis was once a subversive worldview. It confronted institutionalized self-deception, and in so doing liberated us to look beyond convention and prescription to a livelier sense of self and a freer society. Like Marxism, it once attracted mavericks, radicals, skeptics, and other critical thinkers in search of an intellectually challenging and liberating discipline. But again, like Marxism, psychoanalysis is attracting fewer and fewer students, and its creative energies are increasingly deflected into infighting, power struggles, and even lawsuits. Its guiding spirit is no longer the subversion of authority, but protecting it. If psychoanalysis is to thrive, even to survive, it needs to find a way to attract creative people again, and encourage them to engage creatively with the new economic and intellectual surround in which we are called to practice.

I think that this challenge can be met, but it requires a shift away from our present rule-bound, standard-setting, gate-keeping ethos to one that can again welcome innovation and the capacity to think outside the box. I offer this look back to our roots as
an organizing metaphor. Freud's creativity and radicalism existed in a creative—and dialectical—tension with his own tendency to rigidity and authoritarianism. This was true of Marx, too. Freud's and Marx's-followers were undoubtedly attracted to that tension, and with good reason; without either-the creative thesis or the structuring antithesis, how could their movements have prospered? Certainly psychoanalysis as we know it would not exist. We need the same creative tension now. We can't, in our desire for standing, go on embracing authoritarian processes at the expense of the passion that once inspired the psychoanalytic movement. Our economic security in today's world depends as much on the latter as on the former.

It is not hard to recognize the autocratic tendencies in Marx and Freud. But revolutionary flames burned in them too, and ignited the movements that bear their names. The times when those movements were at their most vigorous and influential have been the times when they provided a framework in which passion could burn brightly, like a well-laid fire. Psychoanalytic institutions today are no longer structured to encourage that vital spark, but to extinguish it lest it consume the apparatus of power. We need to restore the balance between control and risk if we want to restore our vitality and our growth. Decisions and procedures that enforce conformity, such as those that currently rule in BoPS,1 endanger us at least as much as the threat of "wildness," against which our current analytic culture defends itself so fiercely. Years of repression, exclusion, and schism have cost us dearly. It is time to face our history, grow beyond our foundations, and learn at last to deal constructively with the fact of our differences. Our

1 Before 1946, the institutes of APsaA enjoyed relative autonomy. Changes in standards required unanimous consent of all the institutes. The Board of Professional Standards (BoPS), a committee of the corporation, was established and institute autonomy was replaced by the absolute autonomy of BoPs. I think the model for this arrangement was Freud’s ring bearers for the Europeans and the central committee of the Communist party (I assume you meant “Communist party.”) for the Americans.
society must be large enough to encompass us all, and we can keep it that way only by constantly subverting entrenched power. Subversion is not a luxury or an elective quality of our field. It is its sine qua non, a requirement, the soil out of which we sprang. The synthesis of a vital and growing psychoanalysis requires the thesis of rules and the antithesis of insurgency. We neglect it—we suppress it—at our peril.

References


