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HISTORICIZING FREUD: AUTOPSY OR REINCARNATION?

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Frederick Crews, *Freud: The Making of an Illusion* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2017)

Joel Whitebook, *Freud: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Freud in His Time and Ours*, trans. from the French by Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2016; original French edition published 2014)

Peter-André Alt, *Sigmund Freud: Der Arzt der Moderne. Eine Biographie* (Munich, C. H. Beck, 2016)

The publication between 2014 and 2017 of four substantial historical biographies of Sigmund Freud raises a number of questions that should be of interest to intellectual and cultural historians. Both Freud's reputation as a pioneering empirical investigator and brilliant theorist of human subjectivity, and his influential role in framing public discussion of the unconscious dynamics and conscious expressions of the "psyche" or the "soul" have been declining for a number of decades. Apparently we have finally reached that point in time at which W. H. Auden's famous comment (in his 1939 elegy) that Freud was "a whole climate of opinion under whom we conduct our different lives" no longer resonates.[1] Unlike the last major historical Freud biography, Peter Gay's *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (1988), which still worked assiduously to sustain the contemporary presence and thus cross-cultural and cross-temporal validity of Freud's discoveries as empirically grounded, universal rational truths, recent works by Frederick Crews, Joel Whitebook, Élisabeth Roudinesco, and

[1] W. H. Auden, "In Memory of Sigmund Freud (d. Sept. 1939)," in *Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden* (New York, 1945), 163–7, at 166.

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Peter-André Alt attempt to historicize Freud's work in a more critical and fundamental fashion. The perspectives governing all of these studies are self-consciously "historical." They build their interpretations of Freud's work and their judgements regarding its claims on investigations of the temporally situated, personal, sociocultural and theoretical contexts which conditioned and therefore limited or "relativized" its meaning and its truth. For three of the biographers (all except Crews) this also implies that Freud's work was not so much a completed articulation of an investigative method (either positivist or hermeneutical) that unveiled a singular interpretation or "discovery" of a general truth as the representation of an open-ended process of investigating and thinking through the problem of the origin, development and nature of the human "soul." From this perspective the attempt to grasp Freud's work as a fully articulated truth or completed interpretation that can now be seen as historically limited or framed by specific cultural contexts is to read Freud's life and work within assumptions about closed cultural systems or temporally bounded climates of opinion, assumptions that have themselves become a part of the historical past.

One could imagine these biographies as massive intellectual obituaries. However, they address the question of Freud's historical particularity without specific reference to each other, and from different perspectives, and thus indirectly open up broader questions of what it means to historicize the work of an influential thinker who cannot easily be confined to the past as the product and representation of a specific cultural context. Is the act of constructing Freud as a historical phenomenon equivalent to pronouncing his cultural death, or could it mark a transition from death to resurrection and reincarnation? The growing recognition of Auden's Freud as a particular historical and cultural phenomenon also opens up the possibility of reading Freud in new ways. Once Freud's work is grasped as a "product" of its time and place, it may also be possible to excavate it for previously ignored meanings and unresolved, open-ended investigations and thus to engage it again (from the "outside," one might say) as a specific "productive" power that may illuminate the various contextual determinants that confine our own thinking and allow us to develop new ways of directing, liberating, or at least enhancing, our thinking activity as historical subjects.

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Of the four historical biographies under consideration in this essay, the perspective of Frederick Crews's *Freud: The Making of an Illusion* will seem most familiar to those who have followed discussions about the legacy of psychoanalysis in the "Freud wars" that gained widespread attention in the 1990s and have

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continued, though with less public resonance, into the present.[2] Crews has been a major participant in those wars and the most insistent and unrelenting critic of Freud's reputation as the creator of a body of original "scientific" knowledge about the human psyche, especially as it was promulgated by the loyal disciples controlling the International Psychoanalytic Association during the triumphant phase of Anglo-American ego psychology in the quarter-century after 1945.[3] The intensely personal nature of Crews's unveiling of the underlying motivations and strategies that generated and sustained what he sees as the illusions and delusions of psychoanalysis might make it difficult to construe his work as a historical rather than a criminal investigation. It should be pointed out, however, that psychoanalytic knowledge was from its origins a very personal knowledge in which it was difficult to disentangle self-expression, empirical observation and critical reflection. Crews's mesmerizing account of Freud's shamelessly egomaniacal, endlessly duplicitous, and often maliciously cruel campaign to achieve and sustain for himself the historical stature of a courageous creator of a solution to the mind/body problematic of human existence based on the meticulous observation and rational analysis of the hidden, immanent processes whereby the unformed energies of physical nature evolved into the individuated self-consciousness of human subjects is based on a number of historicizing contextual claims.

Crews adamantly insists that there was never any real content to psychoanalytic theory other than a collection of constructed self-projecting illusions. In that sense one might see his position as successor to the early twentieth-century claims of Freud critics like Wilhelm Fliess and Carl Gustav Jung that Freud's so-called "knowledge" consisted of little more than the projection of his own unconscious thoughts, intentions and fears onto the lives of others. But Crews also tells a specific story about how such self-deceiving projections were created and how their creator was transformed both by himself and by his followers into a historical figure of the iconic stature of a "Shakespeare" or "Jesus of Nazareth" (1). Crews's main historical focus is on the particular person rather than the body of work. He believes that the work has no independent status but is simply material for examining the "case" of Freud. Once we grasp the particular (and

[2] See, for example, Frederick Crews, ed., *The Memory Wars: Freud's Legacy in Dispute* (New York, 1995). The Afterword of this collection of nineteen essays is Crews's "Confessions of a Freud Basher." A more sustained and more reasoned attempt to connect the collapse of Freud's reputation to the act of scholarly historicizing is Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen and Sonu Shamdasani, *The Freud Files: An Inquiry into the History of Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, 2012).

[3] The complicated and conflicted history of psychoanalysis in the post-Second World War era has recently been retold in Dagmar Herzog's revisionist *Cold War Freud: Psychoanalysis in an Age of Catastrophes* (Cambridge, 2017).

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thus "historical") origins of Freud's observations and theoretical claims, those observations and claims will simply lose their power. According to Crews, the reason the leaders of the psychoanalytic movement exerted such strict control over access to the unpublished materials of the Freud archives was obvious—historical investigations were a primary threat to maintaining the illusions about the scientific truth of psychoanalysis.

The scope of Crews's historicization of Freud is relatively narrow. The central question driving his investigations is: "How and why did a studious, ambitious and philosophically reflective young man, trained in rigorous inductivism by distinguished researchers and eager to win their favor, lose perspective on his wild hunches, efface the record of his mistakes, and establish an international cult of personality?" (3). In his search for the source of the motivations that turned Freud into a self-glorifying creator of illusions, however, Crews does raise a number of issues that pertain to the broader question of historical determinants for the creation and development of psychoanalytic theory.

Crews's cautionary moral tale of Freud's decline or "fall" into the role of a creator of illusions falsely portrayed and marketed as "truths" begins with the experience of failed integration or assimilation into an imagined universal culture of Enlightenment humanism during his early university years. Freud's consciousness of cultural isolation and exclusion within his own culture has most often been attributed by both Freud and his followers (with a considerable element of retrospective exaggeration, in Crews's view) to the experience of anti-Semitism. From Crews's perspective the personally felt "weight of antisemitism" shaped Freud's quest to overcome the cultural disadvantage of marginalization through conquest, by any means, of the world that had refused him full participation and recognition. He rejected the humiliating stance of passive assimilation and pursued the active strategy of recognition through conquest. Anti-Semitism was not merely an obstacle to deserved recognition and integration, according to Crews, but an enemy that "aroused a permanent rage" against Christianity in Freud and defined the very core of the psychoanalytic project as a "peculiarly inward form of revolutionism" whose explicit aim was to undermine the transcendent foundations of traditional religion (21–3). At times Crews suggests not only that Freud was determined to unveil the illusions of traditional religious belief, but also that he imagined himself as the prophet of an alternative, immanent, "post-religious" understanding of finite human existence that would displace existing structures of religious meaning and the practices that sustained them, at least among members of the cultural elite. This is Crews's most interesting substantive claim about the motivating animus behind the creation of psychoanalysis—but he does not follow up his assertions by investigating the ways in which Freud thought his way through his scientific and philosophical inheritance in search of an immanent understanding of the finite human soul,

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or how this search might be interpreted in terms of Freud's persistent claim that psychoanalysis provided a "scientific," neutral and objective knowledge of the origin and inner dynamics of the psyche. And Crews does not bother to analyze any of the post-1900 essays on religion and culture in which Freud thought his way through some of these issues. What we might call Freud's "religious" or "post-religious" quest functions primarily as an irritant for Crews because of the pretentious claim it implied about the cultural significance of the constructed illusions of psychoanalysis and the indifference it created toward the mundane medical tasks of healing and care.[4]

The second contextual frame that is clearly important in Crews's story of Freud's surrender to untethered fantasies of intellectual conquest is the intensely personal, social and professional insecurity that emerged from the collapse of stable forms of social identification and reciprocal recognition in late nineteenth-century Central Europe, especially among recently emancipated Jews and other migrant populations, and the ways in which the quest for autonomy and recognition, even for educated professionals, was increasingly defined by the competitive relations of a market economy. Freud's persistent examination of the conditions of self-knowledge and self-determination, or "autonomy," is not seen by Crews as a working through of one of the core philosophical elements in the Enlightenment conception of the rational and ethical subject, but is reduced to an unethical surrender to competitive self-interest: "The commercial mentality is what set Freud apart from the ethical scientists and physicians of his era." He "cared only about the cause to which his name was attached, found it imperative to inflate his results, to make promissory claims, to meet objections through sophistry, scorn and ad hoc tinkering, and to pile further theory atop postulates that had never been validated" (666).

Finally, Crews does try in some indirect ways to contextualize the breakthrough to psychoanalysis in the late 1890s as embedded not only in the turmoil of Freud's desperate competitive search for personal recognition as a Jewish outsider in a Christian culture, but also within a more general crisis of personal identity that emerged from the cultural "death of God" expressed in the collapse of belief in transcendently grounded natural laws and ethical norms that integrated individuals into national and civic communities. This "identity crisis" involved virtually all dimensions of mutual recognition and personal autonomy, but it was most intimately and intensely experienced as a crisis of the sexual and gendered individuation of the human subject, as the collapse of an assumed or necessary

4 Crews's focus on the ways in which Freud's ambitious quest for conquest and fame involved a neglect of patient welfare echoes the theme of Louis Breger's *Freud: Darkness in the Midst of Vision* (New York, 2000), but Breger's account of Freud's "dark side" is less reductive and does include some recognition of Freud's intellectual accomplishments.

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transition from the instinctual desires of natural being to the shaping of these desires into culturally meaningful identities as stable or rooted individuations of personal selfhood. The desperation and inner turmoil of Freud's attempts to navigate this dissolution and potential reconstruction of subjective identity formation in the 1890s are what drove him, in Crews's narrative, not only to the irresponsible use and promotion of dangerous drugs (the years of Freud's use and abuse of cocaine loom large in Crews's discussion of the formative elements in the creation of psychoanalysis) but also to surrender to purely subjective projections of his own wishes and imaginings as if they represented empirically grounded truths about the nature of the embodied psyche and its development. That Freud's ability to confront and examine his inner turmoil might have provided an experiential opening into an investigation of a peculiarly modern anxiety about the dysfunctional distortion and even dissolution of the boundaries of individual selfhood in a period of both radical sociocultural transformation and the collapse of transcendent authority is not a consideration that enters into Crews's analysis. By 1900, Crews is convinced, Freud's theories no longer had any relation to external reality, but were part of the process "of reducing the world to the size and shape of his obsessions" (547), and his subsequent changes in theory and therapy were simply adjustments whose aim "would be to protect and promote his brand, irrespective of its run-ins with evidence and logic" (666). Thus Crews's historical biography breaks off at the turn of the century with a no-longer-redeemable, delusionary Freud. The transition from the seduction theory to the Oedipal theory is not seen as a "breakthrough" to knowledge of a previously hidden psychic reality of unconscious subjectivity, but simply the displacement of one subjective construction by another, both based on fantasies rooted in the personal dynamics of Freud's own family romance. His controversial interactions with others, like his sister-in-law Minna Bernays or his intimate confidante and friend Wilhelm Fliess, are seen as determined by his inner demons, to the point where Crews is even willing to make empirical claims about the truth of certain unsubstantiated events (Minna's alleged abortion) based on what simply had to follow from Freud's projections of an imagined reality onto the social relations in which he was entangled. Crews's views about Freud's relations to the scientific methods and theories of his contemporaries are determined by this perspective. Freud's work does not reveal any serious attempt to think through the various scientific claims and frameworks that characterized various post-Darwinian attempts to formulate an immanent theory of the formation of the human subject, but remains a kind of arbitrary pastiche of appropriated fragments of the scientific discoveries of others grounded in nothing more than the desire to sustain a veneer of originality and universality.

It would be wrong to dismiss Crews's attempt to undermine any and all foundations for the validity of psychoanalytic theory and practice as simply the

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ranting of a "Freud basher." The issues he raises about the personal search for a post-religious meaning that may have framed Freud's views of the struggles of the human soul and the secrets hiding in its depths, or about his complex and often convoluted reflections on the kind of knowledge that might satisfy this search in relation to his scientific and philosophical training and contexts, or finally the relationship between the chaotic turmoil of Freud's multidimensional identity crisis of the 1890s and a convincing experiential grounding for a communicable knowledge of the structure and dynamics of the modern psyche, are all central to the current task of historicizing Freud, and the works of Whitebook, Roudinesco, and Alt all take up these issues from their own specific national, disciplinary and personal perspectives. Unlike Crews, who ends his historical biography at the turn of the century, Whitebook, Roudinesco and Alt also recognize the importance of the years of turmoil that led to Freud's formulation of the basic tenets of psychoanalysis for shaping an ongoing process of self-reflective thinking through the expanded modern and postmodern dilemmas of identity formation until the moment of his death in 1939.

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Written from the disciplinary perspectives of both a professional academic philosopher and a practicing American psychoanalyst, Joel Whitebook's biography provides the clearest counterpoint to Crews's attempt to use historical investigation to destroy Freud's reputation as a significant thinker. Like Crews, Whitebook situates his project within the disintegration of the orthodox, "official," psychoanalytic theory and practice that had dominated the public sphere in the postwar era. Although Whitebook agrees with radical Freud critics like Crews that the time has come to historicize and thus relativize Freud's work by approaching it with a knowledge of the particular limitations of the cultural frameworks in which it was produced, and especially reproduced after Freud's death, he imagines this as a shift from a rigidly positivist to a more hermeneutically oriented intellectual framework for understanding Freud's texts and as an invitation to revise and revitalize rather than dissolve and destroy Freud's intellectual heritage. He has moved beyond Peter Gay's hope that the universality of Freud's truths could be sustained with a few minor revisions and new additions, and suggests that the core meaning of Freud's theory about the nature and development of individuated human subjectivity changes as it is appropriated or reread from different historical perspectives as a possible construction of meaning for his own time rather than as a positive truth for all times.

Whitebook focuses on what he sees as two major shifts in cultural context that have changed the meaning of Freudian theory. The first is the internal shift

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within psychoanalytic discourse and therapy since the 1970s toward a much greater emphasis on the pre-Oedipal stage of development and concomitantly on maternal relations, infant psychology and attachment theory. The second, related contextual shift concerns the "break with tradition" that marked the beginnings of psychoanalysis, a historical shift that emerges in Whitebook's analysis as a break with the reductively rational and positivist Enlightenment project for the production of legitimate and ultimately complete and transparent "scientific" knowledge of human nature and the emergence of a more self-reflectively complex, inwardly divided, and open-ended or non-reductive conception of science that does not, on the one hand, exclude as illegitimate that knowledge which is shaped by constructions of symbolic meaning in the "dark" areas of human experience that reach beyond the boundaries of a narrowly conceived fact-based rational analysis, but does, on the other hand, reject totalizing conceptualizations that claim certainty about the meaning of what lies beyond the boundaries of empirical observation and rational knowledge. This "science" is an open–ended investigative process emerging from a full, disabused recognition of the finitude of all perspectives on the essence or nature of human existence. Both of these shifts, moreover, have contributed to the emergence of a new conception of the core dilemmas of psychic life as pertaining not only to the development of individuated identity as a particular gendered selfhood in relation to a complex variety of others (as in the Oedipus complex), but also to the emergence of the archaic boundaries of individuation itself, which originate in the primal pre-Oedipal separation of the infant from the maternal womb. The importance of a new "unclassical" type of psychoanalytic subject (or patient)—a subject whose very sense of self-identity and its possible boundaries is at stake, who not only suffers from a "classical" kind of neurotic dysfunction within the process of self-development shaped by familial structures of authority and identification but also struggles with foundational issues tied to individuation per se, including a problematic longing for a return to the archaic starting point of absolute merger or non-differentiation between self and other, subject and object—is at the center of Whitebook's rethinking of the meaning of the Freudian conception of human subjectivity.

Situating Freud's personal development and the construction of his theoretical understanding of psychic life in historical contexts is important for Whitebook's project to revitalize psychoanalysis as a relevant form of knowledge. It is the historicizing of Freud's life and work which reveals the ways in which Freud himself struggled with the pre-Oedipal stages of psychic development, with the investigative and conceptual work of understanding psychic reality through a complex form of scientific investigation that included constructing frames and genealogies of symbolic meaning as well as theories of "positive" truth, and especially with the problem of explaining the persistent desire for integration

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into totalizing worldviews of absolute meaning. Reading Freud's work critically from a standpoint in which the dominance of the Oedipus complex, the power of a narrowly positivist conception of scientific knowledge, and the rejection of all forms of experience that affirm an identity transcending the difference imposed on us by our existential finitude appear increasingly simplistic and reductive, can reveal the often hidden, "spectral" or "unofficial" layers of Freud's complex, self-critical and ongoing understanding of psychic life. For Whitebook the recent opening of access to Freud's uncensored private correspondence (especially with his fiancée Martha Bernays in the 1880s but also with Wilhelm Fliess in the 1890s) is particularly revealing of the psychological turmoil in which fear not only of feminization but also of total self-dissolution marked the formative period of psychoanalytic theory. Unlike Crews, Whitebook embraces the new evidence that has exposed Freud's inner turmoil and virtual self-dissolution in the 1890s as a source of insight into the creative chaos that can expand and complicate our reading of Freud's texts and allow us to see and engage dimensions of Freud's work that have been ignored within the official psychoanalytic tradition.

In each of the three areas that are the focus of Whitebook's historicization there is clearly an opportunity for historians to enrich and broaden the historical context of his analysis and thus also enter the debate over the meaning of the relevant Freudian texts. Whitebook's particular perspective as a practicing psychoanalyst is especially obvious in his discussion of Freud's struggle with the archaic pre-Oedipal stage of self-development. Turning Freud into an object of his own psychoanalytic investigation, Whitebook emphasizes the ways Freud's personal development was grounded in a problematic relationship with his mother and connected to his intense struggle to construct a masculine identity that would sustain his personal and professional autonomy. The problems of the father complex, the psychic dilemmas of masculine assertion and the repudiations of both femininity and passive homoeroticism dominate Whitebook's two lengthy chapters on Freud's problematic love affair with Wilhelm Fliess. Freud's moments of self-surrender in this relationship marked a massive crisis of his self-identity as a man and as a human being. The very boundaries of his self often seemed to be threatened and produced frenzied attempts to overcome the fear of complete self-dissolution. It was the "divine madness" of this experience, this dissolution of the boundaries of the autonomous, rational ego, Whitebook insists, that provided the intellectual " force field" that was the precondition for the emergence of psychoanalysis. The task for intellectual historians would be to situate Freud's difficulties in dealing with the pre-Oedipal structures of individuation or identity formation, as well as with the problems of patriarchy, masculinity, femininity and so on, within the competing discursive and social frameworks of his historical culture. Comparative analyses with other major Central European figures of the modernist generation for whom there is a significant amount

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of revelatory material—like Arthur Schnitzler, Gustav Mahler, Thomas Mann, Rainer Maria Rilke or Robert Musil, for example—would make Freud's particular dilemma seem less idiosyncratically tied to his peculiar familial constellation. Also important in this regard would be a broader social analysis of the ways in which the crisis of traditional civic or state liberalism and the emergence of free-market capitalism, with its focus on competitive individualism, in Central Europe during the 1870s effected the transitional pathways from the natural identities of familial life to the collective identities of ethical norms and civic culture, as has been pursued and examined, for example, in the work of Eli Zaretsky.[5] Jews were not the only cultural "migrants" caught in the space between familial relations and loyalties on the one hand and civic identities and universal norms on the other. It was in this space, where the energies of instinctual life were controlled, sublimated or released to conform to cultural values and ethical norms that much of the psychological turmoil of Freud and his contemporaries was situated.[6] Historicizing Freud suggests that Freud did not so much express this process in some universal sense as participate in it in a particular, situated fashion.

Whitebook's attempts to use the process of historical contextualization to address questions pertaining to the nature of psychoanalytic knowledge as a form of science or philosophy, or both, operate at a number of different levels. His first concern is to reveal the limitations of the orthodox claim, forcefully presented by the intellectual biography of Peter Gay, that the theoretical framework of Freud's investigations and conceptualizations was a consistent commitment to the empirical procedures and rational analysis of a scientific positivism

[5] Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York, 2004), developed a broad, global perspective on the ways in which the Freudian theory of the individuated personal unconscious that presented personal identity as a problem and a project developed as both a product and a critical self-reflection of the transitions within modern capitalism, but the historical task of making the particular connections between global social–cultural transformations and the particular activity of thinking that created the texts that marked the origins and development of psychoanalysis remains to be completed. More recently Zaretsky has summarized his position in the form of a call to reanimate the critical, and political, dimensions of Freud's self-reflections on the making of personal selfhood in the culture of modernity. Eli Zaretsky, *Political Freud: A History* (New York, 2015). George Makari's attempt to place Freud's thought in context in his *Revolution in Mind: The Creation of Psychoanalysis* (New York, 2008) reduces the creation of psychoanalysis to a synthesis of ongoing transformative shifts in late nineteenth-century academic psychology and sexology and virtually ignores both the philosophical and the humanist frameworks of Freud's thinking and the broader sociopolitical and cultural contexts of his life.

[6] There is an interesting, though very cryptic, recent account of the situation of cultural migrancy among Freud's generation of Central European Jews in Adam Phillips, *Becoming Freud: The Making of a Psychoanalyst* (New Haven, 2014), chap. 2.

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grounded in the traditions of the Anglo-French Enlightenment. Whitebook divides his historicization of Freud's relation to the Enlightenment tradition into two major stages. First, Freud's early education was marked by assimilation into the integrating, universalizing ethos of a broadly humanistic European culture through the mythic historical narratives of collective meaning within the Jewish, Egyptian, and pre-Christian classical traditions. Second, as he entered the more advanced phases of his cultural integration at the university he was introduced into the dominant contemporary German versions of Enlightenment science through the biophysical reductionist, natural-science models of the Helmholtz school, which applied the quantitative and analytic procedures of mechanical physics to the domain of evolutionary biology and physiology. Although Whitebook also mentions Freud's early flirtations with more ambitious expansions of the positivist model, developing out of Romantic nature philosophy and the Darwinian revolution, that sought to include knowledge of the rational reflection and ethical agency of the human subject within the science of nature, and thus solve the puzzle of the emergence of the soul from material being, he does not clearly explicate the neo-Kantian assumptions concerning the transcendental ego and ethical subject that framed these scientific debates, or the cultural and political choices implicated in many of the philosophical and scientific disagreements that sought to resolve the "riddles" of existence in an immanent manner. Clearly, Freud's struggles with this Central European version of the Enlightenment tradition were crucial for the formulation of his project to develop a legitimate "scientific" model for investigating the immanent origins and development of the ethical and self-reflexive human subject. At one point Whitebook does describe Freud as the heir to the classical German philosophical tradition and analogous to Marx (and his theory of creative labor) in his conception of psychic reality as an active embodied unconscious subjectivity that ultimately determined the organizing structures of human experience (222–3). But Whitebook's main concern is to show how a historical reading of Freud's development as a thinker in relation to the competing Enlightenment traditions reveals a complex model for imagining the active thinking subject as a basis for self-reflective distancing from the preverbal realm from which individuation develops, in order both to prevent collapse of the boundaries of finite individuality and to resist the temptation of an absolutist response to the fear of self-dissolution through narcissistic re-creations of the individual self as an incarnation of absolute being.

Whitebook is most eloquent and convincing in his reading of the historical Freud as articulating a view of scientific knowledge as always limited and "historical," as a protection against megalomaniacal claims to absolute knowledge or abject submersion in the unstructured sea of being. Science in this model becomes an open-ended activity of immanent transcendence, a process of

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self-critical reflection that constantly affirms the finite particularity of the knower and the limitations of human knowledge, and refuses to interpret the absence of divine or transcendent meaning as a loss that might be replaced. A missing piece in this analysis is Freud's rethinking of archaeological and narrative models for reconstructing the present as a product of the past during the time when he focused his attention on the ways in which empirical observation of mental representations of the psychic reality of repressed subjective intention (the unconscious wish), rather than the material reality of physical processes, could be organized into legitimate, "scientific" forms of knowledge. The attempt to develop a "science" of the soul was very much tied, in Freud's critical thinking at the turn of the century, to revising the "human-science" models for framing the historical origins of human subjectivity in stratified cultural forms and narrative genealogies in order to come to terms with the psychic reality of the meaning-making activity of unconscious subjectivity.

Whitebook's careful dissection of the various dimensions or layers of Freud's conception of science as it emerges in the context of the transformation of the Enlightenment tradition in the late nineteenth century is also clearly related to the central importance he gives to Freud's understanding and critique of religion. For Whitebook, Freud's writings on religion are clearly not speculative asides or instances of "applied" analysis, or examples *à la* Crews of a delusionary messianic ambition to replace Christianity, but in-depth examinations of the assumptions and intentions that drive and sustain psychoanalytic knowledge. On the one hand, Freud's writings on religion clarify his conception of the finite "helplessness" of human existence that persistently fuels the desire for "feminine" submission to an absolute patriarchal authority or mystical submersion in the maternal "navel" of being from which all beings emerge as individuated forms. On the other hand, Whitebook suggests, Freud's focus on intentional self-critical distancing from all temptations of attaining salvation through submission or submergence is itself a form of meaning with some of the characteristics of a religious truth. This perspective emerges most obviously in Freud's critical reflections about the relationship between his own finite subjectivity and the collective identity of monotheistic religion. In this instance the process of immanent transcendence through critical self-reflection on the historical, culturally particular conditions of his own individuated being made possible a sense of his "essential" identity as a "godless Jew," an "absolute" identity defined by the constant activity of critical resistance to both submission and submersion (closure) which always recognizes the relations between the resistant defiance of its defense of autonomy and the historical conditions within which that autonomy and resistant defiance are constructed. This ongoing activity of contingent self-construction that can never end in a permanent identity or settle in a final home can itself become a kind of "spiritual" being—the spirituality, one might say, of the eternal migrant

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always aware of the boundaries (and thus a kind of transcendent spectator) of his/her own finite being.

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Like Whitebook's biography, Élisabeth Roudinesco's *Freud in His Time and Ours* addresses the task of historicizing Freud as an opportunity to open our eyes to a Freud not easily summarized in a closed system of thought, but whose life's work remains an open-ended project, worthy of reengagement and rethinking in "our time." Yet her perspective differs in a number of obvious ways from that of Whitebook. Her psychoanalytic training and lifetime association with the French Lacanian tradition inform her understanding of contemporary psychoanalysis, which she sees as open to philosophical reflections on the nature of the Freudian subject, less confined by the official orthodoxy of Anglo-American ego psychology, and more inclined to radical and subversive interpretations, including a reading of Freud that emphasizes his attention to the pre-Oedipal stages of development as well as his often empathetic and inclusive analysis of the feminine and homosexual variants in the shaping of individual identity. She also obviously grasps the development of the Freudian concept of the subject as embedded in a broad cultural tradition that is not confined to the scientific and philosophical assumptions of Freud's immediate intellectual environment, or the specific disciplinary histories of natural science and philosophy more generally. In fact, she hardly touches on Freud's process of thinking through the specific scientific and philosophical positions of his university mentors like Brücke and Brentano.

Roudinesco does see an investigation of the historical contexts shaping the formation of psychoanalysis as an opportunity to open up new dimensions and tensions in the Freudian legacy, but she tries to show how these contexts connect Freud to the broader cultural traditions of Western conceptions of human subjectivity. Within these contexts it was not so much the struggle to attain "scientific" knowledge of psychic reality that constituted Freud's centrality as a thinker but his initiation of a "symbolic revolution" that "imposed on modern subjectivity a staggering mythology of origins whose power seems more alive than ever, even as efforts to eradicate it continue" (3–4). This "mythology" emerged from an intensely personal and historically situated struggle to recognize the irrational, "dark" dimensions of human subjectivity without surrendering the autonomy and ethical responsibility of the individual will or the discipline of rational control. Directly confronting and analyzing the tense interaction between the powers of desire and aggression, between love and death, was a necessary condition for facing the reality that the individual psyche struggled to shape and manage without surrendering to reductive resolutions.

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Roudinesco does, like Whitebook, seek the beginnings of Freud's quest for knowledge in his familial and ethnic context. But unlike Whitebook she is interested in the entanglement of Freud's experience within the complicated process of Jewish emancipation and subsequent failure of assimilation into a collective national or state identity, and in the ways this process connected to a continued focus on familial relations as the originating ground and developmental space of subjectivity. For Freud the construction site of human subjectivity was the place where nature and culture joined, not in the activity of a nature-transcending ethical or political power that remade individuated natural or physical beings into universal "spiritual" subjects. Roudinesco is also receptive to the way in which the specific experience of Jews in late nineteenth-century Central Europe can be viewed as an extreme version of a more general experience of sociocultural identity formation shaped by migratory homelessness and uprooted cosmopolitanism. The inability to move smoothly from the embodied particularity of (increasingly nuclear) familial ties to stable public forms of self-identification sustained the tensions of the migratory condition. Even though Freud spent almost his whole life in a single geopolitical location surrounded by family and embedded in Jewish friendships and social associations, he still thought of himself as an outsider and as an exemplar of Ahasverus, the iconic representation of the wandering Jew.

Roudinesco also points out the complexity of sexual desire and gender differentiation in a social world in which women's roles and women's consciousness of self-identity were in a process of transition and tension and the family emerged as an increasingly prominent site for social formation. She rejects the notion, promoted by Whitebook, that Freud's problematic personal relationship with his mother led to a denial of the importance of the pre-Oedipal foundations of individuation, but instead sees the complicated particularities and intensities of familial relations in Freud's life as tied to shifts in social structure and cultural meaning associated with the Jewish migrations and the urban experience of the professional and educated middle classes more generally.

For Roudinesco the structures of knowledge most relevant for historicizing Freud are less the scientific methods and philosophical assumptions embedded in Freud's professional training than the archaeological and genealogical dimensions of the symbolic narratives of European cultural and literary history which he absorbed during his early years and that became a specific object of analysis and study during the gestation period of psychoanalytic theory and practice at the turn of the century. Unfortunately, just as she does not provide a systematic and detailed analysis of the natural-scientific forms of knowledge through which Freud thought his way through to an immanent conception of the origin and fate of the soul, she also does not pursue Freud's specific discussion of the ways in which the archaeological reconstruction of anthropological

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meaning-systems and "nonfictional" historical narratives framed his breakthrough at the turn of the century. From his earliest years he sought to make sense of his inner conflicts about autonomy and communal identity through the narratives he absorbed from the Jewish Bible, the Greek tragedies and modern European literary classics, like those of Cervantes, Shakespeare and Goethe. Roudinesco notes that he interpreted his struggle with his self-immolating, feminine desire to merge with Fliess in the late 1890s in terms of the biblical struggle between Jacob and the Angel, a struggle that did not result in a decisive victory of one side but in a critical self-control that avoided submission to the darker instincts of the self, a form of immanent transcendence that left the subject wounded, yet stronger. Like Whitebook, she could have been more specific in the ways in which Freud's breakthrough to a new way of grasping individuated existence at the turn of the century was specifically connected to a turn toward, and transformation of, the model of archaeological excavation and reconstruction of layered memory traces and an attempt to formulate a "scientific" nonfictional model for a construction of the complex genealogical narratives that emerged as the stories of self-making in the domain of a "psychic reality" characterized by intentional constructed meanings as well as buried memories of foundational events and relations.

It is misleading, Roudinesco suggests, to read the Freudian texts as the products of a unique inner investigation of the unconscious intentions that individuals bring to their existential relations to each other in social and cultural communities. Instead, she claims, we should read Freud as a sensitive, empathetic and intuitive reader (the remarkable "ear" that Foucault so admired) of the implicit meanings and their unconscious distortions that structured the formation of individuated lives in the age of the "belle époque," and as a writer who possessed the aesthetic ability to transform these stratified meaning fragments into a moral fable that could function as the conscious discursive structure or generalized framework of meaning for individual subjects. Freud may have thought that "what he was discovering in the unconscious foreshadowed what was happening to people in reality," but what he was actually discovering "was at bottom nothing but the product of society, a familial environment and a political situation whose signification he interpreted masterfully so as to ascribe it to the work of the unconscious" (4). Roudinesco's aim as a historical investigator is "to observe Freud constructing his own era while he was being constructed by it" (3). By "inventing a modern subject divided between Oedipus and Hamlet, between an unconscious that determines him without his knowledge and a guilty consciousness that shackles him in his freedom," Roudinesco claims, Freud publicly presented his intellectual "discovery" as "an anthropology of tragic modernity." This marked the creation of a new kind of knowledge, with little relation to medical psychology, but more like "a bizarre discipline that united

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body and soul, affect and reason, politics and animality" in a fragile combination of apparent opposites that remained in constant tension and thus open to constant evolution and transformation (81–82).

As part of her project to re-create the historical contexts whose structural determination of personal identity formation were mirrored and reproduced in the powerfully meaningful story or moral fable of self-production in Freud's texts, Roudinesco reproduces some of the many accounts of, and interviews with, associates and patients that have entered the public domain through the opening of the Library of Congress Freud Archives in 2010. Unlike Crews, Roudinesco is not disturbed by the various ways these stories diverge from or even contradict the narratives that Freud or his loyal disciples may have tried to read into them. What she does see is a broad and diverse array of individuals struggling to construct meaningful stories of self-making out of the confusing fragments and irreconcilable tensions of their own experience, but with less intellectual power and moral discipline to step back and objectify their intimate experiences for self-analysis and public consumption than Freud. Freud's great accomplishment was to present his own personal story of the production of the modern subject as a story of his time and culture. What Roudinesco does not investigate or analyze in any detail, however, is the ways in which this story, this symbolic narrative and moral fable for his own time, was "scientifically" constructed and pursued as a story that included the critical consciousness and ongoing reconstructive and interactive "archaeological" labor of the storyteller or storytellers within its narrative, and that thus constituted a symbolic revolution in which the most powerful stories of the production of meaningful subjectivity were stories that included the making of the story within them, and contained an important dimension of open-ended or interminable retranscription. It is in this sense that Freud became what Peter-André Alt calls not just a representative of modernity, but the "Doctor of Modernity."

* * *

Alt approaches the task of historicizing Freud from the perspective of a German literary scholar with special expertise in the works of Freud's own literary icons from the late Enlightenment and neoclassical periods. This approach includes attention to figures such as Goethe and Schiller, as well as to the structural transformations, especially of narrative form, that marked the works of Freud's modernist contemporaries, like Franz Kafka, Robert Musil and Thomas Mann. Like Roudinesco, Alt would like to portray Freud as the thinker who produced "the most influential theory of modern man," not from the evidence of scientific experimentation or rational analysis, but from the buried "stories of suffering" whose traces he excavated from the intimate lives of both himself and others, and

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which he recomposed into a powerful story, a self-consciously constructed mythic narrative, of the making of the modern psyche that "changed the understanding of our subjective existence (*Seelenleben*) in a radical and comprehensive manner" (14). "He who speaks of the modern speaks necessarily of psychoanalysis," Alt claims: "To reflect the modern means to be grasped by psychoanalysis, to be absorbed within it" (16). However, Alt does not critically address the ways in which historicizing Freud makes him a situated participant within the heterogeneity of modernist culture as an open-ended project and not necessarily its embodiment as a historically defined or enclosed form.

The problem for Alt is how to present a convincing account of the ways in which this "symbolic revolution" in Western thinking, this transformation of the discourse within which humans defined their fate as "living souls" in a secularized world, emerged from the particular individual experience of Sigmund Freud. Alt addresses this question by focusing his biography on Freud as a writer, as an individual who from his early *Gymnasium* years until his death seemed driven to objectify his experiences and feelings in words and thus inscribe his intimate world in a public space where he could think it through, revise and expand it, place it in relation to other contemporary models of the immanent production of the human soul, and share it with others. Of the four biographies under review, Alt's work not only is the longest (over a thousand pages) but also contains by far the most systematic and detailed analysis of Freud's textual corpus, including the recently expanded publication of his personal correspondence. At times this comprehensiveness can be overwhelming for the reader, and Alt's own narratives sometimes seem lost in a Freudian labor of constant reconstruction of strata of meaning from historical fragments and the possible associations among them. For Alt the most revealing image of Freud the creator of the "demanding legacy of the darkest and at the same time most clear-sighted science of man ... that has ever been produced" (18) is Freud at his writing desk in Berggasse 19, toiling night after night in a never-ending process of thinking and rethinking, inscribing and reinscribing. It is above all Freud the self-critical thinker able to distance himself from the immediacy of his desires and feelings and thus hold and delay his responses for further deliberation, and Freud the writer, continually inscribing his thinking processes so that they might become objects for further thinking by himself and others, who emerges as the historical Freud who was somehow able both to construct a genealogy of the modern subject and also to move beyond it, to objectify it and transcend it in an open-ended process of self-conscious analysis that eventually became the foundation for the "postmodern" subject.

For Alt the distinctive dimension of Freud's interaction with the psychological turmoil of identity formation and potential dissolution in the quarter-century before the First World War was that he did not surrender to the temptation to seek reductive resolutions of intensely experienced inner tensions. From early on

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Freud displayed an ability to distance himself from the immediacy of his personal experience and most intimate feelings and use his critical intellect to sustain the tension between his mind and body, to develop that "evenly-hovering attention" that he later made into a rule of therapeutic practice.[7] During his *Gymnasium* and university years he almost seemed like a person "without a body" (60), absorbing and then observing, transcribing and interpreting his instinctual and emotional life through constant reading and writing. In a chapter entitled "The Dictatorship of Abstinence" Alt describes Freud's remarkable repression of sexual activity during the long period of his courtship, and then, after a brief decade in which coitus was tied to reproduction, his reversion to an ascetic lifestyle in which sexual abstinence and scholarly productivity were wedded together. Alt interprets Freud's ability to develop an empirical, neutral, scientific attitude toward the sexual drive and the various transformations it underwent in the making of individual identities as the ability to transform his own libido into an "object" of conscious knowledge and thus "idolize" his own sexual repression as the condition of intellectual independence and creativity (123).

Freud's personal culture of abstinence was clearly connected in Alt's view to his constant writing. What Alt's book makes obvious is the way in which not only Freud's textual production but also his personal correspondence revealed a consistent commitment to thinking activity and its objectification in words as the core of his personal as well as public identity. The fact that his four-year engagement with Martha and his tumultuous love affair with Fliess (as well as many other intense emotional relationships) were primarily epistolary was critical to his ability to resist submergence in the other and engage in a constant process of questioning, reflection, analysis, projecting, and speculating. Freud took his personal correspondence as seriously as listening to patients in his consulting room or absorbing himself in the readings and textual inscriptions of his research, and the currently published volumes of his correspondence compete in size and importance with his published works. The personal letter was the site where he could experiment; develop new concepts; respond to questions, doubts and alternative possibilities; and thus keep the conversation open. Freud's notorious avoidance of any experience of music that was not centered around a verbal text; his constant pursuit of linguistic clarity; his persistent rewriting, revising and summarizing of his fundamental ideas; his resistance to letting himself be absorbed, even momentarily, into the "oceanic feeling" of a mystical experience, were all expressions of this same distancing neutrality that Freud nurtured as the foundation of his intellectual autonomy.

7 Sigmund Freud, "Ratschläge für den Arzt bei der psychoanalytische Behandlung" (1912), in Freud, *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), 376–87, at 377.

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Alt's interpretation of the meaning of Freudian "science" is tied to the discipline of constant self-critical distancing from the object of observation and analysis, but he also develops a complex, multidimensional view of psychoanalytic knowledge from this starting point. He is particularly suggestive in his attempts to address the ways in which Freud translated the archaeological metaphor into a method for excavating, contextualizing and reconstructing the repressed meanings of the psychic intentionality of the unconscious subject. In this case the memory traces to be excavated were disguised expressions of the "reality" of "meanings" constantly subjected to retranscription, rather than obscured memories of experienced physical events or affective experiences, even when those physical events may have grounded and channeled specific expressions of unconscious intentions and the absorption of reconstructed memories into constructed narratives. To interpret the meanings in the traces of the unconscious intentions of the psyche, to embed them within the complex contextual relations that ultimately displayed their originating "ideas," required not just rational analysis but also a mythopeic construction of possible connections that gave intentional and associative meaning to the fragments. But these mythic meanings that made sense of the fragmented, obscured traces of unconscious connections and purposes presented to consciousness needed to be constructed or reconstructed through a careful empirical investigation and rational analysis of their conscious representations. The core of psychoanalytic science in Alt's view is that it was a combination of the rationality and empiricism of the investigative process and the recovery or construction of mythical meanings that produced a historical narrative out of the spatially scattered and temporally stratified excavated fragments of subjective meaning. The descent into the depths of unconscious fantasy needed to be objectified and regulated by rational understanding of the process. "The psychoanalytic project proceeds under the double signification (*Vorzeichen*) of rationality and mythology: neither exists without the other, both day and night are surprisingly bound up together" (257). The symbolic traces that become manifest in consciousness needed to be interpreted in terms of their hidden unconscious origins and reinscribed as parts of a narrative of psychic intentions or wishes moving through the temporal and structural strata of the different meaning systems of the psyche. The interpreter required a rational model of the psychic "apparatus" and its dynamics in order to produce a legitimate form of "mythical" knowledge inscribed as historical narrative.

From Alt's perspective as a literary scholar, Freud's own specific conception of artistic representation remains problematic. For Freud the imaginary worlds and fictional stories that gave meaning to the phenomena of experience in works of art constituted a documentary testimony of the manifest appearances of the unconscious meanings or ideas disguised and distorted in conscious life. Freud read literary works not as possible sites for the self-conscious activity

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of interpretive construction that remade the manifest content of experience into relations and sequences that revealed a deeper hidden meaning, but as expressions of an unconscious psychic reality that required the interpretive methods and psychic models of the analyst to be fully understood. It was the hidden truth in the latent content of art rather than its manifest forms that fascinated him, and this content found its appropriate form in psychoanalytic "science." He did not allow artists the full dignity of producers of "critical immanence." The real meaning of the work of literature or other aesthetic production was not fully available to its creator, who remained an unselfconscious maker of "mythic" meaning. Only an analytical reconstruction of the ways in which the mythic meaning embodied in the art was created or objectified on the basis of unconscious intentions could unveil the true, hidden meaning of its originating "ideas."

* * *

This may seem a bit myopic on Freud's part, not only to a literary scholar but also to historians engaged in historicizing Freud's life and work. A historical understanding of psychoanalysis would need to work through the process of analyzing the production of its texts and their manifest content as historical representations of specifically situated meanings emerging from within the discursive formations of a particular time and place. Freud's claim that only psychoanalysis integrated the self-conscious process of meaning creation into the narrative model of historical truth ignores the integration of the self-conscious understanding of the open-ended processes and contexts of meaning construction as a central element in the aesthetic forms being created by contemporary modernist artists. Historians need to examine Freud as himself a mixture of artist and scientist, or as a representative of the self-conscious, open-ended, immanent construction of meaning that is a core dimension of modernism, a construction of meaning that included the excavation and remaking of the conditions and procedures of its own construction. In this sense both Roudinesco and Alt, in their complex and often confusing attempts to reconstruct Freud's life and work as exemplary of modernist culture in general, can function as potential guides for historians.

The empirical methods and precise analytical distinctions of "science" that allow for a self-critical "distancing" or "objectifying" experimentation with particular narrative sequences and models of meaningful worlds are the necessary tools for reconstructing the conditions and consequences of the empirically specific determinations of identity within the real world in which the ethical task of self-fashioning is played out. Both the scientifically constructed historical narratives of psychoanalysis, and the aesthetically constructed mythic narratives of modernist writers like Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, Hermann Broch,

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Hermann Hesse, Arthur Schnitzler or Franz Kafka, articulated a symbiotic relation between the analytical self-reflections of science and the symbolic representations of art in pursuit of the goal of illuminating what Freud called the "riddles" of integrating nature and mind in a narrative of the immanent historical production of the individuated human soul. "Science" represented the stance of diagnostic observation and critical analysis, laying bare the limiting conditions within which the modern human subject was fashioned. This vision recaptured the Enlightenment conception of a secular or godless empirical analysis that did not claim to provide a coherent or "closed" representation of the world, but instead fueled a critical understanding of the ways in which meaningful worlds were constructed. "Art" in turn was defined less by the goal of imagining alternative worlds and coherent identities than by an ability to articulate or objectify the process through which such worlds or identities might be produced. In both modes the complex reflexive process of creating narrative meaning, or of attempting to create narrative meaning, itself emerged as a meaningful story. The unifying subject of the narrative was reconstituted as an open-ended movement of identity dissolution and re-creation, a process that involved not only the subject of the manifest content of the text but the subject who was the maker of the text as well. In this sense the act of historicizing Freud might also provide a mirror of the historicizing historian's participation in the story that the act of historicizing produces, and Freud might be resurrected in a new incarnation as a pioneering thinker of historical existence imagined as a self-critical movement of immanent transcendence. This process did not conform to the traditional closed systems of either positivist science or meaning interpretation (hermeneutics), but prefigured the emergence of an interminable historicism that combined elements of both in a conception of historical truth as a form of narrative truth. However, as the new historicizers of Freud's work suggest (often implicitly and inadvertently), we should examine Freud's "pioneering" participation in this process not as the "discovery" of a hidden truth, but as an open-ended examination and constant rethinking of the ways in which human understanding of the natural and cultural dimensions of the development of the "soul" need to be reimagined and reconstructed in ways that conform to the experience of its individuated immanent reality as a finite being in the world.

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