THE POLITICS OF METHOD IN THE HUMAN SCIENCES

Positivism and Its Epistemological Others

GEORGE STEINMETZ, EDITOR

Duke University Press *Durham/London 2005*

PSYCHOANALYSIS AS CRITIQUE

Psychoanalysis and the Theory of the Subject

ANTHONY ELLIOTT

"The most radical and thoroughgoing attempt to erase the subject," writes Anthony Giddens, "is found not in structuralism, or in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipe*, but in Mach's positivism" (1979, 44–45). Yet, if it is so that positivistic philosophies lack any account of the reflexive and affective dimensions of subjectivity, it is also the case that a strange positivistic haunting is to be found in those alternative theoretical traditions that have sought to promote a recovery of subject. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in Freud's psychoanalysis, the topic of this essay. To say, as Freud did, that the unconscious does not think is not only to underscore the profoundly imaginary dimensions of subjectivity, but also to call into question the logical form and past achievements of the social sciences. Yet, in an ironic twist, Freud's invention of psychoanalytic methods is, in various respects, closely connected with a naturalistic standpoint in social philosophy and shares an assumption that the logical frameworks of the natural and social sciences are in key respects the same.

A central purpose of this essay is to explore the theory of psychical imagination, especially of fantasy, uncovered (and required) by Freud. A related purpose is to examine some of the mechanisms by which Freud displaces this location of the creative and self-instituting capacity of the unconscious imagination. In what follows, I explore Freud's attempt to locate the foundations of psychical life in terms of a specifically modernist tension between imagination and rationality; this tension pervades much of Freud's work. In particular, I focus on his foundational (though unfinished) text, the "Project for a Scientific Psychology."[1] My argument is that the continuing significance of Freud's work for contemporary theory rests precisely in its uncertainty over fantasy and the unconscious imagination, an uncertainty that shifts between the boundaries of inside and outside, anxiety and control, psychic flux and scientific authorization. The final sections of the essay consider the relation between imagination and specialized knowledge in the age of liquid modernity.

The Origins of Psychoanalysis

The "Project for a Scientific Psychology" of (Freud 1895/1966) is a text marked by Freud's desire for mastery, an attempt to subject the workings of mind to the laws of motion on the physiological basis of neurology. The psyche, in this proto-draft of psychoanalytic theory, is conceptualized as an "apparatus," one made up of various subsystems and mechanisms. The study of hysteria and of neurotic disorders led Freud to grant the psyche a neuromechanical logic of its own, a mode of action that receives, transforms, and discharges energetic excitations. Freud's aim is to understand the laws of psychical economy, to master them, to render them transparent. The opening declaration of the "Project" is indeed full of self-masterful zeal and scientific certainty: "The intention is to furnish a psychology that shall be a natural science: that is, to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determinate states of specifiable material particles, thus making those processes perspicuous and free from contradiction" (1895/1966, 295).

Freud theorizes his multisystemic "psychical apparatus" as interlocking agencies of excitation homologous to physical energy, hence the grounding of psychology in natural science. He argues for the development of a quantitative framework in order to grasp, and thus also to colonize, the nature of mental functioning, thus rendering the secrets of psychical energy "free from contradiction."

Yet, while the introduction of this quantitative viewpoint derives much of its impetus from modernist procedures of enframing, ordering, and mastery, the "Project" is also rich in speculative insight about the imaginary contours of the primitive libidinal substratum. Repression and defense, the libidinal drives with their competing forces of energy, ego organization, and memory: these ideas are all present and inform the account of mental life sketched in this text.

What is perhaps most immediately striking about the "Project" is the manner in which Freud argues that the psychical elaboration of sexuality is not to be found in some free-floating realm of images and scenes, but rather in the objective determinism of energy and forces. Freud conceptualizes the heart of the matter as the transformation of energy or quantity (abbreviated as Q) into perceptual and instinctual stimuli within a neuronic framework. The psychical apparatus is a complex network of neurons, a network that follows the general laws of motion. The dynamics of force, attraction, and defense, Freud argues, dominates the mental apparatus. Through a blending of the ideas of Hermann von Helmholtz and J. F. Herbart, neurophysiological concepts are brought to bear on the functioning of desire and pleasure.[2] Quantity dominates the psychical apparatus from start to finish in the "Project": it is conceptualized as an energetic current that fills or drains, charges or discharges neurons. The powerful intensities of energy thus function as the primary source of psychical excitations, what Freud describes as a "cathecting" of neurons.

If it is the motions of energy that bring a psychical movement or action about in the first place (through the charging or discharging of neurons), then the registration of experience, including the capacity to store memories, should vary according to the flow of quantity available at any particular moment. Yet Freud's account of energy as the primary motor power of psychic functioning rejects this possibility, and instead connects the nature of quantity to what he calls "neuronic inertia," or, more commonly, the "constancy principle." The principle of constancy means that the psychic apparatus tends to reduce its own accumulation of energy to zero, to divest itself of force and tension. "The mind," as Richard Wollheim writes of Freud's "Project," "tries to expel all energy as and when it enters the system" (1971, 45). The psyche, then, works to defuse the impact of energetic excitations, to maintain the existing level of quantity as low as possible; and insofar as Freud's thought grants the psyche a determining power at all at this stage of his thinking, which will become clear when we consider the relation between energy and its psychic registration, it can be said that the creative function of such differentiation is itself central to the mental constitution of human beings.

The elimination of energy from the psychic apparatus, however, turns out to be not so simple. Freud's conception of the energetic filling of neurons and of the principle of inertia (that is, the draining of such quantity charges) only goes so far to comprehend the manner in which the psyche receives stimulation from the outside world, as with the nature and function of perception. The difficulty that arises is that the psychical apparatus cannot escape from, it cannot eliminate the voracious energy of internal demands (such as the needs of hunger and the desires of sexuality) in the same manner. As a result of internal demand, which produces an accumulation of energy, the psychical apparatus, Freud says, "must learn to tolerate a store of quantity sufficient to meet the demands for specific action." In other words, the mind must be able to register feelings and thoughts in such a way as to bring together internal demand with the objective conditions of discharge. In this way, when the mind is stimulated by certain thoughts, feelings, and wishes, the self will be able to respond with an appropriate action, and not some random response. At such a level of analysis, this involves a meshing of psychical enjoyment with the lived immediacy of self-other relations. As Freud puts this: "At first, the human organism is incapable of bringing about the specific action [of satisfaction]. It takes place by *extraneous help*, when the attention of an experienced person is drawn to the child's state by discharge along the path of internal change. In this way this path of discharge acquires a secondary function of the highest importance, that of communication, and the initial helplessness of human beings is the *primal source* of all *moral motives*" (1895/1966, 318). Crucially, the question of energy and the path of its discharge is inseparable from the question of communication, the dynamics of intersubjectivity. Seen in this light, energy is at once anchored in and the guarantor of intersubjective space.

But what of discharge? The ultimate and central means in which this is now explored—the problem of energy and the internal world—is through the pressing of quantity into the mode of operation of the psychical itself. Freud separates the sensory neurons into two types: o-neurons and u-neurons. An exegesis of the differences between these two classes is something that has already been well accomplished in the psychoanalytic literature (see Sulloway 1979, ch. 4; Wollheim 1971, ch. 2). In general terms, the o-neurons receive stimulation from the outside world (as in perception), whereas the u-neurons receive stimulation from the internal world (such as the needs of hunger). In Wollheim's gloss, "The o-neurones are totally permeable, they offer no resistance to the flow of quantity through them, and, consequently, are totally unaffected by it, whereas u-neurones are to some degree or other impermeable, they offer some resistance to, and hence retain permanent traces of, quantity as it flows through them" (46). The psyche in this conception is not defined by whether or not energy is eliminated, but by the maintenance of a certain level of tension in order for discharge. And discharge, Wollheim writes, is understood by Freud as a process of psychic repetition: "If a given quantity recurrently follows one specific path through the u-system, then it is safe to assume that this is the path along which relief, for that quantity, is to be found" (48).

There remains, however, the need to discriminate between the relief of discharges as regards the primary and secondary functions of the psyche, once it is granted that there is an originary productive dynamism at this energetic level of human functioning. The category of tension in the "Project" is linked to a regulatory mechanism that Freud calls the "pleasure-unpleasure series." Simply put, Freud postulates an equivalence between the experience of unpleasure and a rise in tension, on the one hand, and the experience of pleasure and a decrease in tension, on the other. The psyche for Freud functions according to the avoidance of unpleasure; pleasure, as indicated, is understood in terms of the sensation of discharge. At this point, however, a modification to Freud's energetic model, in particular to the functioning of the secondary processes, necessarily imposes itself. To understand how the pleasure-unpleasure combination achieves registration within the psychical apparatus, Freud introduces the concept of consciousness, which is conceived as an inhibiting system of bound energy that functions at a constant level. Consciousness is conceptualized in the "Project" through the positing of a third class of neuron: w-neurons. What changes everything in the discussion of the psychic apparatus at this point is that, although consciousness and reality testing can be understood as determined by quantity, Freud insists that the flow of energy as such never enters the w-system of neurons. Instead, he speaks of a transformation from quantity to quality with the mediation of an "indication of reality." Subjective experience of the outer world requires an inhibition of libidinal energy; this is an inhibition that is central to the capacity to distinguish between a desire for an object and the object itself.

An inhibition of quantity thus takes place in the psychical translation from the primary to the secondary process. Freud asserts that, as quantity flows through the u-system and is influenced by the memory of pleasure or pain, paths of discharge will be sought that bring internal needs into line with reality testing. That is, the psyche can either seize on or defend against the power of wishes as intersecting with interpersonal relationships. Meanwhile, the ego enters directly into this task of discrimination, pressing back memory images of the wished-for object in the primary process, and pressing toward "indications of reality" that will permit for a specific action to be carried out in line with internal demands and external requirements. As Freud puts this: "Where, then, an ego exists, it is bound to inhibit primary psychical processes." This inhibiting function of the ego involves a shift from energy as free-flowing in the primary process to energy as bounded in the secondary process. This shift also informs Freud's view that the ego can assert its rule over unconscious conflict and division; this can be pictured as a kind of reclaiming of subjective control in the name of rationality.

If the capacity for discrimination between imagination and reality is what sustains reflexive selfhood, however, it is also implicated in the realm of pathological defense. The nub of the problem, as the “Project” continuously reminds us, is quantitative. For excessive quantity conflicts with these regulatory functions of the ego; excessive quantity outweighs the ego’s activity of inhibiting; indeed, in an act of violent incorporation, excessive libidinal eruptions can fuse a memory image of a wished-for object with perception itself. In this case, memory will be confused with reality, as happens with the conversion of affective intensities in hysteria, displacements of energy in obsession, and so on. The eruption of excessive quantity lies at the root of emotional pain, leaving the subject overwhelmed and anxious; it also leaves its mark in the form of permanent memory traces. Such an overflowing of energy is damaging because its path of release is illusory: discharge is sought through hallucination, not reality.

Seen in this light, the quantitative focus in Freud’s “Project” redramatizes the relationship between libidinal desire and reality testing, particularly in the characterization of memory (that is, the memory of an experience of pleasure-unpleasure) as a condition in which the sense of reality is constituted. “Unpleasure,” Freud writes in a sentence that anticipates the *Weltanschauung* (worldview) of psychoanalysis, “remains the sole means of education.” (There is a close tie, it should be noted, between the negativity Freud attributes to “unpleasure” and the development of notions such as “frustration” [Bion] and “lack” [Lacan] in post-Freudian theory.) It is this linking of unpleasure and reality, this crushing of the narcissistic self-unity of the psyche, where Freud locates autonomous subjectivity as the capacity of the mind to distinguish between imagination and memory, on the one hand, and indications of reality, through perception, on the other. The creative mastery of this discrimination not only underwrites our mental capacities for attention, understanding, and cognitive thought; it also leads to a critical distance from the disabling influence of primary process regression.

It will be apparent from the foregoing commentary that the psychical apparatus as detailed by Freud in the “Project” is fixed on a mechanical register, quantitative, deterministic, and operationalized by three types of neurons. Indeed, in a letter to his friend and mentor Wilhelm Fliess, Freud says of the “Project”: “Everything seemed to mesh, the gear mechanism fitted together, one got the impression the thing now really was a machine that would shortly go by itself” (Freud 1985, 146). A mental machine whose mechanisms are to function free from distorting contradictions: the determinism, and its guiding fantasy of control, is particularly evident here. In this quantitative psychology of desire, the transition from physical tension to a properly psychical elaboration is one of excitations that enter into the interconnecting pathways imprinted in the neuronic framework. In many respects, Freud's unyielding search throughout the "Project" for the quantitative foundations of psychological behavior drew its animus from his deep faith in science, reason, and objective knowledge. With such a faith, he deployed a litany of mechanistic metaphors—"charges," "quantity," "apparatus," "system," and the like—in the search for a truly *scientific* psychology. Indeed, the "Project" is a text that maintains the hopes and ambitions of positivism throughout, modifying the logic in operation at every point in which psychical life resists classification, squeezing the heterogeneous flux of desire, with Freud's characteristic relentless determination, into the design of an established scientific worldview. Freud's deep conviction that the psychical dimensions of human experience are open to codification by science is itself subject to repetition throughout this text: with further modification or tinkering to the system, sure knowledge lies around the next corner. In fact, even in the *Outline of Psychoanalysis*, written during the last year of his life, Freud expresses the hope that the psychoanalytic contribution to knowledge may one day "exercise a direct influence, by means of particular chemical substances, on the amounts of energy and their distribution in the mental apparatus" (1938/1964, 182).

However, it is now time to assess the central tension in Freud's work, a tension that runs throughout the "Project," between rationality and knowledge, on the one hand, and imagination and fantasy on the other. This specifically modernist tension is inscribed in Freud's division of psychical functioning between reality, logic, and the pleasure-unpleasure series. A number of important problems arise at this point. What, exactly, is the relationship between imagination and reality? What is left of imagination after the subject perceives an "indication of reality"? How do energy quantities shape psychical qualities? And is this a process of translation or of mediation? Freud's answer to this dilemma, as we have seen, is that energy, as the lifeblood of imagination, marks, structures, and indeed invades in mental disturbance the functioning of the psyche:

> Wishful cathexis carried to the point of hallucination and a complete generation of unpleasure, involving a complete expenditure of defence, may be described as "primary psychical process." On the other hand, those processes which are only made possible by a good cathexis of the ego and which represent a moderation of the primary processes may be described as "psychical secondary processes." It will be seen that the sine qua non of the latter is a correct exploitation of

> the indications of reality and that this is only possible when there is an inhibition on the part of the ego.—We have thus put forward a hypothesis to the effect that, during the process of wishing, inhibition on the part of the ego leads to a moderation of the cathexis of the object wished-for, which makes it possible for that object to be recognized as not being a real one.

The objectivistic consequence of this description is one that derives from Freud's formalistic separation of imagination and logic, a separation in which imagination is subordinate to reason. Freud stamps the ideology of the Enlightenment onto this mapping of the psyche by insisting that an indication of reality is constituted when thinking is divorced from the processes of imagination, an "inhibition of the process of wishing." However, there is nothing in this description that accounts for the transformation of psychical energies into ego inhibition and discrimination; this difficulty is all the more compounded by Freud's uncoupling of consciousness from imagination in this passage.[3] Note too, that there is nothing in this perspective that suggests why excessive energy should overwhelm the subject in such a manner as to produce permanent memory traces.

But Freud maintains throughout the "Project" that the question of subjective meaning is an economic or quantitative one. For Freud, the quantitative buildup of tension is the pure point of energetic origin in the constitution of psychic functioning. However, as Paul Ricoeur has argued, the relation posited between quantity and quality soon outstrips itself, taking Freud's deterministic hypothesis in the "Project" to the breaking point. In this respect, the question that arises is this: What brings quantity, or energy, *into relation with* quality, or psychic meaning? The difficulty of coming to grips with this question within the energetic framework posited in the "Project" can be demonstrated by considering the nature of fantasy and, for our purposes here, especially the founding of fantasy.

The construction of fantasy, as various traditions in psychoanalytic theory make clear, involves the child in perpetual image constructions of its world. Fantasies are constituted through a transcription of the tension of biological need into the representational "expression of wishes and passions," to invoke Isaacs's definition (1991, 96). This means that when a longed-for object (initially the maternal breast) is found to be missing (through, for example, the unavailability of the mother), the child hallucinates it in its absence. In doing so, the breast is represented, and actually experienced, in fantasy, even though the mother is not present in material reality.

Now, even from the points raised thus far, it will be clear that there are immense conceptual difficulties in fleshing out the structure of fantasy in terms of the quantitative model offered in Freud's "Project." What emerges most strongly, perhaps, is the impossibility of assigning some energetic origin to something, namely fantasy, that posits an object as both existing and nonexistent; the founding fantasy is in itself a kind of "playing" with the unavailability of the mother. This seems to suggest that, in making something out of nothing, in the creation of a mental image, the psyche is located in an imaginary function that exceeds anything suggested by the quantitative aspects of Freud's theory.

What is in question, in other words, is the whole concept of the representational dynamics of energy itself. The representational status accorded to the psyche in the "Project" is that of the registration of perceived reality, of the perceptual apparatus. Perceptual stimulation, in the charging of neurons, is at the root of the construction of psychic reality and fantasies. (This proposed intersecting of reality and imagination is further expanded in a letter to Fliess in which Freud comments that fantasy is "derived from things that have been heard but understood [only] subsequently," a formulation to which Freud adds that "all their material is, of course, genuine"; 1892–1899/1966, 247). In these proto-psychoanalytical formulations, fantasy is viewed by Freud as a reproduction of something already perceived, an integration of elements that have been pressed into the internal world from elsewhere, whether the outside world (that is, of "things heard") or the neuronic system itself (through the discharging of energy). Backing away from the glimpses of the creative and dynamic nature of the unconscious he had in his clinical work, it is as if, once he has discerned the problem of subjectivity, experience, and meaning, Freud is anxious to be done with it. Fantasy in this view is a derived, or secondary, phenomenon. Yet it is precisely in the realm of fantasy, in the fantasmatic creations of the unconscious imagination, that the psyche outstrips biological need as well as the imprint of external reality.

Problems of Interpretation

It is with the "Project for a Scientific Psychology" that Freud first maps the psychical world, a world of free and bound energy, hallucinatory wish-fulfillment and delayed thought, disruptive affect and amassed excitation. As regards the erotic powers of unconscious imagination, this account of the psyche is to provide a skeletal structure for Freud's subsequent theoretical formulations on repression and defense, on the drives, on the primary process mechanisms of condensation and displacement, and on the timelessness of infantile wishes. The "Project" is thus Freud's response, as a first approximation, to the problem of the turmoil of primitive mental life on perception and thought. It is a model that offers an access route to the distinctive features of normal mental functioning, that is, the inhibition of the primary process in the separating out of hallucination and perception. This separating out, or reality testing, is what secures planned action or agency in the intersubjective world; imagining, perceiving, and reasoning is how the human subject gathers its bearings. But it is also a model that recognizes the seductive power of instant gratification and hallucinatory wish-fulfillment, the hallmarks of the unconscious. It is a model that encounters the uncompromising and distorting realm of repressed desire; this is a conceptual structure that trades with terrifying hallucinations and traumatic inhibitions (a trade informed by the pathogenic experiences of the hysterics Freud encountered in the fashioning of psychoanalytic treatment). The "Project" is therefore rooted at once in observed reality and theorization. It presents a path that leads from the physiological substrata of the mind, enters and travels through the troubled waters of unconscious affective life, and then returns to the conceptual shores of scientific certainty—or at least this would have been so had Freud completed the text.

However, within this framework it is actually impossible, as we have seen, to think about the productive work of the psyche, the creative indetermination of imagination and thought. The profound tension here is that Freud's "Project" uncovers and brings to light the powers of imagination (hallucinatory wish-fulfillment and ego inhibition frame the discontinuity of human subjectivity), while simultaneously denying the full force of desire in the name of science, rationality, and objectivity. Freud reaches toward the self-instituting capacity of unconscious imagination, yet, caught up in the established mastery of science, displaces this element in favor of the psyche as a black box of energetic inputs and outputs. This brings into focus the incompatibility, in the cultural, historical, and scientific context of Freud's world, between imagination and science, desire and objective knowledge. And yet, as the "Project" itself demonstrates, the subordinate place that the imagination occupies to reason refuses to be contained; desire comes to invade and outstrip the colonizing power ascribed to rationality. The disruptiveness of the primary process in this text works in part, then, to derail the language of science, resisting the enframing and classification to which it has been submitted.

It is for this reason, perhaps, that Freud will abandon the "Project," failing to request the return of the manuscript from Fliess (to whom it was dispatched for criticism) and also omitting any mention of it in his autobiographical writings. The "Project" can therefore be understood to function as a displaced text, a kind of founding act of repression in the constitution of psychoanalysis itself. From this point of view, it can be said that Freud banishes the "Project," a text scarred by the scientific worldview of the late nineteenth century, to respond more effectively to his discovery of the unconscious imagination. Indeed, this banishment functions as a powerful form of liberation for Freud. For it was precisely at this point of his career that Freud abandoned his seduction theory, the notion that every neurosis conceals a history of real sexual seduction and actual trauma, and replaced it with a more critical interpretation of the relation of psychic life to the outer world. Central to this shift in Freud's approach was a radical revaluation of the internal processing of external reality, especially of how individuals interpret, frame, and fantasize experience (including memories of sexual experiences in childhood). Retracting his seduction theory, Freud wrote to Fliess of his "certain insight that there are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that one cannot distinguish between truth and fiction that has been cathected with affect" (quoted in Masson 1984, 264–265). But if the unconscious fantasy life of the individual is not merely a copy of objective reality, then this significantly increases the autonomy of the imagination in its dealings with the social world. As John Toews comments:

> The collapse of the seduction theory in the fall of 1897 was marked by a collapse of Freud's confidence in his ability to use evidence from his patients' fantasies in reconstructing the real history of event sequences . . . but this collapse was transformed into a "triumph" by his recognition that fantasies might be read a different way, as signs of the unconscious intentions that produced them rather than as the forgotten events to which they referred. From this perspective the "embellishments" and "sublimations" of fantasy were not so much outworks to be demolished as obscure revelations of a different kind of truth, the truth of unconscious psychical activity. They were openings into a hidden world of "psychic reality" that was not passive and objective but active and subjective, a world of unconscious psychosexual desire. (1991, 513)

Once Freud granted fantasy an active and subjective dimension, therefore, the psychic realm no longer functioned as a mirror to objective reality.

"Freud democratized genius by giving everyone a creative unconscious"

(Rieff 1961, 36), writes one commentator of this recasting of the process of psychic investment. But what emerges in Freud, throughout various formulations and explanations, is a conceptual recognition of the location of desire that outstrips even this "active" or "subjective" component of fantasy. This amounts to saying that Freud's uncovering of the creative unconscious is at once imperative and displaced, given that it is precisely this fantasmatic dimension of human experience that captures the impasse between the inside and the outside, between the troubles of the life of the mind and the troubles of the social world. It is central insofar as Freud takes unconscious fantasy as the stake of meaning, deconstructing the radical otherness of the sense-making process, all the way from moral prohibitions to psychological disturbance. Dreams, of course, provide Freud's key reference point here in the attempt to put desire in its proper place—not merely in the sense of explaining desire and its difficulty away, but of understanding the ambiguity and undecidability of wish-fulfillment in its encounter with the primary processes of condensation, displacement, and distortion. Seen from this angle, the attachment of meaning to experience can be traced to unconscious wishes and intentions, and this for Freud forms part of the detective work of psychoanalytical practice.

There is, however, another Freud, sometimes explicit, sometimes less so, on the limits of psychoanalytical interpretation. This is the Freud who questions the nature and limitations of scientific knowledge in Western culture, and, in particular, it is the Freud who locates a hidden world of unconscious impulses and fantasies as dislocating the scaffolding of psychoanalysis itself. This emphasis stresses that scientific knowledge, even in the sphere of psychoanalysis, cannot provide protection from anxiety as regards living with the turbulence of desire. It cannot protect from anxiety because of the matchings and misalliances of passion and knowledge, fantasy and rationality, which inevitably recur and which also mark the impossibility of limiting the space of psychoanalytic interpretation. That is to say, desire at once confers and exceeds meaning, locating the human subject at a point of Otherness that is both ecstatic and intolerable. Consider, for example, Freud's comments on the "blind spot" of dreams, a point that is always already beyond the control or mastery of any shared, intersubjective knowledge: "We become aware during the work of interpretation that . . . there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation have to, in an entirely universal manner, remain without any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought" (1900/1953, vol. 5, 525). In other words, the creative unconscious (branching out in all directions of mind and world) is that which plays tricks with explanation and rationalism.

The domain of imagination, as I emphasized earlier, was never fully integrated with the core suppositions of psychoanalytic theory; it was left by Freud as a kind of splitting or rupture of the inside and the outside. The balance of this inside/outside dualism tipped in different directions throughout Freud's career, and I have previously connected these strands of thinking to a modernist and postmodernist Freud on the powers and limits of the human imagination (A. Elliott 2002, 17–18). Freud the modernist is forever attempting, implicitly or otherwise, to enframe and master the laws of psychic processes, to lock the radical otherness of unconscious experience within the determinable. From this angle, the inventor of psychoanalysis is in the last resort colonizing the realm of desire and pleasure in order to know it, to make subjectivity more manageable. The "seduction" of trauma, the "secret" of dreams, the "sway" of reality over the pleasure principle, the "phylogenesis" of Oedipal rivalry: psychoanalysis revolves around creating conceptualization, classification, and boundaries. And yet Freud's metapsychology also works against itself, acknowledging the limits of science in favor of fantasy and the imagination. Representation, symbolism, hallucination, fantasy, omnipotence of thought: Freud refuses the human subject an easy relation to itself or the outside world. Questioning the enlightened values of the scientific tradition, this is the Freud who speaks of the fantastic creations of the unconscious imagination, of the "dark continent" of feminine sexuality, of the uncanny in sexuality and in language, and of psychoanalytic interpretation as interminable.

Something similar goes on in contemporary psychoanalysis. The creative power of unconscious fantasy is at once embraced and denied in a range of psychoanalytic traditions, as if the split in Freud between knowledge and imagination is condemned to repeat itself. The key strands of psychoanalysis that attempt to understand something about the self-instituting dimensions of fantasy range from the libertarian Freudianism of Herbert Marcuse, through the Kleinian and post-Kleinian tradition (with its strong emphasis on creativity and the aesthetic process), and is now perhaps best represented in the French psychoanalytic feminist work of theorists such as Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. Here there is the explicit attempt to think of fantasy as a realm of indetermination, as central to a certain state of human relatedness, a generative space in which the capacity for feeling and thought develops, a capacity which is the primary basis for the transformation of human relationships.

There is, however, another strand in post-Freudian psychoanalysis that has sought to reduce the space of radical imagination in subjectivity and the social process. Sometimes this has been quite explicitly addressed to the stakes of knowledge and self-mastery, especially in the U.S. school of ego psychology, which tends to sidestep questions of sexuality and desire to upgrade the powers of the ego along the normative paths of rationality and social adaptation. Sometimes it has also been done in more radical schools of psychoanalysis; Lacanian theory, for example, flirts with a structuralist advocacy of the colonizing role of language in the constitution of desire, a standpoint that arguably displaces many of Freud's core insights into the creative figurability of fantasy and sexuality. Whether expressed in the name of rationalism or structuralism, however, the underlying aim is the attempt to oppose knowledge and structure (as objective reality) to subjectivity and fantasy and to wipe out the creative, self-instituting realm of representation and passion in which subjectivity and history interweave.

Pushed to an extreme, this reintroduction of reality leads to a rigid externalization of psychical space, that is, back to Freud's seduction hypothesis that psychic process mirrors objective reality, pure and simple. Indeed, this is precisely the charge that Jeffrey Masson makes against Freud, challenging him on rejecting the actuality of seduction in favor of fantasy and the Oedipus complex, in his book *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory.* "By shifting the emphasis from an actual world of sadness, misery, and cruelty," writes Masson, "to an internal stage on which actors performed invented dramas for an invisible audience of their own creation, Freud began a trend away from the real world that . . . is at the root of the present-day sterility of psychoanalysis and psychiatry throughout the world" (1984, 144).[4] The act of fantasy or memory for Masson is instead one that recalls real experience and actual trauma; there is, as it were, a one-to-one correspondence between the trauma of abuse or seduction and mental disturbance. Yet it is exactly this point of correspondence, or, more accurately, the wish for a direct fit between mind and world, that reveals most forcefully the distorting element in Masson's discourse. Without in any way denying the devastating psychic and social consequences of child abuse and trauma, it seems to me that Masson's rejection of fantasy is made in the name of establishing certitude and transparency. It is as if he believes that subjectivity, once stripped of fantasy, can operate without ambiguity and ambivalence; a uniform, standardized communication can take place between self and society; and mental disturbance or illness can be seen as the result of similar or identical instances of actual trauma. Seen in this light, as Jeffrey Prager writes of the contemporary attack on Freud and psychoanalysis, "Masson [expresses] nostalgia for a pre- (or early) Freudian world . . . a world where things are precisely as they appear, always reflecting a hard, obdurate reality that can be easily and readily perceived. No interpreting self, no unconscious one. What happens happens, and there is no mystery as to how one processes, interprets, and gives meaning to those occurrences" (1994, 214).

The relation between imagination and rationality documented thus far has been primarily considered from a psychoanalytic perspective. We need, however, to consider the broader social, cultural, and political influences shaping the core features of the imaginary in the contemporary epoch. We also need to consider the impact of specialized, expert knowledge on the domain of imagination and of the pathologies this produces.

Psychoanalysis and Social Science

Perhaps the best way to approach the broader sociological implications of the foregoing argument is to consider the linkage between the origins of psychoanalysis and modernity. One prominent interpretation points to the erosion of authority and community in the light of the waning of tradition, custom, and habit. Such a viewpoint is perhaps best expressed in the writings of Philip Rieff (1966, 1979). Rieff argues that psychoanalytic theory and therapy becomes "culturally appropriate" with the shift from traditional "positive communities," which anchored belief systems and symbols in stable social networks of custom, family, and religion, to "negative communities," in which individuals create meaning in terms of their own personal experience. In premodern societies, when people were in pain or distress, they sought meaning from the sureties of cultural tradition, habit, and religion. Positive communities might thus be said to have created their own therapeutic order. Modernity, as a posttraditional order, offers no such guarantees as concerns personal doubts and anxieties. In conditions of modernity, self and society are in greater flux, and hence there is a turn inward toward private, emotional experience. "In the age of psychologizing," Rieff writes, "clarity about oneself supersedes devotion to an ideal as the model of right conduct" (56).

Psychoanalysis becomes of crucial cultural significance, according to Rieff, because it forms a central connecting point between dislocating outer experience and the creation of inner meaning. In Rieff's terms, psychoanalysis emerges at a point of cultural "deconversion," a time of breakdown in frameworks of meaning, of startling social transformations and dislocations. With this erosion of tradition and, most important, religious authority, Freud's search for meaning in dreams, wishes, desires, and fantasies was a radical counterassertion of human possibility and hope. In a world of dislocation, uncertainty, and change, psychoanalytic theory and therapy creates an openness to the multiplicity of modern experience, offering the possibility of meaning and well-being. As Rieff puts it, psychoanalysis offers the individual a chance "to keep going."

The analysis set out by Rieff is of considerable critical power in terms of grasping the ways the cultivation of self-understanding and intimacies of the self emerge against the backdrop of the dislocations and uncertainties of the modern social order. Indeed, in recent formulations of this dynamic, it is often argued that, in the posttraditional order of modernity, self-revision or -reflexivity is intrinsic to the constitution of self-identity and intersubjective social relations (Giddens 1991). In terms of the opening out of the personal sphere, psychoanalytic theory and therapy can be said to offer individuals a radical purchase on the dilemmas of living in the modern epoch. From such a standpoint, it can be said that the subject is split, but crucially this is a splitting open to self-understanding. There is little in this account, however, to question the way an awareness of the more productive elements of imagination, and of unconscious imagination in particular, should have become open to cultural transmission at this historical point. Rieff's analysis seems to imply a causal connection between the breakdown of tradition and the rise of psychoanalysis. But, why psychoanalysis? Why was this conceptual map created to represent people's experience of subjectivity, sexuality, and meaning? Is the turn inward, of which Rieff speaks, merely a matter of the weakening of cultural tradition?

Unquestionably, reflexiveness relating to intimacies of the self is a highly personal matter, and there is an enormous variety of psychological approaches and schools from which people might choose today. However, the core importance of therapy, psychoanalytic or otherwise, does not relate primarily to issues of personal choice. Rather, it relates to the self-awareness of human imagination and the structuring role of fantasy in personal and social life. Rieff is led to obscure the decisive role of psychical imagination in the domain of culture by privileging social transformation, practice, and ideology. Yet the actual practice of psychoanalysis or psychoanalytic therapy can surely only be brought into existence if the discoveries of Freud, as founding father, hold up and can withstand critical examination. All of which is to say that psychoanalysis comes to depend more and more on criteria that are internal to its own legitimation, that is, the recognition of the structuring role of fantasy.

In analyzing the rise of psychoanalysis and therapy in modern societies, Rieff is undoubtedly correct to stress the central role of rapid social change in the fracturing of human experience. In the midst of an ever expanding globalization of the social environment, tradition no longer supplies binding cultural prescriptions, and selfhood as such becomes intrinsically problematic. By means of psychoanalysis and therapy, people can find a new language for addressing, and thereby coming to terms with, private dilemmas. For Rieff, however, this correspondence between the loss of tradition and the rise of therapy appears culturally structured and fixed: psychoanalysis functions essentially as a substitute for traditional moral, political, and religious guidelines. Without severing its relation to social transformation, however, we should also see the emergence of psychoanalysis as part and parcel of the modernist attempt to embrace imagination, to uncover the contradiction and conflict of human passion. Understanding the development of the self in modern societies, particularly its problematization, should focus on the imaginary capacities for self-representation and self-construction through which individuals express and transform themselves. In this view, psychoanalysis is not simply a social fabrication, but a creation of imagination and fantasy as well. We can thus supplement Rieff's account by highlighting that psychoanalysis plays a crucial role in the modern epoch in uncovering the presence of psychic processes hidden from awareness. The virtue of such an approach is that it underscores the point that it is the creative power of the unconscious imagination that underpins this searching of our innermost hopes and dreads.

In political terms, however, there is more at stake here than just personal and cultural self-understanding. Not only does modernity promote an uncovering of reflexiveness as concerns human subjectivity and the radical imagination, but this reflexiveness is itself embedded in a discourse of science and expert knowledge. That is to say, reflexiveness does not exist in a vacuum; it is situated in psychological, cultural, and political networks. And it follows from this that such reflexiveness can also be drawn into, and indeed fuel, asymmetrical relations of power. This embedding of reflexiveness in asymmetrical relations of power is a central component of a discourse that I call the *psychologization of desire,* those institutionalized aspects of specialized knowledge in the sphere of human sexuality. Doctors, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and indeed many psychoanalysts (when analysis is practiced reductively) trade in the isolation, classification, and consolidation of a cohesive code of sexual rules. In ideological terms, the driving force here is the quest for sure knowledge: it is thanks to expert psychological insight that the "right" or "wrong" approach can be applied to troubled relationships in the home, school, business, bureaucratic organizations, and government agencies. Psychological expertise offers reassurance against the insecurities of living. Psychological know-how is also regularly used to keep at bay personal and cultural ambivalence, as the problems of daily life are recast in a fixed, technical vocabulary.

Surprisingly, Rieff has little to say about this rationalization of psychoanalytic knowledge. He does, as was stressed earlier, credit psychoanalytic therapy with supplying new personal and cultural guidelines in the late modern age. With the opening out of the personal sphere, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy become less centered on normative issues of a cure and more and more a matter of self-actualization. Yet the prospects for self-actualization are deeply constrained, by factors both inside and outside psychoanalysis. Rieff acknowledges that the professionalization and routinization of therapy has softened the critical edge of psychoanalysis and has produced a "boredom" in psychoanalytic societies. Yet he fails to consider that the independence of psychoanalysis, at the levels of theory and clinical practice, has often proved incompatible with the authority of specialized knowledge in the psychological professions. For this reason alone, much that is vital and alive in psychoanalysis has declined into dogmatism. These are issues I now wish to consider in some detail.

To comprehend this psychologization of desire, we have to move away from an exclusive concentration on the sociology of modern societies and look to the structuring of fantasy and power in the modern era. Consider, for example, the creation of psychoanalysis and its embedding in modernity's institutional dynamics. Freud, as we have seen, uncovered the connections between self-identity and unconscious sexuality in a revolutionary way, revolutionary because it led men and women into a reflexive encounter with the condition of subjectivity as fractured, split, and ambivalent. At the same time, he anchored psychoanalysis in a medical discourse of science, the design of which, I have suggested, sought to effect a subordination of inner nature to human control, order, and mastery.

This preoccupation with desire as subordinate to the world of scientific knowledge and power has also taken place as regards the cultural, institutional development of psychoanalysis. Once more, it is fairly easy to trace out the interplay of anxiety and denial, insight and repression, which pervades the ideological function of psychoanalysis in modern societies. Against the backdrop of Freudian psychoanalysis, people seek to explore their deepest intrapsychic experiences and personal relationships, an exploration that is underwritten by the creativity of the unconscious imagination. The Freudian revolution is, in this sense, a revolution of the personal sphere, an opening out of the self to anxiety and ambivalence. This infiltration of Freudian psychoanalysis into the everyday social world, however, also brings it directly into contact with those institutional dimensions of specialized knowledge and power. In many instances, this contact has led to a deadening of psychoanalysis as an open-ended system of meaning and also to a routinization in the application of its theoretical and conceptual resources. A marked self-containment and fixation of Freudian concepts has taken place, as psychoanalysis has increasingly become a world unto itself. The reduction of psychoanalysis to a medical, mechanistic treatment of behavior pathologies, seen as a method for adapting the individual to an objective, knowable reality, became widespread in the psychoanalytic movement, especially in the United States. Indeed, many psychoanalysts still understand the aims of clinical technique in such terms. On the other hand, and especially in France, psychoanalysis has been pulled in a highly abstract direction. In France, psychoanalysis became increasingly divorced from its founding concern with representation, fantasy, and passion, and instead was projected into the academic discourse of philosophy, being read as a dislocation of theoretical knowledge itself. Sherry Turkle expresses well the differences between these cultural, institutional appropriations of psychoanalysis:

> In the story of what happened to psychoanalysis in the United States, the fact that the "American Freud" was nearly monopolized by physicians, a social group under the greatest possible pressure to emphasize the useful, took the general American preference for the pragmatic and raised it to a higher power. In France, the psychiatric resistance to psychoanalysis allowed it a long period of incubation in the world of artists and writers before a significant breakthrough into medicine, a pattern which reinforced the French tendency to take ideas and invest them with philosophical and ideological significance instead of turning them outward toward problem solving. (1992, 49)

These cultural differences, between "useful" and "abstract" appropriations of psychoanalysis at the institutional level, have more in common than is often supposed, or at least this is the case as concerns the issue of expert knowledge. For both U.S. and French appropriations of psychoanalysis, despite differences of content, express an overriding emphasis on control: in the case of U.S. psychoanalysis, control over behavioral adaptation; in the case of French psychoanalysis, control over the metatheorization of the life of the mind.

The process of psychologization that I am describing here is but a variant of, in Michel Foucault's terms, the power systems of an "apparatus of sexuality," one of the most unrelenting forms of domination and social control, as it transforms polymorphous sexualities into culturally routinized prohibitions and permissions pertaining to pleasure.[5] Foucault's provocative studies of the connections between discourse and sexuality capture well the sense of fixity prompted by the more normalizing forms of psychoanalysis detailed in the foregoing paragraphs. Preexisting types of sensual pleasure, says Foucault, become "sex" as the creation of discourses about it—such as medical texts, therapeutic books, and self-help manuals—bring about an ordering of "normal" and "pathological" sexual practices. The subject, according to Foucault, is not "sexed" in any meaningful sense prior to its constitution in a discourse through which it becomes a carrier of a natural or essential sex. As Foucault puts this: "The notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning: sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signified" (1981, 154). As such, sexuality has as its focus the manipulation of the body, a manipulation that disguises and extends the power relations that connect domination directly with the individual subject.

For Foucault, sex infiltrates and controls everyday pleasure because the self-awareness of the individual as a subject of sexuality is the result of a forgotten coercion and subordination to power/knowledge networks. The production of sex as a category is the end result of the mystifying organization of power/knowledge relations. As Foucault writes of this intrinsic link between sexuality and expert knowledge:

> In the family, parents and relatives became the chief agents of a deployment of sexuality which drew its outside support from doctors, educators, and later psychiatrists, and which began by competing with the relations of alliance but soon "psychologized" or "psychiatrized" the latter. Then these new personages made their appearance: the nervous woman, the frigid wife, the indifferent mother—or worse, the

> mother beset by murderous obsessions—the impotent, sadistic, perverse husband, the hysterical or neurasthenic girl, the precocious and already exhausted child, and the young homosexual who rejects marriage or neglects his wife . . . caught in the grip of this deployment of sexuality which had invested it from without, contributing to its solidification into its modern form, the family broadcast the long complaint of its sexual suffering to doctors, educators, psychiatrists, priests, and pastors, to all the "experts" that would listen. (1981, 110–111)

This process of psychologization, though, is in some ways even more alienating than Foucault's characterization suggests. For what is psychologized, and hence appropriated, by modern institutions is an awareness of the creative, dynamic realm of unconscious fantasy itself. The self-instituting force of imagination is translated and experienced as part of the iron grip of expert, psychological systems on knowledge. Desire has moved out of the domain of the self and into the institutional realm of laws and regulations; it is thus projected into something outside and Other.

In Foucault's terms, the issue of a translation from fantasy to the institution as such is perpetually deferred because the sexualized subject is always the product of subjection to power: a "deployment of sexuality which had invested it from without." Yet, what is it that frames this "without"? What elements of fantasy, desire, and affect are invested in systems of knowledge and power? How does the human subject experience expert systems as colonizing knowledge affecting personal relationships? How is psychoanalysis experienced as a delivery system of expert knowledge on sexuality, love, and intimacy? These questions, so important to an adequate understanding of the relations between self and society, touch on some of the core issues relating to the self-understanding of imagination in the contemporary era. Of crucial importance in this respect is the uncovering and denial of unconscious fantasy.

Sexuality, Fantasy, Modernity

Let us, then, rethink the relation between modernity and imagination in a way that seeks to establish a psychopolitical link between the recognition and denial of fantasy. A driving concern with the fantasy life of the individual, with feelings, passions, wishes, fears, and anxieties, as well as with the question of the delimitation of the psychic, emerges as intrinsic to modernity. This delimitation of the psychic is, in large part, an outcome of the transformation from premodern to modern cultures, a transition that, as seen by Rieff, emerges out of a loss of community and a softening of the boundaries between the private and public spheres. With the breakdown of tradition and the dissolution of meaning, the self turns inward. Yet there is more to this delimitation than sociology alone. The turn toward the "inner life" of the subject, to psychic interiority, is itself attained through the activity of the unconscious imagination and can be understood as a creative rewriting of the historical trajectory of modernity. It is a rewriting of the social-historical process insofar as it facilitates thinking, at once personal and social, of the *contingency of self and society.* "Freud," writes Richard Rorty, "suggests that we need to return to the particular—to see particular present situations and options as similar to or different from particular past actions or events. He thinks that only if we catch hold of some crucial idiosyncratic contingencies in our past shall we be able to make something worthwhile of ourselves, to create present selves whom we can respect" (1989, 33). This uncovering of the particularity of unconscious fantasy and sexuality (analyzed by Freud in terms of energy, pleasure, anxiety, and repression) provides for self-knowledge of the constitutive role of human ambivalence and promotes an engagement with psychic and sexual life.

My analysis of Freud in the stream of modernity, however, has also shown that the instituting power of fantasy has been correspondingly neglected and repressed in theoretical discourse and as part of modern social activity. As regards theory, it has been argued that there is a fundamental tension in Freud's thought between the creative power attributed to unconscious fantasy on the one hand, and a desubjectifying tendency that displaces imagination to the confines of rationalism, objectivity, and scientificity, on the other. Freud's thinking about the psyche takes place on these two distinct axes, which results in the radical power of unconscious imagination being at once discovered and expropriated, uncovered and denied. So, too, the difficulties of ambivalence are sidestepped, or displaced, in whole sectors of contemporary culture. What I have called the psychologization of desire arises directly out of this repression of awareness of the profound fantasization of all personal and social life. In such instances, fantasy has lost its intrinsic connection with self-institution as a central focus for "experience" and instead is brought under the control of technical knowledge and rationalism. The connection to psychical imagination is lost in the sense that matters concerning fantasy, sexuality, and intimacy are projected, and experienced, as part of the orderly, rationally structured domain of psychological and psychoanalytic expertise. The problem may lie within (at the level of the psychic), but it is a condition from which escape is sought from without (at the level of the social).

As regards the psychologization of desire, one can agree with Foucault that the pathologization of sexuality is constituted and reproduced by the expansion of power/knowledge systems. Discourses of science, especially psychological expertise, produce subjects by manufacturing the conditions and operation of sexuality, of normalization via the differentiation of sexual practices. This is achieved through the material inscription of discourses into social procedures and regulations that frame sex and sexuality and that constitute the way people forge self-awareness of their place in the sexual field. Yet this process of manufacturing sexual identity is much more of a psychical drama than Foucault recognizes. The self is both subject to power systems, such as discourses of the person and sex, and is engaged in responses to such classificatory operations through imagining, fantasy, and in-depth reworkings of psychical organization. Unlike Foucault, then, I think that psychological repression is produced not only as the normalization of sexuality, but also as the sexualization of normalizing power. The trials of sexual prohibition are highly fantasized settings.

Paradoxically, this sexualization of normalization works to reinforce the principal dualisms of the modern era, such as the split between the psychological and the social, norm and anomaly, rationality and imagination, objectivity and fantasy. Certitude as a strategy of survival is central to the symptoms of modernity. Yet not only subjectivity is at stake here. The modernist aims of ordering and enframing, which destroy the alterity of self and society, penetrate theoretical knowledge and, crucially, psychoanalysis itself.

Notes

1 Freud's "Project for a Scientific Psychology," written in 1895, was first published in 1950 as "Aus der Anfången der Psychanalyse." It was then translated into English by Ernst Kris in 1954 (Freud 195/1954). References to the text in this chapter, however, are to the *Standard Edition* (Freud 1895/1966).

2 For a brief discussion of the influence of Helmholtz and Herbart on Freud, see Ricoeur (1970, 72–73).

3 Ricoeur's (1970, 80) critique of the "Project" makes a good deal of this point, highlighting that Freud cannot give a mechanistic explanation of how the threat of unpleasure leads to a noncathexis of quantities stored in the ego.

4 Perhaps this is also the place to note that I accept Masson's point concerning the sterility of psychoanalytic therapy, or at least of its failings when practiced reductively. However, against Masson, I locate the reasons for this in the growing psychologization of culture and the transformation of psychoanalysis into an expert system of spe-

cialized knowledge. As such, the undoing of such psychologization involves grasping the constitutive role of fantasy in subjectivity, culture, and society; it requires a postmodern turning back of fantasy upon itself. Such an undoing would involve, contra Masson, more fantasy, not less, or at least more of a critical appreciation of the structuring role of fantasy in personal and cultural life. My view on this issue is set out in greater detail in the following sections of this essay.

5 See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, published in three volumes, of which volume 1, *An Introduction* (1981), is especially relevant to the concerns of this essay.