THE FUNCTION OF METAPSYCHOLOGY – STUDY OF AN AMERICAN CONTROVERSY, 1970s–1980s

Manuel Batsch, Essex, UK

MANUEL BATSCH is a lecturer at the University of Essex in the Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies. After completing his PhD at UCL, he pursued his research on the role of theory in the psychoanalytic clinic, publishing articles in peer-reviewed journals and book chapters such as '*Project for a Scientific Psychology*: The Impossibility of a Text' in the forthcoming volume *Wilding Analysis: From the Couch to Cultural and Political Life* (Routledge, Beyond the Couch Series). In parallel, Manuel Batsch works as an honorary psychotherapist at Camden Psychotherapy Unit and he is following the training of the Institute of Psychoanalysis.

Introduction: The Esoteric Name of Psychoanalysis

It is striking that Freud invents two neologisms simultaneously: psychoanalysis and metapsychology. In a paper originally written in French, 'Heredity and the Aetiology of the Neuroses', Freud uses the term 'psychoanalysis' for the first time:

> I owe my results to a new method of psycho-analysis, Josef Breuer's exploratory procedure; it is a little intricate, but it is irreplaceable, so fertile has it shown itself to be in throwing light upon the obscure paths of unconscious ideation. (Freud, 1896a, p. 151)

This paper was sent off to the *Revue Neurologique* on 5 February 1896. Eight days later, in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess, Freud created the word 'metapsychology': 'I am continually occupied with psychology – really metapsychology' (Masson, 1985, p. 172).

Here is 'psychoanalysis' intended for a scientific publication, 'metapsychology' used in the secrecy of a private correspondence, as if metapsychology was at first the other name, the esoteric name of psychoanalysis. The interdependence between a method – the practice of psychoanalysis – and a set of concepts – metapsychology – exists in Freud's work since their birth, but what remains unclear is the exact nature of this link. In other words, what was the function of metapsychology in Freud's psychoanalytical practice?

Referring to the problems raised by the clinic of hysteria, Freud wrote: 'You see that the remainder of the problem lies once more in the field of psychology – and, what is more, a psychology of a kind for which philosophers have done little to prepare the way for us' (Freud, 1896b, p. 219). In fact, metapsychology was for Freud this field of research in which he could problematize conventional assumptions about the psychology of his neurotic patients. He pursued this research throughout his life, in the process giving birth to different models of the functioning of psychic life.

Each evolution of Freud's metapsychology raised debates and controversies within the psychoanalytic movement. Even the very project to build a psychology of the unconscious was challenged early on, notably by Eric Fromm (1947) and Karen Horney (1937), who tried to apprehend the psyche not as an apparatus but rather through its potentiality to form social relationships. The way some analysts proposed to replace a psychological approach with a cultural one is a rich field of investigation when it comes to the vicissitudes of Freud's reception in the United States. However, it is one that I will leave aside in this paper since the controversy I am researching here is of a more epistemological kind. It stemmed from a new generation of American psychoanalysts who through the 1970s and 1980s questioned the legitimacy of Freud's metapsychological knowledge. I propose to explore the rejection of metapsychology by this generation of American analysts and suggest

that their aim was to transform psychoanalysis into a purely rational form of knowledge. I will also look at some of the reactions that these American polemics triggered, notably from respondents who pointed to the central importance of metapsychology in relation to the clinic.

The 1970s–1980s controversy over Freud's metapsychology took place in the wider context of epistemological debates on the status of human science in the United States. In his book *Working Knowledge*, Joel Isaac identifies the different epistemological models through which human sciences have sought to legitimize the production of knowledge since World War II. He describes a first, positivist phase that goes from after the war to 1962, during which human sciences aspire to reproduce the causal explanatory models of natural sciences, followed by a second, hermeneutic phase that puts at its core the understanding of subjective meanings (Isaac, 2012, pp. 9–10). This paper explores the way in which a generation of psychoanalysts, trained and for the most part born in the United States, raised in their turn the problem of legitimizing psychoanalytic knowledge, and how the core of this endeavour revolved, for them, around Freud's metapsychology. I show here that in their epistemological reflections, the actors of the metapsychological controversy reproduced the two main models described by Isaac and grouped themselves around positivist and hermeneutic views. In confronting the scientific legitimacy of metapsychology, these analysts from the New World help us retrospectively to understand the nature of this old Freudian theoretical project.

'The Maidservant of Psychiatry': Metapsychology and Its Discontents

Freud was highly suspicious of the future of psychoanalysis in the United States. In one of his last letters to Theodor Reik, about the issue of lay analysis, he wrote that for American analysts, 'analysis is nothing else but one of the maidservants of psychiatry' (Gay, 2006, p. 633). Freud felt that in the United States psychoanalysis was not considered an autonomous field of knowledge, but had to be absorbed into another mainstream practice. I think that it was such a motivation – finding a theoretical womb for psychoanalysis – that pushed a series of American analysts to attack Freud's metapsychology in the 1970s. These analysts were trying to 'understand, clarify, and put to work the psychoanalytic theory of thinking' (Holt, 2009, p. vii). In other words, they were attempting to discover new epistemological foundations for psychoanalysis. Though the results of these attempts gave birth to various models, they all started their endeavours with a complete rejection of Freud's metapsychology.

This challenge to Freud's metapsychology was in fact part of a more general turn against classical ego psychology. When the American critics questioned metapsychology, they were studying it in the form that they had received it: which was mainly through Heinz Hartmann. From 1940 to 1960, Hartmann and Anna Freud were indeed the two most influential Freudian theorists in the United States (Ellman, 2010, p. 169). Through the US publication of Anna Freud's *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* in 1946 and Hartmann's *Ego Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation* in 1958, a certain reading of Freud's structural model was spread in which knowledge of the unconscious was gained through the mediation of the preconscious and conscious aspects of the ego. A striking example of the fact that what was being evaluated was an ego psychology version of metapsychology is that these critics retained nothing of the death drive but aggression. Hence, it is important to understand the definition of metapsychology given by classical ego psychology.

Hartmann thought of psychoanalysis as a natural science that was 'moving in the direction of becoming a general theory of human behavior' (Hartmann, 1964b, p. 12). He perceived this as essential in order to bridge psychoanalysis and developmental psychology. Hartman did not raise the question of the role played by metapsychology in the evolution of

Freud's thought but treated it as a set of given concepts that he tried to make as easily digestible as possible for the science and social science of his time. As he wrote, his aim was to balance the 'rationalism of enlightenment and the irrationalism of the romantics' (Hartmann, 1964a, p. 9). Within the psychoanalytic scientific edifice, he viewed metapsychology not as metatheory but as 'theory on the highest level of abstraction' (p. 328). Hartmann's approach expressed a desire to establish a hierarchical classification of psychoanalytic propositions, which would constitute one of the epistemological obsessions of ego psychology and a foundational anchor for the critics of metapsychology.

In their groundbreaking paper, 'The Points of View and Assumptions of Metapsychology' published in 1959, David Rapaport and Merton Gill proposed such a classification with an ascending order of generalization: empirical propositions, general psychoanalytic propositions and metapsychological propositions.[1] Freud had defined a metapsychological presentation as a description of a psychical process 'in its dynamic, topographical and economic aspects' (Freud, 1915c, p. 181). For Rapaport and Gill, metapsychological propositions include the dynamic point of view, the economic point of view, the structural point of view, and additionally the genetic point of view and the adaptive point of view.

With this paper, Rapaport and Gill signed a form of manifesto for an ego psychological understanding of metapsychology, and this manifesto had two main consequences. First, they rejected the topographical point of view in favour of the structural point of view. Second, they added genetic and adaptive dimensions in order to redefine metapsychology within the framework of psychoanalysis understood as a natural science. It is precisely the recognition that such an attempt would lead to a dead end, and that 'Freudian natural-science metapsychology is a serious obstacle to the development of psychoanalysis' (Gill, 1988, p. 46), that would eventually push Gill to change his view and to reframe metapsychology within 'a self-contained hermeneutic' model of psychoanalysis.

Another attempt to classify psychoanalytic propositions was made by Robert Waelder in his 1962 paper, 'Psychoanalysis, Scientific Method, and Philosophy'. Waelder distinguished six degrees of relevance in Freud's doctrine, from the most important to the less important: the level of observation, the level of clinical interpretation, the level of clinical generalizations, the level of clinical theory, the level of metapsychology and finally the level of Freud's philosophy. It is worth noting that unconscious mental processes are classified by Waelder not at the level of metapsychology but at the level of clinical observation.

The way these analysts, oriented towards ego psychology, established a hierarchy of Freud's corpus in fact prepared the ground for the general attack on metapsychology, because with such classifications they transmitted two types of prejudice. The first consisted in approaching Freud ahistorically, as if Freud's concepts had appeared in one go as a ready-made organized system. A closer chronological reading of Freud shows that his theory was a constant work in progress and, moreover, that in this work in progress metapsychology played a very particular role. In fact, it could be argued that metapsychology does not aim to be a coherent system but a space of creativity that at times follows and at times guides the clinical work.

The second prejudice was to force on Freud's theory a type of hierarchy borrowed from natural science. In this hierarchy, the main authors from ego psychology proposed that metapsychology was the most speculative part of Freud's theory. Many analysts would cling

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1. Like Hartmann, Rapaport attempted to make psychoanalysis a general psychology. Through his work at the Menninger Foundation, he mentored many of the researchers like George Klein, Roy Schafer, Merton M. Gill and Robert R. Holt who eventually rebelled against Freud's metapsychology.

to this definition in their criticisms. Thus, Frank (1979) understood metapsychology as the metatheory of psychoanalysis and Arlow defined it as 'a priori assumptions beyond hypotheses derivable within the clinical setting' (Arlow, 1975, p. 517). Freud, however, never presented such a hierarchical edifice of knowledge, but rather developed his own peculiar epistemological framework. According to Vannina Micheli-Rechtman, even 'more than the unconscious in itself, the radical novelty was in Freud's eyes the whole intellectual endeavour that led to this discovery' (Micheli-Rechtman, 2010, p. 29, my translation).

In *The Resistances to Psycho-Analysis* (Freud, 1925[1924]a), Freud returned to the motives behind the hostility triggered towards psychoanalysis, which he had touched on earlier in *A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis* (1917b). He stressed the peculiarity of the psychoanalytic epistemological framework, which succumbs completely neither to the mechanistic approach of the natural scientist, nor to the speculative one of the philosopher. It maintains a difficult middle position between perception and speculation, between clinical fact and philosophical concept. Freud predicted that psychoanalysis would derive

> nothing but disadvantages from its middle position between medicine and philosophy. Doctors regard it as a speculative system and refuse to believe that, like every other natural science, it is based on a patient and tireless elaboration of facts from the world of perception; philosophers, measuring it by the standard of their own artificially constructed systems, find that it starts from impossible premises and reproach it because its most general concepts (which are only now in process of evolution) lack clarity and precision. (Freud, 1925[1924]a, p. 217)

One other important premise for the critics of metapsychology can be traced to Lawrence Kubie's article 'The Fallacious Use of Quantitative Concepts in Dynamic Psychology'. In this paper published in 1947, Kubie argued that Freud's economic principle holds a special fascination due to its pseudo-scientific aspect. But because the quantitative changes of individual energy components are impossible to measure in a clinical observation, the use of economic quantitative terms was, according to Kubie, 'the weakest element in all current theories of psychological causation' (Kubie, 1947, p. 518).

In Kubie's article the word 'metapsychology' never appears. However, two elements in it will have a strong influence on what I identify as the two main currents of the American critique of Freudian epistemology. The first will be developed through the positivist criticism of metapsychology: it is Kubie's attack on the psychic energy model. Indeed, most of the criticism will be addressed to the economic point of view, and to the idea that Freud's concern with psychic energy is a scientific anachronism. Kubie argued that Freud's economic metaphor was a convenient way of covering over the difficulties of psychodynamic causation, while evading the task of finding methods to quantify such processes. Kubie's refusal to attribute any metaphorical possibilities to Freud's texts can appear somewhat naive. Yet, this demand for measurable parameters will be at the centre of the positivist critique. In his introduction to a new translation of Freud's metapsychological papers, Mark Cousins rightly linked this demand with the development of quantitative data in psychological research (Cousins, 2005).

The second element will be at the core of the hermeneutic critique: it is the way Kubie distinguishes between description and explanation in science. Kubie's thesis is that the use of non-measurable quantitative concepts to explain psychological phenomena is fallacious because it rests on the delusion that 'we have explained a phenomenon which we have merely described in metaphors' (Kubie, 1947, p. 508).

This distinction between explanatory and descriptive scientific methods is rooted in the 'dispute on method' (*Methodenstreit*) that took place at the end of the nineteenth century in

German-speaking universities. The debate, which started amongst economists, erupted into the broader field of academic knowledge with the publication in 1883 of Wilhelm Dilthey's *Introduction to the Human Sciences*. Dilthey's aim was to give human sciences an epistemological status that would be both as scientific as the natural sciences and independent of them. This led to an epistemic split which, as noticed by De Robertis, is still unresolved more than 150 years later (De Robertis, 2001, p. 134).

On the one side, we have a form of knowledge developed by natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*), with a nomothetic approach, which explains (*erklären*) its objects from the outside by establishing universal laws out of experimental facts using 'causal' categories. On the other side stands a form of knowledge developed by human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*]) with an idiographic approach, which attempts to understand (*verstehen*) its objects from the inside, describing their singularities using the categories of 'aim' and 'meaning'. I will show how the hermeneutic critics – particularly via the distinction between the 'how-question' and 'why-question' (Klein, 1973; Schafer 1975) – will reopen the 'dispute on method' at the heart of Freud's metapsychology by identifying it as a relic of Freud's scientism and proposing to replace this explanatory discourse with a descriptive one. Noticeably, Heinz Kohut in *The Restoration of the Self* (1977) developed a similar view: he accepted any innovations when it came to descriptive theory but believed that a crisis of the explanatory theory had arrived.

To summarize, the two premises shared by classical ego psychologists were:

1. Psychoanalysis is a natural science.
2. It is necessary to 'synchronize' Freud's work in order to remove speculation from theory.

The idea, put forward notably by Hartmann, that psychoanalysis is composed of two theories – a clinical and a speculative one – would provide a rock to stand on for the critics of metapsychology.

Both the proponents of positivism and those of hermeneutics shared a reading of metapsychology as a model that offers mechanistic explanations. The difference between them was that the upholders of hermeneutics aimed to refute metapsychology as non-analytic and to replace it by another fundamental theory, while the supporters of positivism wanted to translate the metapsychological hypothesis into one that could be empirically testable. This distinction matches the one made by Modell who, in his 1981 article 'Does Metapsychology Still Exist?', distinguished the attacks against metapsychology that attempt to modify it because it is no longer congruent with observation (the positivist view) from those that understand it as a completely irrelevant discourse (the hermeneutic view). These two lines of thought somehow confirm Freud's fear about the future of psychoanalysis in the United States, as psychoanalysis finds itself threatened with being assimilated into psychology on the one side and into biology on the other.

In what follows, I will first consider in more detail the views of three of the most representative analysts who critiqued Freud's metapsychology from a hermeneutic angle: George S. Klein, Roy Schafer and Merton M. Gill. Afterwards, I will turn to the arguments of the positivists.

The Hermeneutic Point of View: A Return to Phenomenology?
George Klein

In the story of this controversy, the first unambiguous call for the rejection of metapsychology was made by George Klein in 1973 with the publication of 'Is Psychoanalysis Relevant?'. Klein distinguished two theories in Freud: two lines of

development that 'express different conceptions of what psychoanalysis is and ought to be' and whose 'more profound point of distinction is that they derive from two different philosophies of inquiry and explanation' (Klein, 1973, pp. 9–10). One theory rests on clinical explanation and its aim is the reading of intentionality. It tries to decipher the meaning of 'behavior, experience, testimony […] as jointly exemplifying directive "tensions", avowed, disavowed, repressed, defended' (p. 10).

The second side of psychoanalytic theory is metapsychology, which Klein perceived as an approach in which 'the terms of explanation have nothing to do with the subject's own vantage point; it is the person *observed as a physical process* that is the main objective' (p. 12). Klein argued that these two lines are incompatible because the former describes the intentionality of the subject, whereas the latter rejects the very notion of a psychological subject. The coexistence of these two paradigms leads, therefore, to a form of confusion that blurs the distinction between mechanistic drive and subjective motivation.[2]

According to Klein, it is the clinical orientation towards explanation that is most characteristic of psychoanalysis, because it informs an exchange in which the analyst searches for a depth intentionality in the patient's experience, which they aim to communicate to the patient through meaningful interpretations. Klein proposed that 'to get to the core assumptions of clinical psychoanalysis […] surgery is necessary – a theorectomy', that would separate clinical from metapsychological notions, 'so as to free the irreplaceable core concepts of clinical psychoanalytic theory' (p. 9).

Stripped of its mechanistic line of explanation, Klein described psychoanalytic theory more as a humanistic discipline than a natural science, and he compared the role of the analyst to 'the historian's obligation of narrative construction' or 'the playwright's responsibility for depicting a logic of motivation' (p. 13). In his 1976 paper, 'Freud's Two Theories of Sexuality, Psychology versus Metapsychology', Klein further developed this logic of motivation as a replacement for metapsychology. He proposed that motivations are the results of experiences perceived by a person during the course of their development. This theory of motivation is in fact articulated through the developmental psychological concepts of experience and behaviour in order to integrate psychoanalysis into psychology. In Klein's model, psychoanalysis would be a part of psychology that provides an adequate language for the description of the subject's depth intentionality.

Throughout his work, George Klein was looking for a conception of intentionality that could be transcribed into conscious modes of thought. From this angle, a neurotic symptom is perceived as a meaningful solution found by the subject to face the demand raised by several conflictual intentional ideas. These conflictual ideas belong to the same category of representations produced by the same conscious mode of thinking. Klein never considered intentional contents that would not be subjugated to consciousness. He put forward a vision of the psychological subject as a self-present subject: a subject that could ideally think itself in its entirety.

More than a cure, the setting for the classical psychoanalytic treatment becomes a means for human observation, a sort of psychological laboratory. Consequently, one understands George Klein's rejection of Freud's metapsychology, since metapsychology puts forward a form of intentionality that resists being transcribed into the language of

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2. In *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (1970[1965]), Paul Ricoeur likewise distinguished two levels of discourse in Freud's theory: on the one side, a metapsychological explanatory level that rests on conflictual forces and a circulation of energy, and on the other, an interpretative level that rests on the deciphering of latent meanings. Unlike many analysts defending a hermeneutic perspective, Ricoeur justified the duality in Freud's theory and argued that this correlation between forces and meaning is a consequence of the singularity of the objects studied by psychoanalysis (Ricoeur, 1970[1965], p. 75).

consciousness and which deconstructs the notion of a psychological subject. Moreover, far from revealing to the analysand the depth of their intentionality, or the most intimate secrets of their being, Freud's metapsychology makes possible a cure that constructs a form of radical otherness in the self. Clinically, it creates a form of intimacy that remains irreducible to consciousness or to the ego.

Instead of Freud's dynamic unconscious, Klein proposed a sort of phenomenological unconscious made of non-accepted or even non-socialized experiences. One of the most striking aspects of this shift is the replacement of sexuality by sensuality; thus he speaks of 'the theory of infantile sensuality' (1973, p. 4). The sexual energy of the drive is replaced by the experience of sensuality, whose source is not a pressing and puzzling demand, but a quest for an adaptive goal with a clear meaning.

Roy Schafer

In 1976, Roy Schafer presented himself as being in the forefront of 'a new critical movement concerned with the logic, language, implications and applications of Freudian psychoanalysis' (Schafer, 1976, p. x). Indeed, the work of Schafer appears to be one of the most original amongst the American critics of metapsychology. This is probably due to the fact that his views are strongly influenced by analytical philosophy, which unlike continental philosophy has for the most part not directly engaged with psychoanalysis, although there are of course some important exceptions. A main characteristic of analytical philosophy is to investigate the way in which reality is formulated linguistically (Laugier & Plaud, 2011, p. 13). Schafer's critique of metapsychology was therefore addressed at the level of its language, which fails to deal with meanings or the singularity of subjective experience. Schafer's verdict is irrevocable: 'It is time to stop using the mixed physicochemical and biological language of Freudian metapsychology' (Schafer, 1975, p. 41).

Following Wittgenstein, Schafer understood the notion of language as 'a set of rules for saying things of the sort that constitute or communicate a version of reality or a world' (1975, p. 42). Schafer wanted to replace metapsychology by another language: first, because in his view it is not conceptually rigorous and systematic enough, and, second, because its language borrowed from natural science eliminates the subject. Schafer thought that the subject excluded by the scientific aspect of metapsychology returns through the anthropomorphic aspect of its language. Moreover, this anthropomorphic language takes an infantile form and the language of metapsychology seems to reproduce the archaic body of infancy: 'notions of internal, external, boundaries, thresholds, damming up and discharging: all these and many others may be viewed as psychosexual body language inappropriately elevated to the status of theoretical terms' (p. 42).

This last criticism had been already developed by Home who accused Freud's metapsychology of having applied metaphors to meaning, and of understanding those metaphors literally: metapsychology 'reifies the concept of mind and elaborates a scientific type theory in terms of causes. To reify is to deify, for reification creates the ideal immortal object by the simple process of definition, just as personification in the era of humanism created the immortal gods' (Home, 1966, p. 47).

This suppression of the subject puts metapsychology in contradiction with what Schafer understood as the essence of psychoanalysis: to make the subject the agent of its actions. On that aspect, Gilbert Diatkine (1985, p. 1219) pointed out the influence of Sartre on the way Schafer defined the aim of the analytical cure. In order for psychoanalysis to rediscover what Schafer understood as its true nature, an alternative language is necessary. From 1972 onwards, with his paper 'Internalization: Process or Fantasy' and through his book published in 1976, *A New Language for Psychoanalysis*, Roy Schafer would literally devise this new language that he named 'action language'.

To create this alternative language, Schafer used ideas from the main philosophical currents of the twentieth century. His key influence is to be found in the part of analytic philosophy called philosophy of mind inaugurated by Wittgenstein's later writings, but he also took concepts from existentialism – notably his use of Sartre's concept of 'bad faith' (Schafer, 1976, p. 235) – and phenomenology. Action language is defined as an attempt to stress the transformative significance of psychoanalytic interpretation through

> its bringing home to the analysand the extent to which, and the terms in which, he has been the author of his own life, unconsciously and preconsciously as well as consciously, and the extent to which and the terms in which he has been disclaiming this activity. (Schafer, 1975, p. 44)

Hence, action language is developed as a feature of psychoanalysis understood as a practice of interpretation: a hermeneutic language to replace Freud's metapsychological language. The fundamental rule of the action language is to regard all psychological processes, events, phenomena or behaviour as actions. The only human phenomena that are not classified as actions by Schafer are bodily changes because, according to him, 'they are devoid of symbolic content' (Schafer, 1973, p. 178).

Because, in his view, the psychoanalytic cure dealt only with actions, to speak of mental processes one should replace the use of nouns and adjectives by active verbs and adverbs. Schafer banished the use of the passive form from his action language. Moreover, he recommended that analysts no longer refer to location, movement or direction and never mention quantity. The topographical, dynamic and energetic points of view were therefore eliminated. In the same way, 'we shall not speak of internalization except in the sense of a person's imagining his incorporating something' (Schafer, 1975, p. 45). The main psychodynamic concepts such as drive, impulse or psychic energy were likewise excluded from action language and the 'id' is emptied of all content and limited to an adverbial usage (p. 47). Similarly, the systems conscious, preconscious and unconscious were replaced by three descriptive 'modes of actions'. Whether a psychological process is conscious or unconscious becomes a secondary matter.

Many articles have been written to refute Schafer's proposals (Wurmser, 1977; Barratt, 1978; Meissner, 1979; Anscombe, 1981; Oppenheimer, 1984; Diatkine, 1985). From these criticisms I have extracted four points that I find the most relevant for my study:

1. Action language suppresses the difference between doing and saying.
2. In Schafer's view, the aim of psychoanalysis is reduced to making the subject responsible for his actions.
3. His idea of creating a sort of Orwellian Newspeak devoid of any unconscious phantasy that would avoid any misunderstanding seems an illusion. Moreover, such a language could be experienced as persecutory by the analysand.
4. The unconscious becomes secondary as a qualifier of mental processes. From this angle, Schafer's action language appears to be a pre-psychoanalytic formulation.

At stake in the effort to replace Freud's metapsychology by 'action language' is an attempt to reintroduce a subjectivity in which meanings are transparent and immediately available to consciousness. As with George Klein, who replaced the drive theory with a phenomenology of motivations, I understand Schafer's work as an attempt to replace a psychology of the unconscious with a phenomenology of action.

Merton Gill

The importance of Gill's criticism comes from his theoretical shift: he moved from being Hartmann's close colleague – and redefining an ego psychology reading of metapsychological points of view in collaboration with Rappaport (Rapaport & Gill, 1959) – to supporting George Klein's notion that 'metapsychology is irrelevant to psychoanalysis' (Gill, 1975). He actually carried Klein's argument one step further by stating that metapsychology is not psychology at all but provides 'explanations which are only pseudoscientific apings of natural science', and that psychoanalysis, on the other hand, 'needs to develop in its own terms as a self-contained hermeneutic science' to which the usual canons of empirical research could be applied (Gill, 1988, p. 46).

Gill stood up against the idea that renouncing metapsychology would be an 'abandonment of the fact that a human being is a biological organism as well as a person', because according to him, 'psychoanalysis deals with biology as it is psychologically experienced, not in somatic terms' (p. 46). Gill set out with great clarity the premises and the reasoning at work in the hermeneutic assault on metapsychology. This rests on the argument that the object of psychoanalysis would not be the biological reality of the mind but the way this biological reality is subjectively experienced. Psychoanalytic theory would then be a descriptive and interpretative discourse of these subjective experiences.

Metapsychology is thus reduced to being an unnecessary explanatory discourse. The supporters of the hermeneutic view never consider a reading of metapsychology as a more abstract way to describe the psyche in the context of the analytical encounter itself. The unconscious is identified in a limited way as the intentional contents expelled from consciousness. In other words, they refuse Freud's dynamic unconscious and so ignore the problem raised by the description of intentional ideas that cannot be apprehended by consciousness. Moreover, in this hermeneutic model of psychoanalysis, every subjective experience can be transcribed into empirical variables. Subjective experiences manifest themselves in the purity of self-presence to consciousness, and the cure aims to describe this phenomenology of intentionality so that the subject would regain a form of control over it.

The Positivist Point of View: Lost in Translation?

The positivist criticism of metapsychology originated from a different line of reasoning. Unlike the supporters of a hermeneutic epistemological status for psychoanalysis, the positivist point of view retained the idea of metapsychology as a set of 'theoretical assumptions on which a psychoanalytic system could be founded'. The positivist attacks against Freud's metapsychology were directed rather against its speculative aspect, and the project became one of linking metapsychology with a method whose scientific nature would be guaranteed by empiricism and the Popperian principle of falsifiability. Hence, the main endeavour of the positivists was to find correlations between metapsychological concepts and testable hypotheses: in other words, an exercise of translation. This translation follows two steps. The first is to identify what the observable phenomena in psychoanalysis are; the second consists in generalizing this data into a scientific theory.

I distinguish two broad trends amongst positivist critics. The first proposes a new scientific theory to generalize the observable data. This view is exemplified in the work of Emmanuel Peterfreund. The second conserves metapsychology as a generalizing theory with the condition that it follows the rules of empiricism: a metapsychology that has given up speculation and introspection. I will examine this second approach through Charles Brenner.

Emmanuel Peterfreund

Emmanuel Peterfreund believed that the aim of psychoanalytic research was to establish generalizations about the phenomena under observation. Unconscious phenomena are not observable but 'patients have experiences – sensations, feelings, images, fantasies, thoughts,

and so on – which can be thought of as the raw data of psycho-analysis, the phenomena of observation' (Peterfreund, 1975, p. 534). Peterfreund proposed that in 'all sciences there are high-level theories which use terms that are quite abstract and remote from observable phenomena' (p. 535) and he defined metapsychology as the language in which the high-level, abstract psychoanalytic theory is expressed.

Peterfreund argued that Freud's metapsychology was based on a pre-Freudian view of man that depended on two fundamental untenable assumptions: first, the idea that the mind is separate from the body, and second, that the mind is unique to humans. This Cartesian, pre-Darwinian outlook makes Freud's metapsychology unacceptable as a paradigm. Hence, Peterfreund argues for a change of paradigm in order to 'use the most advanced creations of the human mind to attempt to explain the mind itself', and as a new paradigm, he proposed: 'information processing and a systems model which is consistent with neurophysiology' (p. 547). Peterfreund understood psychological experience as the input and feedback of information, and psychical conflicts were to be conceptualized using 'a complex hierarchically arranged, branching tree of contingent situations' (p. 539). Rather than the expression of a psychic conflict, neurosis would be a mistake in the programming of the mind. In Peterfreund's information theory model, the dynamic unconscious has literally disappeared and has been replaced by a descriptive unconscious that operates more like a computer – a sort of program that reprogrammes information.

Charles Brenner

At first glance, Brenner offered a trenchant criticism of the hermeneutic reading of metapsychology. He explained that the separation between a concrete level of psychoanalytic theory that is supported by clinical data and an abstract, unproved and unprovable level rested on a misconception of knowledge formation, since there is no such thing as a neutral observation: in 'every branch of science even the simplest observations involve ideas of the highest order of abstraction' (Brenner, 1980, p. 200). Brenner was opposed to the view that psychoanalysis is a science of meaning, and argued that it was a branch of natural science since 'mental phenomena are an aspect of brain functioning, it follows that psychology and psychoanalysis are necessarily a branch of biology' (p. 206).

Brenner explained that the data of every branch of science are unique, but that they all share a common endeavour to find cause-and-effect relationships with respect to their data: 'Science is, in any case, adjectival, not nominal. It is not what one observes that defines science: it is the attitude one brings to one's observations and how one deals with them' (p. 206). Thus, if indeed psychoanalysis deals with meanings as data, it would nevertheless be fallacious to conclude that it is a science of meanings. Brenner's epistemological subtlety was to point out that the types of meanings gathered by the psychoanalytic encounter constituted a new category of data that was unknown before Freud. Freud's discovery of free association as 'the fundamental rule of psychoanalysis' (Freud, 1911–1915[1914], p. 107) would represent the discovery of a technique that generated a new category of objects: wishes, fears, fantasies, dreams, neurotic symptoms, and associative material expressed in language and gestures. In Brenner's view, the clinic becomes a technique, a sort of laboratory for discovering the human psyche.

According to Brenner, these new objects of knowledge should be studied through the method that is shared by all natural sciences: observation, formulation of generalizations and the most rigorous testing of these hypothetical generalizations. In this epistemological model, Brenner understood Freud's metapsychology as synonymous with 'psychoanalytic psychology': a psychology of unconscious mental processes. As long as this 'psychoanalytic psychology' has available data of observation, Brenner thought that metapsychology could be used as a generalizing theory.

I have proposed that the positivist criticism was always a form of translation. In Brenner's case it would be a kind of tautological translation: *metapsychology* is translated by *metapsychology*. However, from Freud's to Brenner's metapsychology there is an obvious loss in translation, since Brenner completely disregarded the idea that introspection, or any form of speculation, could be a research method in psychoanalysis. Brenner acknowledged the novelty of free association as a method of observation, but never considered that metapsychology could be the manifestation of this method of free association *in the construction of a theory*: that is, he refused to see any links between free association and metapsychology.

Brenner's refusal to give any role to introspection in metapsychology and his 'sacralization' of clinical data pushed him to refocus the theory around the expression of the patient's conflicts. In his introduction to *Psychoanalysis: The Science of Mental Conflict* – a series of essays in honour of Charles Brenner – Arnold D. Richards notices that this 'sensitivity to the experiential specificity of the analysand's conflicting wishes' led Brenner to 'adopt a position of nominal agreement' with the stance of hermeneuticists like Klein and Schafer (Richards, 1986, p. 9). Richards points out the 'essential difference', though: that 'Brenner arrives at his position using the language and conceptual framework of classical analysis', whereas Klein and Schafer 'feel they can articulate the singularity of the individual's conflicts and wishes […] with a new vocabulary and a new conceptual framework' (p. 9).

'The Witch Metapsychology': A Third Perspective on the Debate

In what follows, I want to return to Freud's work in order to highlight aspects of the metapsychology that were either overlooked, misperceived or rejected in this first wave of American critical debates in the 1970s–1980s, before finishing with a brief view of some of the counterstatements they provoked. At the beginning of *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes*, Freud wrote a kind of epistemological manifesto that I find especially relevant in this discussion, since, on the one hand, it anticipates Brenner's critique of a neutral observation of meanings, but on the other hand, it also points towards a theory of knowledge that would take introspection into account:

> Even at the stage of description it is not possible to avoid applying certain abstract ideas to the material in hand, ideas derived from somewhere or other but certainly not from observations alone. Such ideas – which will later become the basic concepts of the science – are still more indispensable as the material is further worked over. They must at first necessarily possess some degree of indefiniteness; there can be no question of any clear delimitation of their content. So long as they remain in this condition, we come to an understanding about their meaning by making repeated references to the material of observation from which they appear to have been derived, but upon which, in fact, they have been imposed. (Freud, 1915a, p. 117)

Freud writes that metapsychological ideas are not derived from 'observations alone' but from 'somewhere or other'. What could this 'somewhere or other' be? Freud would give an answer to this in one of the last psychoanalytic texts to be published in his lifetime: 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable' (1937). In this text that denotes a certain pessimism, Freud questioned the therapeutic efficacy of the analytical cure. In the third section, he explained that when it comes to the treatment of severe cases of illness, the decisive factor in achieving any success is a taming of the drives. 'If we are asked by what methods and means this result is achieved,' wrote Freud, 'it is not easy to find an answer. We can only say: "So muss denn

doch die Hexe dran!" – the Witch Meta-psychology. Without metapsychological speculation and theorizing – I had almost said "phantasying" – we shall not get another step forward' (Freud, 1937, p. 225).

The implication follows that, when clinical work reaches its limits, the only way to progress is through metapsychology, even if this progression is fraught with pitfalls, for 'what our Witch reveals is neither very clear nor very detailed' (p. 225). Hence, the 'somewhere or other' from which metapsychological ideas are derived is speculation, theorizing and even phantasying. The hypotheses provided by metapsychology form a kind of mythology borne out of Freud's theoretical speculations, from Freud's phantasies.

Freud had already articulated this idea in an exchange of letters with Albert Einstein published under the title *Why War?*: 'It may perhaps seem to you as though our theories are a kind of mythology and, in the present case, not even an agreeable one. But does not every science come in the end to a kind of mythology like this? Cannot the same be said today of your own Physics?' (Freud, 1933, p. 211). Paul-Laurent Assoun has noticed how, in Freud's metapsychological texts, the shifts from Oedipus to Narcissus and then to Thanatos involve a growing use of 'phantasying' (Assoun, 2009, p. 81). One of the main peculiarities of Freud's model consists in the epistemological value of such an act of 'phantasying' at the core of a theory of the human psyche.

To this point we can add a further observation, which has to do with the way dimensions of 'theatricality' and metaphor, embedded in the language of Freud's metapsychological works, were ironed out of the texts on which the American debate based itself. Unlike the founders of ego psychology, the analysts who undertook the critique of Freud's metapsychology trained in America and read Freud primarily in English through James Strachey's translations in the *Standard Edition*. According to Riccardo Steiner, these had been encouraged in the direction of 'scientificity', partly under the influence of Ernest Jones, in order to add medical credibility to psychoanalysis. Jones presented Freud as a 'Darwin of the mind, who has replaced the metaphysical or poetical phrases of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, Shaw, by a scientific and biological one' (Steiner, 1987, p. 53). Reading Strachey's translation, one therefore encounters a Freud coloured with a positivist light.

Freud's German metapsychology did in fact contain many terms inspired by a Greek or a Latin terminology.[3] Therefore the metapsychological texts seem more in accord with the premises guiding the *Standard Edition* than other parts of Freud's work. However, I would argue that Freud is here using the language of science in a *metaphorical* way. In giving an account of unconscious processes, scientific language functions like a scenography. As Friedman and Alexander put it, Freud 'both preserves and overthrows the language of naturalistic sciences' (Friedman & Alexander, 1983, p. 304). This metaphorical aspect is more evident in German, and to explain this point it is useful to come back to Freud's 1915 definition of metapsychology:

> I propose that when we have succeeded in describing a psychical process in its dynamic, topographical and economic aspects, we should speak of it as a *metapsychological* presentation. (Freud, 1915c, p. 181)</EXT>

In the *Gesammelte Werke*, Freud writes:

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3. In a non-exhaustive list that comes from the one established by Emmet Wilson (1987, p. 304), one finds in these works such non-Germanic words as Objekt, Libido, Erogenität, Introversion, Mechanismus, Apparat, Quantität, Reaktionsbildung, Affektstörung, Niveau, Differenz, Funktion, Tendenz, Ideal, Genese, Faktor, Basis, Impulse.

> Ich schlage vor, daß es eine metapsychologische Darstellung genannt werden
> soll, wenn es uns gelingt, einen psychischen Vorgang nach seinen dynamischen,
> topischen und ökonomischen Beziehungen zu beschreiben. (Freud, 1991[1915],
> p. 281)

Strachey translated 'eine metapsychologische Darstellung' as 'a metapsychological presentation'. Usually Strachey uses the word 'presentation' to translate 'Vorstellung' and 'Darstellung' for 'account' or 'representation'. But as Joyce Crick explains in the introduction of her translation of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung* mean representation in quite different senses: *Vorstellung* indicates the image or the idea of an act of thought, whereas *Darstellung* 'consists of disguises, substitutions, and stand-ins' for the thought (Freud, 1999, p. xlv). In his translation of *The Unconscious* for *The New Penguin Freud*, Graham Frankland (2005) renders the same phrase as 'a metapsychological account'. My hypothesis is that Strachey chose to translate *Darstellung* as 'presentation' at this point rather than 'representation' in order to reinforce the idea that the mechanistic language used by Freud was not metaphorical. I read *Darstellung* as an indication that metapsychology is a more deviant form of representation.

Darstellung is a word for which many translations have been proposed. 'Presentification' was coined by Monique David-Ménard (1989[1983]) to describe how an unconscious idea is performed through a hysterical symptom. Riccardo Steiner mentions that Ernest Jones had proposed to translate *Darstellung* with 'dramatisation' (Steiner, 1987, p. 79). Botella and Botella chose to use 'figurability' as a translation of *Darstellbarkeit* in order to emphasize that the psychic work of representability is similar to a process of translation: a process 'of "clarifying", and of sending out on reconnaissance to explore an unknown terrain' (Botella & Botella, 2005[2001], p. 2).

All these translations give an idea of *Darstellung* as a theatrical representation of thought.[4] In Chapter 7 of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud takes over Fechner's hypothesis that '*the scene of action of dreams is different from that of waking ideational life*' (Freud, 1942[1900], p. 536) and he explains that it is such a scene of the dream that reveals the hallucinatory mode of functioning of unconscious processes. When Freud describes how an unconscious memory attracts thoughts onto this hallucinatory stage, it is the term *Darstellung* that he uses.

Thoughts connected with an unconscious memory are drawn into a mode of dramatization characteristic of the unconscious; similarly, in order to theorize the unconscious, I am proposing that Freud's metapsychology 'dramatizes' the language of science. The term *Darstellung* is, at any rate, central to the definition of metapsychology, and its translation into 'presentation' prepared the American critics of the 1970s for a too literal reception of the texts and contributed to their sense that metapsychology was based on anachronistic scientific knowledge that had to be replaced by more contemporary theories.

The Supporters of Metapsychology: 'Psycho-analysis farà da se'

In a letter to Jung dated 30 November 1911, Freud protested against the idea that psychoanalysis should be subordinate to another discipline: 'What troubles me most is that Fräulein Spielrein wants to subordinate the psychological material to *biological*

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4. It is also worth noticing that *Darsteller* means 'actor'. When in a hysterical symptom or in a dream, an unconscious thought is represented – or one could say 'performed' – I believe Freud used *Darstellung* to stress the 'theatricality' of this representation.

considerations; this dependency is no more acceptable than a dependency on philosophy, physiology, or brain anatomy. ΨA *farà da se*' (McGuire, 1974, p. 469). There have been diverse responses to the American criticisms; however, it seems to me that they all support the right of psychoanalysis to have its own epistemological structure and not to become subordinate either to a general psychology or to biology. This is well embodied by Arnold Modell's refusal to abandon a metapsychological approach because 'psychoanalysis cannot be fitted into ready made epistemology' (Modell, 1981, p. 400).

In a similar fashion, Leon Wurmser conceived of psychoanalysis as an autonomous field of knowledge of symbolic forms that could be reduced neither to the natural sciences nor to the humanities: 'Psychoanalysis is a symbolic form of theoretical knowledge *sui generis* and *sui iuris*: of independent origins, nature, lawfulness, criteria of validity, and structure of theory' (Wurmser, 1977, p. 495). Moreover, he supported the idea of metapsychology as a metaphor. Many articles have stressed the central place of metaphor in clinical work: Arlow (1969), Caruth and Ekstein (1966), Lewin (1970), Sharpe (1940), Voth (1970), to name a few. Wurmser's originality was to study the place of metaphor from an epistemological viewpoint, focusing on the role it played in the formation and formulation of psychoanalytic theory. From this angle, his work provided a direct answer to Schafer, who through his action language had argued for 'an ametaphorical theory' (Schafer, 1975, p. 49).

Wurmser showed how Schafer's theoretical construct was itself not free of metaphors: 'They may be paler, but they remain metaphors' (Wurmser, 1977, p. 477). Wurmser adopted a Kantian perspective to argue that metaphors are indispensable for scientific generativity. A specificity of psychoanalytic metaphor would be their anthropomorphic dimension since the 'lawfulness of mental phenomena is by definition of "human form"' (p. 494). Hence Freud's energetic point of view that 'has become the bugaboo of critics of metapsychology' is, in Wurmser's opinion, made of 'perfectly acceptable metaphorical concepts, not only because they resemble so closely similar laws of relations in physics' but also 'because the very physical notions of "energy" and "quantity" are themselves of anthropomorphic origin' (p. 487). In Wurmser's epistemological model, a metapsychology made of metaphors operates like mathematics for modern physics: its role would be to formalize and to integrate knowledge about our inner life.

Joseph Sandler's article, 'Reflections on Some Relations Between Psychoanalytic Concepts and Psychoanalytic Practice', is partly an answer to George Klein's attack on metapsychology. In this paper, Sandler stood up for the specificity of psychoanalytic practice based on metapsychology, but he nevertheless pointed to three concepts where 'distance between theory on the one hand and clinical practice and experience on the other is particularly wide' (Sandler, 1983, p. 42):

1. Drives and motives: According to Sandler, not '*all unconscious wishes derive from the instinctual drives.*' (p. 42)
2. Conflict: Sandler takes over the criticism about the anthropomorphic aspect of metapsychology.
3. Object relationship and transference.</NL>

Later on, Sandler developed an idea that seems crucial, according to which each analyst has their own unconscious metapsychology: even 'those who disdain explicit and formal theorizing develop, of necessity, their own personal (and to some extent idiosyncratic) inner sets of theories. They may be unaware of the existence of such theories or frame of reference, or be unable to verbalize them. […] Even the "purest" clinician has *her* theories about her patients' (Sandler *et al.*, 1997, p. 5, n.2).

Amongst the supporters of metapsychology, I think it is crucial to mention the view of André Green. As Riccardo Steiner writes, Green sometimes evokes

> a solitary, worried biblical prophet, warrior, and defender of Freud's work as he understands it, not so much to stick dogmatically to it, but to remind everybody, particularly at this moment in history, of the danger of forgetting the richness and still unsurpassed complexity of Freud's inspirational model. (Steiner, 2000, p. 5)</EXT>

Green reacted in the most radical way against what he perceived as the reduction of psychoanalytic theory. In addition, through Green, one can perceive how the metapsychological controversy triggered a series of debates in psychoanalytic research, including on the relevance of extra-clinical observation.

According to Green, the central debate in psychoanalytic research is metapsychology versus empirical research. Green attacks the idea that a theory of the unconscious could rest on empirical foundations: 'Observation cannot tell us anything about intrapsychic processes that truly characterize the subject's experience. Objectivism cannot be changed into subjectivism without denying what it wants to replace' (Green, 2000, p. 60). He argues that many critics of Freud's metapsychology fail to perceive the fundamental change between Freud's *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) and the breakthrough of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900–1). The dream book inaugurated Freud's metapsychological approach to thinking through psychic problems because the dream became a paradigm for psychoanalytic investigation (Green, 1979). The so-called scientific method seems to Green 'very unscientific because of its irrelevance to the object of psychoanalysis' (Green, 2000, p. 66). For that reason: 'One must admit that a Shakespearean quotation can be more enlightening for a psychoanalyst than a ton of scientific literature!' (Green, 2001, p. 19).

The interesting question is not so much whether Freud's metapsychological speculations should be proved or disproved, but rather 'what the connection is between his speculations […] and the central object of the discipline he created. What are the underlying epistemological problems that even he did not always spell out?' (Green, 2000, p. 69). These epistemological problems stem from the specificity of the object of psychoanalytic research, which Green defines as the study of 'the way the human mind functions in regard to its specific forms of disorganization' (p. 68). Through a set of polysemic metaphors that refer to the analytical setting, the role of metapsychology would be to map and to make sense of those epistemological problems.

In the autumn of 1985, the bimestrial journal *Revue Française de Psychanalyse* published two issues under the title 'Une crise de la métapsychologie' (A Crisis of Metapsychology). I mention here two papers by Agnès Oppenheimer and Gilbert Diatkine that were written directly in reaction to the American controversy. Agnès Oppenheimer, in her paper 'Qu'est ce que la métapsychologie?' (What is Metapsychology?) argued that it was precisely because the discovery of unconscious processes undermines any philosophy of consciousness, which had constituted the epistemological horizon until Freud, that psychoanalytic questions should be formulated in a new framework and, according to her, metapsychology *was* this new epistemological framework (Oppenheimer, 1985, p. 1212). Oppenheimer defends the idea that metapsychology makes it possible to study psychological phenomena beyond the mind–body problem.

In his illuminating paper 'L'Échafaudage et le bâtiment' (The Scaffolding and the Edifice), Gilbert Diatkine stressed a view of metapsychology as a place for exploration. He described a 'metapsychological attitude' which he defined as the ability to 'let hypotheses flow unhindered while maintaining one's critical judgement' (Diatkine, 1985, p. 1231). It is this metapsychological attitude that Freud adopted when he wrote: 'What follows is

speculation, often far-fetched speculation, which the reader will consider or dismiss according to his individual predilection. It is further an attempt to follow out an idea consistently, out of curiosity to see where it will lead' (Freud, 1920, p. 24). Diatkine pointed out the analogy between this attitude and free association. There is a parallel between the technique that produces the clinical material – free association – and the attitude that provides the 'scaffolding' of the psychoanalytical edifice: metapsychology.

Diatkine proposed a symptomatic reading of the American assault on metapsychology: in a similar way to some patients who experience a great difficulty in free associating, some analysts would have a sort of inaptitude to adopt a metapsychological attitude. They replace the fruitful tension between theory and speculation with a methodical hierarchy between a descriptive and an explanatory level of the theory. Diatkine attributed this rigidity to an idealization of an empirical model of science.

It is worth noticing that the enthusiastic adherence to such an ideal model of science seems to have renounced the question that Freud had addressed to Einstein: 'It may perhaps seem to you as though our theories are a kind of mythology […] But does not every science come in the end to a kind of mythology like this?' (Freud, 1933, p. 211).

Conclusion: 'Remaining a Prisoner in Order to Escape!'

In Louis Althusser's moving autobiography *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, which is also an account of his analysis, he explains an escape plan he had conceived, while a prisoner of war in Germany during World War II:

> Having noticed that the Germans alerted all the police and troops within a very wide radius once they realised one of us had escaped, which usually resulted in the capture of the daring individual concerned, I decided the surest way of escaping would be to *let them believe someone had escaped*, wait until the general alert was over which never lasted more than three or four weeks, and then escape *after that*. What I therefore had to do was *disappear* from the camp […] and let them think I had gone, before actually going once the alert was past. To do this, I did not actually have to escape, but simply disappear, in other words hide within the camp itself (which was not impossible) and only then vanish into thin air, when all the measures adopted for the alert had been dropped […] In essence I had found a way of escaping from the camp *without actually leaving* and of remaining a prisoner in order to escape! (Althusser, 1993[1992], p. 108)

Althusser never carried out his plan but he describes how the principle of remaining within an ideology in order to escape it would become a significant metaphor for his intellectual path. Freud's metapsychology constitutes an endeavour similar to the one described by Althusser. In his metapsychological texts, Freud would describe models of the psyche that resist being systematized: they escape the jail of science from within models of the psychical apparatus.

From scientific articles to clinical cases, from papers on psychoanalytic technique addressed to his colleagues to more didactic papers intended for a larger audience, or from semi-autobiographical papers in which Freud presents his version of his intellectual path to papers of applied psychoanalysis – there is a great diversity of textual categories in Freud's work. Amongst this wide range of 'Freudian genres', the metapsychological texts seem very different from the rest. As a reader of Freud's work, one feels almost nervously that the metapsychological texts display a form of knowledge that operates in a very peculiar way. Jean-Claude Rolland describes with great accuracy this impression when he writes:

whoever reads with sustained attention any one of these papers [the metapsychological texts] soon discovers to what extent this speculation distances him from the clinical sphere, to the point of making him lose sight of it; but he also discovers how, behind the impeccable figuration Freud gives to this or that concept […] thought comes to life in extravagance and luxury, a thought that I would say engages with its object more than just explaining it […] The writing in these papers is choppy, in turn advancing and retreating, sometimes abrupt as if it were not possible, for example, to elucidate the drive it speaks of except by submitting to its fits and starts and its violence […]

Unique writing, invocative more than evocative, calling for, demanding an equally unique reading founded on empathy, on the reader's unconscious participation in the author's unconscious. We do not read the metapsychological texts in the way we read Freud's clinical cases or 'The Interpretation of Dreams', not because they are more difficult because more abstract, would resist comprehension or committing to memory more vigorously, but because they compel the reader to confront the strangeness of what they bear witness to more than actually formulating it: strangeness of the melancholy colouring any identificatory movement of the ego, strangeness of the unconscious movements which shy away just as they show themselves, strangeness of the affect that, arising makes the ego oscillate between pain and pleasure. (Rolland, 2005, pp. 96–7)

As suggested by Rolland, I believe that the 'strangeness' experienced by the reader of Freud's metapsychological texts comes from the novelty of the objects they describe. It seems to me that the portraits of the unconscious drawn by Freud in these writings constitute the most subversive representation of the unconscious that is to be found in his work. Freud's metapsychological notions of the unconscious are subversive because they put forward models that cannot be fully transcribed into pre-existing forms of intelligible discourses. It is a kind of epistemological subversion.

From his clinical material, Freud discovers psychical processes that cannot be explained through observation and induction and that cannot be understood though the interpretation of meanings. In Freud's metapsychology, the dynamic unconscious is neither a positivist object of science nor an idealist metaphysical substance, and neither methods based on causality nor methods based on meaning can give an account of metapsychological unconscious processes. There is a rupture of the usual forms of rational discourse.

Fulfilling Freud's prophecy about the destiny of psychoanalysis in the United States, the 1970s American critics resisted the forms of knowledge specific to a psychology of the unconscious. In the name of empirical evidence, or of a coherent theory of interpretation, they relocated the psyche within the walls of evidence-based science. Reductions of metapsychology to intentionality or its translation into empirical positivism share the common aim to introduce into the heart of psychoanalytic theory an *informative* subjectivity that could be apprehended as a set of data. That has consequences for the therapeutic practice of psychoanalysis since such models of the mind can fit in with a more normative clinic, be it the adaptive purpose of psychology or the technical standards of biological psychiatry. By challenging metapsychology, this generation of practitioners opened a breach that called into question the whole psychoanalytic edifice and, from within it, they escorted the general decline of psychoanalysis in North America.

The attempt to legitimize psychoanalytic knowledge and to demarcate it from theoretical models not directly linked to observation has persisted in Anglophone psychoanalysis beyond the time frame that I have studied here. An example of the aftermath of the American controversy is to be found in Luyten *et al.* (2006) who advocate a

methodological pluralism that would 'bridge the gap' between the two main psychoanalytic cultures: positivist and hermeneutic. In this attempt to pacify the 'dispute on methods' that the critical movement had transposed from nineteenth-century German epistemology to 1970s psychoanalysis, they propose to establish psychoanalysis in a theoretical landscape that would combine intelligible discourses based on meaning and interpretation with an intelligibility based on causality and empiricism. However, they never consider the possibility that metapsychological discourse could be a form of intelligibility specific to psychoanalysis.

Another example is Mark Leffert who in his book published in 2010, *Contemporary Psychoanalytic Foundations*, has proposed 'an interreferential schema which balances the influences of postmodernism, complexity theory and neuroscience as its key factors' (Leffert, 2010, p. 2). Leffert, who trained in the 1970s under the influence of the radical critics of the ego psychology school, resumes the epistemological examination of Freud's metapsychology from a new angle. He argues that metapsychology rests on implicit 'assumptions of knowability and predictability that are not ontologically sustainable' (p. xi). Leffert tries to find in the combination of postmodernism, complexity and neuroscience a discourse on the limits of knowledge that would provide a better ground for psychoanalysis than metapsychology.

In their great diversity, all these proposals to rebuild the epistemological status of psychoanalysis converge on one point: that it is not possible to have an epistemology which is proper to psychoanalysis only. Each of these epistemological proposals is founded on models external to psychoanalysis – hence the necessity to attack Freud's metapsychology, because in Freud's mind the function of the metapsychological concepts was to offer a foundation specifically for psychoanalytic theory. In a footnote to 'A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams', Freud justifies his project to write his so-called metapsychological paper as a way to 'clarify and carry deeper the theoretical assumptions on which a psycho-analytic system could be founded' (Freud, 1915d, p. 222, n.1).

In the course of this paper, I tried to show how behind the 1970s challenge to metapsychology lay an attack on a sui generis epistemological status for psychoanalysis. However, the controversy ends up highlighting the epistemological subversion of Freud's metapsychology: a theoretical scaffolding that locates speculation and phantasying at its core, and makes unifying labels or systemic classification intensely problematic. It is the belief in the existence of an essential relationship between Freud's metapsychology and the specificity of the analytic cure that pushed psychoanalysts – mainly in France – to respond to the attacks from American analysts. This belief was summarized by Jean Laplanche when, about 20 years after the beginning of the controversy, he observed: 'One perceives to what extent only metapsychological considerations in their abstract forms are capable of appropriately centring what constitutes the essence of the psychoanalytic *practice*, Freud's inaugural and primordial invention' (Laplanche, 2007, p. 50, my translation).

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the controversies triggered by Freud's metapsychology, specifically the American critiques of the 1970s – Heinz Hartmann, Merton Gill and David Rapaport, Robert Waelder, and Lawrence Kubie for ego-psychology, leading into Roy Schafer, George Klein and again Merton Gill for hermeneutics, Emmanuel Peterfreund and Charles Brenner for positivism, before concluding with a summary of more inventive engagements with

metapsychology including that of Joseph Sandler and André Green. The article argues that in the name of empirical or clinical evidence, the American critiques tried to reintroduce a subjectivity made of data into the heart of psychoanalytic theory and as a result, replaced the subject of the unconscious with a new figure of the subject not only transparent to itself, but also transparent to two main forms of discourse: the hermeneutic discourse, on the one hand, and the positivist discourse, on the other.