ARTÍCULOS SOBRE FERENCZI. CONTEXTUALES E HISTÓRICOS.

FERENCZI, FREUD, ANARCHO-COMMUNISM, AND MASS PSYCHOLOGY¹.

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Sigmund Freud's groundwork *Massenpsychologie and Ich-Analyse* (Mass Psychology and the Analysis of Ego) was published in 1921.³ On 12 May 1919 Freud wrote to Ferenczi: "I ... took up the little thing about the 'uncanny' again, and with a simple minded idea ... I attempted a psa. foundation for group psychology".⁴ The "simple minded idea", which can be traced back to *Totem and taboo* was formulated like this: "The uncanny and coercive characteristics of group formations, which are shown in their suggestion phenomena, may therefore with justice be traced back to the fact of their origin from the primal horde. The leader of the group is still the dreaded primal father; the group still wishes to be governed by unrestricted force; it has an extreme passion for authority; ... it has a thirst for obedience."⁵

Freud's *Mass Psychology* was an important step in Freud's thinking about society and culture, preceding such later works as *The future of an illusion, Civilisation and its Discontents*, and *Moses and Monotheism*. It was a challenging book, it has been reviewed, discussed, interpreted and reinterpreted by many authors, contemporaries and successors. In this paper I am referring to three classic authors who had largely contributed to our understanding of the main questions raised by Freud's book: György Lukács, Sándor Ferenczi and Theodor Wiesengrund -Adorno.

Lukács' and Ferenczi's reactions were almost imminent. György Lukács published a critical review on Freud's book in the German Communist newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag) in 1922.⁶ In his review Lukács acknowledges that "...Freudian psychology signifies a certain advance compared to common psychology", however, "is very liable to mislead anyone not heeding the totality of social phenomena; liable to offer him one of those panaceas for explaining every phenomenon that are so popular today - without forcing him to come to terms intellectually with the real structure of society."

Lukács –in full accordance with the main theses of his seminal work *History and class consciousness* published a year later (1923)- blames Freud's mass psychology since "it attempts to explain man's social relations from his individual consciousness (or sub-consciousness) instead of exploring the social reasons for his separateness om the whole and the connected problems of his relations to his fellow-men. It must inevitably revolve helplessly in a circle of pseudo-problems of its own making."

He also remarks that Freud "seeks to account for mass psychology from the psychology of the individual soul, and in attempting to avoid underestimating the masses he lapses into an equally *boundless overestimation of leaders*. For Freud seeks to explain mass phenomena from his general sexual theory. In the relation of mass and leader - in which he claims to locate the central problem of mass psychology - he perceives only a special case of that 'primal fact' at the root of relations between lovers, the parent-child relationship, relations between friends, professional colleagues etc." (my italics).

While Lukács criticizes Freud because he attempts to understand mass psychology from the psychology of the individual, Ferenczi in his review published originally in 1921 in *Zeitschrift*, perceives with Freud an *opposite direction*, which goes from mass psychology to individual psychology. As he writes: "Scarcely had we got used to the idea that the basis for unravelling the complex phenomena of the group mind (art, religion, myth-formation, etc.) had been provided by the findings of the psychology of the individual, i.e. of psycho-analysis, when our confidence in it was shaken by the appearance of Freud's recent work on 'group psychology'; which showed us the converse, namely that the investigation of the processes of group

psychology was capable of solving important problems of individual psychology." In Freud's approach to mass psychology, Ferenczi sees an example of *utraquism*, a method and an epistemological position "establishing relationships of analogy between distinct elements that belong to distinct fields of knowledge and strata of reality, with the aim of discovering or going deeper into the *meaning* of certain processes." As Ferenczi put it in the first lines of his review: "Looking at scientific advance as a whole, we see that direct, rectilinear advance keeps coming to a dead end, so that research has to be resumed from a completely fresh and often entirely unexpected and improbable angle."

In his review on mass psychology Ferenczi overviews those aspects of Freud's work which he regards as the most remarkable innovations, related to his own (Ferenczi's) previous works and ideas. The first innovation is that "group psychology provides a phylogenetic parallel to the ontogenesis of susceptibility to hypnosis. If we have regard to the central position of suggestion and hypnosis in the pathology and therapy of the neuroses, in education, etc., we shall immediately see that a fundamental revision of our previous views on the subject will have a perceptible effect throughout the field of normal and pathological psychology."

The second vital innovation of group psychology is, in Ferenczi's view, "the discovery of a new stage in the development of the ego and the libido", i. e. identification. "In this phase external objects are not really incorporated, as in the cannibalistic phase, but are 'incorporated' in an imaginary fashion, or, as we term it, introjected: hat is to say, their qualities are annexed, attributed to the ego. The establishment of such an identification with an object (a person) is simultaneously the building of a bridge between the self and the outer world, and this connexion subsequently permits a shifting of emphasis from the intransitive 'being' to the transitive 'having', i.e. a further development from identification to real object-love." Freud's discovery, as Ferenczi sees it, "will certainly bring nearer an understanding of many insufficiently understood phenomena of psychopathology and the psychology of the individual". He mentions here homosexuality (!), paranoia, and melancholia. In general, he attributes to Freud's mass psychology a new conception of the dynamics of neurotic illness: "according to the new description, the neurotic conflict is played out between the sexual trends which are inhibited in aim in accordance with the demands of the ego-ideal (trends acceptable to the ego) and direct sexual trends (trends unacceptable to the ego)."

At the end of his review Ferenczi draws a somewhat surprising conclusion: "the group-psychological factors involved in every psychotherapy ... make the study of this paper of Freud's essential to everyone concerned with the healing of sick minds. For in dealing with the patient the physician is the representative of the whole of human society. *Like a Roman Catholic priest, he has the power to loose or bind*; through him the patient learns to render inoperative the former 'conscience' which made him ill; and it is by virtue of his authority that the patient is enabled to overcome his repressions." (my italics) The priestly, or divine, messianic role attributed to psychoanalysts might be probably in close relation to Ferenczi's personal ambivalent sentiments about Freud as a "father", moreover, a "dreaded primal father", who interfered into his life projects, like his marriage. On the other hand, Ferenczi's remarks touches the central point of Lukács' observation about the "boundless overestimation of leaders".

The contradictory readings of *Mass psychology* by both Lukács and Ferenczi represent their own respective ideologies and presuppositions. For Lukács, *Mass psychology* betrays all the features of a reactionary psychology which reduces concrete social and political conditions to the archaic instincts of individuals, to a "thirst for obedience". For Ferenczi, Freud's work is an extension of his own ideas about suggestion, introjection, and developmental stages of the sense of reality, with a bit of ironic overtone about the "Catholic priest."

Now I turn to a third, also remarkable reading of Freud. In 1951, thirty years after the publication of Freud's *Mass Psychology*, Theodor Adorno published a longer essay on "Freudian Theory and the Patterns od Fascist Propaganda". Adorno, one of the most important Marxist thinkers of the age beside Lukács, re-examines Freud's thesis from the perspective of fascism, the Second World War and the Holocaust. Adorno's text should be seen in the light of his contributions to the study of authoritarian personality, as well as his theories an alienation, reificiation, and mass culture, inspired originally by Lukács's *Theory of Novel*,

and *History and class consciousness*. However, Adorno -contrary to Lukács- strongly sympathised with psychoanalysis, as other members of the Frankfurt School, like Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, or Max Horkheimer. They all attempted to answer to the question posed by Lukács, Karl Korsch, or Antonio Gramsci: why the proletariat could not fulfil its historical mission in 1918/19, what is the "missing link" between the ideological superstructure and the social-economic foundations? They turned toward psychoanalysis in which they saw an explanation for what is "in the mind of people", how does "false consciousness" rise in the individual and collective minds. Adorno believed that "splitting and atomisation of modern man, the self-alienation of the subject is best described Freud, who, as all radical bourgeois thinkers, leaves contradictions unsolved, and abstains from demanding a systematic harmony where the thing is in itself contradictory". ¹² (p. 107).

In his essay on mass psychology, he states that in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, published years before the danger of German fascism appeared to be acute, Freud, "though he was hardly interested in the political phase of the problem, clearly foresaw the rise and nature of fascist mass movements in purely psychological categories. If it is true that the analyst's unconscious perceives the unconscious of the patient, one may also presume that his theoretical intuitions are capable of anticipating tendencies still latent on a rational level but manifesting themselves on a deeper one. It may not have been perchance that after the First World War Freud turned his attention to narcissism and ego problems in the specific sense. The mechanisms and instinctual conflicts involved evidently play an increasingly important role in the present epoch, whereas, according to the testimony of practising analysts, the 'classical' neuroses such as conversion hysteria, which served as models for the method, now occur less frequently than at the time of Freud's own development when Charcot dealt with hysteria clinically and Ibsen made it the subject matter of some of his plays. According to Freud, the problem of mass psychology is closely related to the new type of psychological affliction so characteristic of the era which for socio-economic reasons witnesses the decline of the individual and his subsequent weakness. While Freud did not concern himself with the social changes, it may be said that he developed within the monadological confines of the individual the traces of its profound crisis and willingness to yield unquestioningly to powerful outside, collective agencies." (p. 120)

Adorno's thoughts can also shed light to the "boundless overestimation of leaders" by Freud, referred to by Lukács, and perceived by Ferenczi, too, in the enigmatic figure of a Catholic priest. According to Adorno, this is "the fundamental issue of fascist manipulation. For the fascist demagogue, who has to win the support of millions of people for aims largely incompatible with their own rational self-interest, *can do so only by artificially creating the bond Freud is looking for...*" (my italics, 121). Fascist agitation" -explains Adorno- "is centred in the idea of the leader, no matter whether he actually leads or is only the mandatory of group interests, because only the psychological image of the leader is apt to reanimate the idea of the all-powerful and threatening primal father." (124)

As Adorno draws attention to it, is not perchance that Freud wrote *Mass Psychology* after the First World War, after treating such problems as narcissism, mourning and melancholia, ego and ego ideal. Freud's mass psychological work was a highly pessimistic answer to the challenges of the devastating war and the subsequent, failed revolutions in Eastern and Central Europe, and, at the same time it was an anticipation of the Fascist dictatorships coming to power soon in Italy and Germany.

The Great War and its aftermath incited psychoanalysts to face with massive social and political problems raised by the traumatic events -psychic and social suffering as aftereffects of what was called in that time "war neuroses", an earlier version of PTSD¹³. Politicising and socialising psychoanalysis was, however, not a new phenomenon. As early as in 1909, the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society discussed a lecture held by Alfred Adler "On the psychology of Marxism" in which the speaker argued that Marxian class theory and Freud instinct theory may be eventually synthetized; an another member of the society, Paul Federn emphasised that class consciousness can liberate workers form their neuroses. Adler, who was going to break with the Vienna society soon, was a convinced Marxist, and Federn, as leftist socialist, played an important role ten years later, in the discussions about the psychoanalytic interpretation of revolution. While the

majority of the members refused Adler's theses, in this discussion Freud represented a "centrist" position: the development of humanity and civilisation needs, on the hand, a growing extension of consciousness, and, the advancement of sublimation, on the other.

In the pre-war period Ferenczi too, was already interested in social and political questions¹⁵. Far from being a Marxist, he tried to apply and to extend Freudian concepts to the critique of contemporary social relations. He condemned "excessive repression", which sets free those instinctual forces that lead to religious superstitions, to the cult of authority and to a rigid adherence to obsolete social forms.¹⁶ (283). He had envisaged a future society in which natural strivings and desires would be treated not with negation and repression, but with a "sound government" that would replace hypocrisy and the blind adoration of dogmas and authority. He, like Freud, proposed a utopian "middle roadway", since, "between anarchy and communism [...], between unrestrained individual license and social asceticism, there must be somewhere a reasonable individual-socialistic just milieu that cares also for individual welfare as well as for the interests of society, that cultivates the sublimation instead of the repression of instincts, thereby preparing a quiet path for progress assured from revolutions and reactions" ¹⁷ (p. 433).

It was the Great War that introduced Ferenczi, serving as an army doctor, into the massive and brute social realities. His reaction to the events can be truly followed through his correspondence with Freud, and his published writings, too. In his article "The Ice-Age of Catastrophes" 18 he wrote: "...The worst and most upsetting events could appear as unbridled experiences of experimental psychology, a kind of 'Naturexperiment' that the scientist cannot realize in his study, but at most, within the laboratory of his mind. War is one of those laboratory experiments taken to a cosmic level. In peacetime, only through the complex examination of dreams, of neurotic symptoms, of artistic creations, of diverse religions can one demonstrate [...] that the human psyche presents multiple layers, the culture is but a prettily decorated shop-window whilst at the back of the store, the more primitive merchandise is piled up? War had brutally wrested of this mask and has shown us man in his deepest, truest nature at the heart of man, the child, the savage, the primitive [...] It is in this way that the catastrophes of the ice-age have forged long-ago in the first familial and religious society, the basis of all subsequent evolution. War has simply thrown us back into the ice-age, or rather, it has unveiled the deep imprints that it had left in psychic universe of humanity." (p. 125.) The term "ice-age" has appeared already before the war in "Stages in the development of the sense of reality" where Ferenczi suggests an analogy between "the great step in our individual repression, the latency period", and "the misery of the ice age, which we still faithfully recapitulate in our individual life." ¹⁹ (p. 80) This very Lamarckian idea about ice age was further elaborated during the first World War (as his correspondence with Freud shows), and then in his work Catastrophes in the history of sexuality, known also as *Thalassa*.²⁰ (1924).

Freud also reacted to the brutality of war in "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" (1916). In this essay he complains about "our mortification and our painful disillusionment on account of the uncivilized behaviour of our fellow-citizens of the world during this war". However, as he goes deeper into the mass psychological causes and consequences of the war, he realises that our disillusionments are *unjustified*. i. e. "they were based on an illusion to which we had given way. In reality our fellow-citizens have not sunk so low as we feared, because they had never risen so high as we believed. The fact that the collective units of mankind, the peoples and states, mutually abrogated their moral restraints naturally prompted these individual citizens to withdraw for a while from the constant pressure of civilization and to grant a temporary satisfaction to the instincts which they had been holding in check."²¹

The main target of the Fifth International Congress of Psychoanalysis which took place in Budapest, close to the collapse of the Central Powers, in September 1918 was to draw the lessons of the war. Ferenczi, in his speech under the title "Psychoanalysis of War Neurosis", 22 stated that "the mass experiment of the war caused many kinds of grave neuroses, among them such conditions that were caused certainly not by mechanical effects. Thus, neurologists are due to acknowledge that something was missing from their calculations, namely, the psyche." He added that it was only the terrible experiences of the war that had forced neurologists to appreciate the significance of psychoanalysis. In his address at the congress, Freud

spoke about new lines in the development of psychoanalysis, a positive mass psychological transformation, after war, and pointed out "the vast amount of neurotic misery which there is in the world, and perhaps need not be".²³ He foresaw a future in which "the conscience of society will awake", and will compel it to take responsibility for its psychological as well as material well-being. Freud proposed the creation of outpatient clinics staffed by psychoanalytic clinicians, where "treatments will be free".²⁴ At such clinics, analysts would "be faced by the task of adapting [psychoanalytic] technique to the new conditions".²⁵ In fact, such outpatient clinics were created in the 1920s in Vienna, Berlin, and a decade later in Budapest, too.²⁶

In April 1919 Ferenczi was appointed as professor of psychoanalysis by the government of the Council's Republic at the medical faculty of the Budapest University.²⁷ (The nomination order was undersigned by the "arch-enemy" György Lukács, then deputy commissar of Public Education.) He accepted the professorship from the Communist regime as compensation for his earlier neglect by academia. As an "individual-socialist", he was far from being an enthusiastic supporter of the regime. Although he somewhat sympathised with the plans of the government about reforming public health and medical education, he felt threatened by the plans of the regime to nationalise the whole health system, and to deprive doctors from their private praxis, as the base of their (including Ferenczi's) own existence.

After the defeat of the first Hungarian communist regime on August 1, 1919, Ferenczi was among those professors who were immediately dismissed from their positions. After the traumata of the failure of both revolutions and in the atmosphere of severe repressions Ferenczi felt himself in a vacuum both politically and professionally. He felt obliged to give a justification for the acceptance of a university chair from the Communist government. As he explains, "revolutions are favourable to viewpoints which are either new or neglected by officialdom." According to him, psychoanalysis belong to this category, and he reminds the example of Henri Bergson, whose ideas had been disseminated with the greatest enthusiasm, by a "terribly radical political line", because they were "new" and modern". "They did not realize that Bergson's fundamental thesis, ultra-idealist, resolutely spiritualist and mystical, was in perfect contradiction with their own beliefs". Therefore, he continues, "it is completely unfounded to seek to establish an affinity between the actual set of beliefs of a political faction and those of a science, solely on the basis of whether adherents of the political faction favour the science." (210-211).

He also felt necessary to review his own position *vis-à-vis* politics and society. He categorically distanced himself from Marxism, the ruling ideology of the Councils' Republic, as it can be evidenced from a few handwritten notes,²⁹ stemming probably from 1920. In these notes which he discussed parallels between psychoanalysis and the Marxist idea of history. He concluded that this parallel is unsatisfactory, since the goals of the two schools are basically different. "Psychoanalysis rather joins to Durkheim and not to the Marxist sociology and politics, and, in concrete and actual questions joins to liberal socialism. [...] Psychoanalysis and liberal socialism share the same worldview, the same ethical sense, and the same task in the service of the welfare of men". Psychoanalysis cannot bring "salvation," but only works "for the self-salvation of the individual." In this notes Ferenczi also criticizes "anarcho-communist mentality", and its psychoanalytic followers who are dreaming of the elimination of all repressions, of the satisfaction of all desires, and envisage a "fatherless society" as the ultimate goal of psychoanalysis. He contrasts this kind of "wild" mentality with "the healthy stock" of psychoanalysis whose aim is not the "liberation of instincts," but is rather "an instrument for the self-liberation of personality".

Ferenczi's views strongly influenced Aurél Kolnai (1900–1973), a Hungarian-born philosopher and a member of the Viennese Psychoanalytic Society who published in 1920 *Psychoanalysis and Sociology*, a book dealing with liberal socialism and anarcho-communism³⁰ (1920). Kolnai's book was a pamphlet against what Ferenczi called "anarcho-communist mentality" in psychoanalysis, represented e.g. by Paul Federn, mentioned before (1919), who praised Communism as the elimination of psychological repression.³¹ Kolnai, on the contrary, saw revolution as a mass psychological phenomenon, a manifestation of an oedipal revolt of the tribal brothers against the domination of the Father that only leads to an even more repressive domination of tyrannical leaders, "substitute fathers". It can be assumed that Ferenczi's ideas about the application of psychoanalysis to social questions could have been instrumental in shaping Kolnai's views

on social movements and mass psychology. Freud's mass psychology signified his own contribution to the debate on the psychoanalytic meaning of revolutions, a "boundless overestimation of leaders", which was as reactionary for Lukács, as troubling for Ferenczi, and as threatening for Adorno.

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Notas al final

- 1.- Draft of the paper to be presented at the 13th International Sándor Ferenczi Conference: Ferenczi in Our Time and A Renaissance of Psychoanalysis, May 3-6, 2018, Florence, Italy
- 2.- erosferenc@gmail.com
- 3.- Freud, S. (1921). Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XVIII (1920-1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works, 65-144. The English translation of *Massenpsychologie* as "group psychology" is misleading, it would be more correct to translate it as "crowd psychology" or "mass psychology". In this text I use the latter, except in quotations.
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- 5.- *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* p. 127
- 6.- Lukács, G. Freuds Massenpsychologie, Die Rote Fahne, Mai 1922.
- 7.- Ferenczi, S. (1922[1994]). Freud's 'Group psychology and the analysis of the Ego'. Progress in individual psychology. In M. Balint (Ed.), *Final contributions to the problems and methods of psycho-analysis by Sándor Ferencz*i (pp. 371–376). London: Hogart Press, 1955. Reprinted, London: Karnac, 1994
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- 13.- See: Erős, F. (2017) From War Neurosis to Holocaust Trauma. An Intellectual and Cultural History. In: S.I. M. O.N. Shoah: Intervention-Methods-Documentation. Vienna: Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies http://simon.vwi.ac.at/index.php/47-issues/2017-1/articles/155-from-war-neurosis-to-holocaust-trauma-an-intellectual-and-cultural-history.
- 14.- See Nunberg, H.- Federn, E. (1976-1981). Protokolle der Wiener Psychoanalytischen Vereinigung. Frankfurt a. M. Fischer Verlag. Vol. II. 155-160.
- 15.- Erős, F. (2012). Some social and political issues related to Ferenczi and the Hungarian school. In J. Szekacs-Weisz & T. Keve (Eds.), Ferenczi and his world: rekindling the spirit of the Budapest school (pp. 39–54). London: Karnac, 2012.
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- 22.- See Sigmund Freud/Sándor Ferenczi/Karl Abraham/Ernst Simmel/Ernest Jones, Zur Psychoanalyse der Kriegsneurosen. Diskussion gehalten auf dem V. Internationalen Psychoanalytischen Kongress in Budapest, 28. und 29. September 1918. Leipzig/Vienna 1919. Ferenczi's paper was based on an earlier paper: Ferenczi, S. (1916) [1999]. Two types of war neuroses. In: J. Borossa (Ed.), Sándor Ferenczi. Selected Writings. London: Penguin 1999. (pp.129-144)
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- 26.- See Elizabeth Ann Danto, Freud's Free Clinics. Psychoanalysis and Social Justice 1918–1938, New York 2005.
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