**Dilemmas of psychoanalysis and psychology:
Critical conceptions of subjectivity in the work of Marie Jahoda**

Ian Parker

Professor of Management, School of Management, University of Leicester, UK, and Visiting
Professor in the School of Human and Community Development, University of the
Witwatersrand, South Africa

Email: discourseunit@gmail.com

**Dilemmas of psychoanalysis and psychology:
Critical conceptions of subjectivity in the work of Marie Jahoda**

ABSTRACT

This paper explores work that anticipates current interest in the development of 'psychosocial studies'. Marie Jahoda's (1977) *Freud and the Dilemmas of Psychology* raises important questions about the historical and extant relationships between psychoanalysis and the discipline of psychology. This paper traces those questions within two contextual frames. The first contextual frame comprises the historical vicissitudes of psychoanalysis and psychology from the 1930s through to the 1970s. Jahoda's questions are rooted in a theoretical background that brings the tradition of German-speaking radical psychoanalysis into Anglo-American psychology. The second contextual frame is the development of 'critical' psychological attempts to recruit psychoanalysis for an alternative account of subjectivity from the 1980s through to the turn of the 21st century. Jahoda's contribution, and its place as a 'hinge-point' between old and new conceptions of psychology, is to draw attention to the role of psychoanalytic ideas in the discipline and to provoke further critical reflection on Freud's work today.

Key words: Marie Jahoda, psychoanalysis, critical psychology, subjectivity, history.

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses an important historical strand of work that anticipates the current turn towards 'psychosocial studies' (Parker, 2014). It focuses on dilemmas that Marie Jahoda (1907-2001) opens up in psychology concerning the role of what some critical psychologists now tend to refer to as 'subjectivity'. To talk about 'subjectivity' rather than, say, 'experience' can be a way of drawing attention to *unconscious* aspects of human life; in some critical accounts that aim to 'change the subject' of psychology that is also, of course, to make psychologists take psychoanalysis seriously (e.g., Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, Walkerdine, 1984). The particular relationship between psychoanalysis and psychology lends to 'subjectivity' a meaning which embraces aspects of human experience that are not available to conscious awareness. Psychoanalysis is one way of drawing attention to the importance of meaningful aspects of intention and memory that are absent to the individual subject yet present in its effects. Critical psychology is now one place for considering that argument (Parker, 1999). This is exactly what Jahoda does in her 1977 book *Freud and the Dilemmas of Psychology*.

Many psychologists have been acquainted with psychoanalysis, though the connections between the two disciplines are often obscured. To take one example that is symptomatic of this state of affairs, students of Piaget do not read in the textbooks that Piaget was a member of the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) and practised as a psychoanalyst (Schepeler, 1993). Neither does Jahoda make these links. She remarks that 'Even so remarkable psychologist as Piaget has limited his concern to cognitive development' (Jahoda, 1977, p. 40). She does this because the line of the book is that there is something insufficient about psychology that psychoanalysis can redress. If Piaget were presented as someone who worked with psychoanalysis it would disturb the picture of the broken links between the disciplines that Jahoda then wants to repair.

Many psychologists have argued that we should not neglect Freud, and many of the representations of Freud's ideas in psychology textbooks are grossly inaccurate (Richards, 1989). Recently there have been attempts to close the gap between psychology and psychoanalysis by coordinating more sympathetic renderings of each side of the argument, and these attempts do continue the kind of questions Jahoda raised (Frosh, 1989, 1997). Jahoda's book is important for two reasons.

First, it is located at a particular historical moment that draws upon the past and anticipates future developments in psychology. The 1970s in the UK saw the emergence of much talk of 'crisis', and 'new paradigm' critiques of positivist psychology that emphasised the importance of experience as configured by the accounts that people gave of their actions (e.g., Harré and Secord, 1972). While these critiques seemed to bypass psychoanalysis altogether, the turn to language and then to discourse that they provoked has also seen a re-emergence of psychoanalytic arguments among psychologists (e.g., Parker, 1997; Billig, 1999). What Jahoda did in the mid 1970s was to keep psychology open to the critical possibilities that psychoanalysis presents.

Second, the book is located at a particular conceptual hinge-point between psychology and psychoanalysis. That is, it opens up questions about what psychologists should be doing, and it does so in a way that disturbs the assumptions they make about the boundaries of the discipline as a self-enclosed positivist enterprise. Recent work by psychologists working in qualitative research and media studies have been disturbing those assumptions about method and representation, but in a very different way to Jahoda (e.g.,

Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Blackman and Walkerdine, 2001). We will return to that second aspect presently, but first it is necessary to look at that question of the historical moment of the book and the context for reading it now.

HISTORICAL MOMENT

Freud and the Dilemmas of Psychology raises a number of important questions about the historical and more recent relationships between psychoanalysis and the discipline of psychology.

The book reviews the reasons why psychologists try to keep Freud at bay, the development of psychoanalysis as a method and its contribution to our understanding of psychopathology, personality and individual differences. There is then a discussion of Freud's writings on 'metapsychology', problems of validation and the connections between debates over interpretation and intention in psychoanalysis and some similar concerns in psychology.

Toward the end of the book Jahoda rejects the hermeneutic readings of Freud, partly because if they were accepted 'psychology and psychoanalysis would most likely arrive at an irrevocable split' (Jahoda, 1977, p. 152). This is exactly what the book is aiming to avoid, and it is not accidental that the book is explicitly aimed at psychologists and that it is published by the Hogarth Press, which publishes books for the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, including the *Standard Edition* of Freud's psychoanalytic writings.

The questions Jahoda raises about scientific inquiry in psychoanalytic writing are acknowledged, but in each case in order to turn the charge around to show that 'they also plague academic psychology' (Jahoda, 1977, p. 19). We can trace those questions about the relationships between psychoanalysis and the discipline of psychology within two contextual frames.

Old crises

The first contextual frame comprises the historical vicissitudes and mutual misunderstanding of psychoanalysis and psychology from the 1930s through to the 1970s. Jahoda's questions are rooted in a theoretical background that brings the tradition of German-speaking radical psychoanalysis into Anglo-American psychology. Notice, for example, the way she brings in a reference early on to her teacher Karl Buhler's 1929 book *Die Krise der Psychologie*, and points out that when the Anglo-Saxon world became 'the centre of psychological thought' such contributions were obscured (Jahoda, 1977, p. 2). To say that this is the tradition of 'radical psychoanalysis' is not so much to indicate the explicit links between psychoanalytic explanation and Marxist political theory in such groupings as existed in the late 1920s around the Frankfurt School, as to draw attention to the pervasive left social democratic assumptions about human needs and social arrangements in psychoanalytic work. Many psychoanalysts were sympathetic if not directly involved in socialist politics, and one effect of the destruction of Freudian thought by fascism in Europe in the 1930s was that the link between psychoanalysis and progressive politics in a particular tradition of research was broken. This tradition is expressed in the concern with the distinctive nature of human beings as a nature expressed through *work*. Although this idea is usually identified with Marx alone nowadays, for Freud and Freudians work was essential to the civilizing process and mental well-being. This meant that the absence of work spelt something worse than alienation.

Jahoda's 1933 study of unemployment, with Lazarsfeld and Zeisel, in *Marienthal*, for example, includes accounts in which the psychoanalytic reference points are implicit, but they are contextually intertwined with the employment of psychoanalytic ideas to interpret social issues in German-speaking culture in the early 1930s. Take the chapter on 'Fading Resilience' that draws attention to 'splurges' of 'irrational spending' amidst 'strict economy' (Jahoda et al., 1972, p. 54); 'such episodes are frequently bound up with frustrated love for the children', some of which could perhaps to be interpreted, they say, 'as a yearning for some remains of joy, some of the others are possibly symptoms of dissolution' (Jahoda et al., 1972, p. 55). In the chapter on 'The Meaning of Time' the researchers note the slow 'speed of walking miles per hour, as if 'they have forgotten how to hurry' (Jahoda et al., 1972, 66). Few men – only 12 out of a 100 – are wearing a watch, and the seasons 'make themselves felt more strongly' (Jahoda et al., 1972, p. 77).

Far from opening up new opportunities for leisure, which is the kind of thing that present-day researchers drawing on psychology and psychoanalysis would tend to look for, Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel conclude that 'both the general pattern of life and that of the individual show that the people of Marienthal have gone back to a more primitive, less differentiated experience of time' (Jahoda et al., 1972, p. 77).

Jahoda's Freud in her book *Employment and Unemployment* is still, half a century later, a theorist for whom 'work is man's strongest tie to reality' (Jahoda, 1982, p. 60). Psychoanalytic understanding of the way unemployment gives rise to a condition in which 'their grip on reality is not lost but loosened' (Jahoda, 1982, p. 61) is elaborated with reference to Heinz Hartmann's psychoanalytic ego psychology (e.g., Hartmann, 1958). Hartmann, who is also an important reference point in *Freud and the Dilemmas of Psychology*, took psychoanalysis itself in a direction that would make it compatible, he hoped, with scientific psychology. It is a direction of work that was a driving force in the dominant tradition in US American psychoanalysis after the Second World War.

In this tradition it is possible to determine what is and what is, and what is not an accurate relation to reality. That relation is established, according to ego psychology, in three ways: by inference from observed consequences; by sharing with others; and through immediate experience. Psychoanalysis here is presented as avowedly realist and adaptationist. The meanings of each term 'reality' and 'adaptation' are here each defined by the other.

Jahoda herself notes in *Freud and the Dilemmas of Psychology* that Freud 'nowhere elaborated his notions on adaptation systematically', but she argues that 'it is under the adaptive point of view that his basic outlook on the condition of man found expression in *The Future of an Illusion* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*' (Jahoda, 1977, p. 111).

What Hartmann and his colleagues in the US did was to read this adaptive motif back into their model of perceptual and cognitive processes inside the individual. The development of this psychoanalytic ego psychology was intertwined with the study of ego defence mechanisms elaborated by Anna Freud (1936). Notice that 'adaptation' to reality comes to replace the importance given to 'work' as a relation to reality. It would be possible to say that Jahoda is struggling to retain something important to a psychoanalytic conception of what it is to be a human being, but it is a struggle not only against psychology but also against a powerful historically determined shift in psychoanalysis itself.

There are some unfortunate consequences of Jahoda's own preferred version of psychoanalysis here, not only with respect to the goals of psychoanalysis but also with respect to our image of what a psychoanalytic view of subjectivity might do to mainstream

psychology. The two-way effect of the notion of adaptation and relation to reality is to make it indeed seem as if 'conscious purposes presented no problem', which is a view Jahoda attributes to Freud (Jahoda, 1977, p. 49). If we take seriously Freud's own account of the structure of perception in papers like 'A note upon the mystic writing pad', which Jahoda does briefly discuss (Jahoda, 1977, pp. 47-48) then we would question the unity of conscious as well as trace the effect of contradictory unconscious ideas.

In that paper Freud (1925) showed how perception itself is rendered conscious – as the trace on the cellophane at the surface of the writing pad – by the operation of the unconscious – the wax slab underneath the cellophane. The surface of the wax slab, and so the history of its traces from the past, affects conscious perception when it touches what it takes to be (and constitutes as) 'reality'. It is not surprising that the paper that has since become a favourite with those trying to take psychoanalysis in a 'deconstructive' direction (Derrida, 1978; Sampson, 1989). This then brings us in contact with recent 'crisis' debates in psychology.

New crises

The second contextual frame is the development of what we might term 'critical' psychological attempts to recruit psychoanalysis for an alternative account of subjectivity from the 1980s through to the turn of the 21st century. For Jahoda psychoanalysis is a project that failed, but psychologists have not grasped *how* it fails. It is important to grasp this question if the questions that psychoanalysis raises are not to be lost. And it is all the more important now when the years of psychological reframing of psychoanalytic phenomena look ready to claim more victims.

The December 2000 issue of *The Psychologist*, which focused on the relevance of Freud for psychology, is one example. The articles were devoted to an assessment of Freudian concepts by researchers working within an experimental paradigm. Even the contribution by Peter Fonagy, who is an IPA psychoanalyst, examined Freud on the terms set by the discipline of psychology, and concluded, not surprisingly, that 'Psychoanalysis needs to change', quite explicitly refusing the idea that we should think of 'psychoanalysis as offering an alternative epistemology to the one we habitually use in psychological research' (Fonagy, 2000a, p. 623). This means that he thus subscribes to 'a hierarchy of research design' that puts case reports below prospective studies, comparison studies, and 'gold standard' randomised controlled trials (Fonagy, 2000a, p. 621).

That this sentiment is voiced by a contemporary Freudian – that is, by someone working in the tradition of Anna Freud and US American ego psychology - is grim enough. But the gloomy consequences for psychoanalysis get worse still in Fonagy's comments on an article in the journal *Neuro-psychoanalysis* the same year. The article looked critically at the 'two cultures' of experimental psychology and psychoanalysis, and made the point that the two disciplines speak quite different languages that are difficult to reconcile (Whittle, 2000). Fonagy argues that 'the entire psychoanalytic enterprise has been shaken to its core, at least in North America and many countries in Europe' by the insistence on empirically validated treatments; 'Pluralism has gone beyond acceptable boundaries', Fonagy claims, and the 'fragmentation of theory' and indifference of psychoanalysts to colleagues in other disciplines spells, he says, 'the possible imminent demise of the discipline' (Fonagy, 2000b, p. 4).

Fonagy is talking about the demise of psychoanalysis here, which is surely not something that Jahoda had in mind in the 1970s when she was urging psychologists to take Freud seriously.

Jahoda is quite explicit in her contribution to the BPS 'Models of Man' conference at the end of the 1970s that 'a pluralism of approach is not only desirable but inevitable' (Jahoda, 1980, p. 277). And it seems to me that Jahoda's questioning of psychology's attempt to be indifferent to psychoanalysis is diametrically opposed to psychoanalysis throwing in the towel in this way.

Jahoda's comments at the 'Models of Man' conference also anticipate some of the lines of debate that critical psychologists have been working with in recent years. Her 'rejection of the idea of one unitary model of man for psychology' (Jahoda, 1980, p. 286), and her insistence that 'the ultimate questions about human existence cannot be decided by science' (Jahoda, 1980, p. 286) are precisely themes that have led many researchers in the discipline sceptical about unitary models and scientific reason back to Freud. However, and this is where we should move on to look at the way the book functions as a conceptual hinge-point which has some relevance for contemporary 'critical' questions in psychology.

CONCEPTUAL DILEMMAS

Freud and the Dilemmas of Psychology is actually itself structured by three dilemmas or, better to say, contradictions that would be interpreted and spun differently by critical psychologists from the way Jahoda did in 1977.

Thorn in the flesh

First, let us take the argument that 'the very existence of Freud's thought is a thorn in the flesh of academic psychology that should not be prematurely removed' (Jahoda, 1977, p. 2). This opens up psychology, and draws attention to the way Freud operates to destabilize the methodological assumptions as well as substantive claims that psychology makes about human beings. It chimes with the tactical use made of Freud by some developmental critical psychologists when they argue that psychology pushes aside subjectivity, irrationality and the operations of the unconscious, but that these then return to haunt the discipline (e.g., Burman, 1994). It is exactly the pushing aside of these things that makes psychoanalysis into a thorn in its flesh.

But then a few sentences later Jahoda risks closing down the uncertainty Freud provokes, when she says that the study of Freud 'still has a function to fill for the development of psychology' (Jahoda, 1977, p. 2). This is one point where Piaget is summoned to warrant the claim that Freud's account is 'a reasonable approximation of the sexual, cognitive and emotional development of both sexes' (Jahoda, 1977, p. 83). Not only is there a 'similarity between Freud and Piaget in their approach to the child's construction of reality' (Jahoda, 1977, p. 83), she says, but she later suggests that 'a combination of direct child observation with psychoanalysis', and she does follow Freud's suggestion here, would be useful (Jahoda, 1977, p. 109).

Against a consistent position

Second, she argues that the reader of the psychological literature on Freud 'should not be misled into thinking that Freud had a consistent position' (Jahoda, 1977, p. 3). One of the dimensions of this inconsistency is opened up further in the final chapter of the book when

she refers to Freud's writing in the domains of natural science, social science and humanism as requiring 'different levels of discourse' (Jahoda, 1977, p. 150). It is exactly this inconsistency that has been worked away at so productively in recent critical studies of rhetoric in Freud's writing. The argument here is that the very nature of psychoanalysis is that it attends to the rhetorical work of closing down alternative points of view, and that it is not surprising that this process of repression as a discursive accomplishment should also suffuse and structure Freud's own accounts (Billig, 1999, c.f., Parker, 2001).

But Jahoda herself closes down this rhetorical aspect of Freud, psychoanalysis, and the assumptions that psychologists make about the value of 'a consistent position' by saying, in the very next sentence, that 'The absence of contradictions would be truly astounding, given the sheer volume of his work' (Jahoda, 1977, p. 3). That is, Freud's volume of writing is summoned to explain why a number of different contradictory things are said by him, and the inherent contradictoriness of discourse and subjectivity is eclipsed. A prosaic explanation thus covers over and closes a more psychoanalytic one. This is a little different from her comment later in the book that Freud himself noted that the complexity of a psychoanalytic account was due to a difficulty 'inherent in the subject matter' and that psychoanalysis 'only tried to do justice to human complexity' (Jahoda, 1977, p. 44). This needs only a little reflexive work to link the theoretical framework in a two-way rhetorical relation with its object of study. But that would then make it difficult to arrive at a conclusion about Freud's various points-of-view as being 'nearer to an optimal complexity', which is the formulation Jahoda gives shortly afterwards at the BPS 'Models of Man conference' (Jahoda, 1980, p. 284).

Psychoanalytic culture

Third, Jahoda notes that Freud has become a cultural force, that 'some acquaintance with his thought is enormously widespread' (Jahoda, 1977, p. 4). This comment potentially takes the reflexive two-way relation between psychoanalysis as a theoretical account and its object a step further, and the comment connects with recent work on the way psychoanalysis has developed as a cultural force that then provides theories of selfhood for subjects of the culture to understand themselves. Studies of the 'social representations' or 'discourses' of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy have shown how the very forms of subjectivity that Freud elaborated not only structure contemporary common-sense accounts of action but also make certain kinds of treatment meaningful (Parker, 1997). This would bring psychoanalysis within the orbit of 'social constructionism' in critical psychology.

Again, this possibility is closed down by Jahoda in her reference to this cultural impact of psychoanalysis as being through a 'vulgarised version' that leads to particular difficulties in redressing the balance among 'all too well prepared minds' (Jahoda, 1977, p. 4). Because the task of the book is to compare a correct reading of Freud with a prescription for the development of psychology, however rhetorically hedged around and uncertain both of those are at points in the text, cultural changes are viewed as external to basic underlying phenomena that may be discovered either by psychoanalysis or psychology. For example, she comments at one point that what 'the lunatic fringe of the women's liberation movement' do not understand is 'that notwithstanding the radical change in adult sexual values, the childhood processes remain unaffected by this' (Jahoda, 1977, p. 88). To treat the diffusion of psychoanalysis as one of the 'dangers' seems to lead to a political stance in relation to psychology which does not sit easily with elements of present-day feminist work

in critical psychology and psychoanalysis (e.g., Burman, 1994; Blackman, Walkerdine, 2001). Jahoda's comment misplaces where psychoanalysis comes from and why it works.

CONCLUSIONS

One hundred years of psychoanalysis does not provide answers about the nature of human subjectivity much more successfully than one hundred years of psychology. What Jahoda does in *Freud and the Dilemmas of Psychology* is to make us think about the questions in a different way. In this respect it is not a case of determining how she is wrong and how we are right, for present-day critical approaches are as much determined by their historical moment as her account is.

The book functions as a hinge-point in the sense that it articulates two historical periods and paradigms of work in psychology. To say that it is a 'hinge-point' is also to open some of the ambiguities in language that psychoanalysis is so adept at explicating, and to say that this hinge-points 'articulates' two things is also to draw attention to the contradictory metaphorical work that language does. Jahoda articulates an argument for psychoanalysis in the context of laboratory-experimental psychology and against it, and she articulates an argument about the relationship between psychoanalysis and 'critical' psychology that we may now fruitfully reflect upon.

The historical moment her book and her work more generally keeps alive is the attention to psychoanalysis as a tradition of work in which are embedded certain points-of-view about human subjectivity which the discipline of psychology still does not fully address. Jahoda's contribution to our understanding of the failures of each now needs to be reassessed as part of a project of critical work across the two arenas of inquiry.

REFERENCES

- Billig, M. 1999. *Freudian Repression: Conversation Creating the Unconscious*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Blackman, L., Walkerdine, V. 2001. *Mass Hysteria: Critical Psychology and Media Studies*. Palgrave: London.
- Burman, E. 1994. *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*. Routledge: London.
- Derrida, J. 1978. Freud and the scene of writing [orig. publ. 1967]. In *Writing and Difference*. Routledge & Kegan Paul: London; 196-231.
- Fonagy, P. 2000a. The outcome of psychoanalysis: The hope of a future. *The Psychologist*, **13**: 620-623.
- Fonagy, P. 2000b. On the relationship of experimental psychology and psychoanalysis. <http://neuro-psa.com/fonagy.htm>
- Freud, A. 1936. *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*. The Hogarth Press: London.
- Freud, S. 1984. A note upon the 'mystic writing-pad' [orig. publ. 1925]. In *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis, Pelican Freud Library Vol. 11*, A. Richards (ed.). Pelican: Harmondsworth; 429-434.
- Frosh, S. 1989. *Psychoanalysis and Psychology: Minding the Gap*. Macmillan: London.
- Frosh, S. 1997. *For and Against Psychoanalysis*. Routledge: London.
- Harré, R., Secord, P.F. 1972. *The Explanation of Social Behaviour*. Basil Blackwell: Oxford.
- Hartmann, H. 1958. *Ego Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation* [orig. publ. 1939]. International Universities Press: New York.

- Henriques, J., Hollway, Urwin, C., Venn, C., Walkerdine, V. 1984. *Changing the Subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity*. London: Methuen.
- Hollway, W., Jefferson, T. 2000. *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: Free Association, Narrative and the Interview Method*. Sage: London.
- Jahoda, M. 1977. *Freud and the Dilemmas of Psychology*. The Hogarth Press: London.
- Jahoda, M. 1980. One model of man or many? In *Models of Man*, Chapman, AJ., Jones, DM. (eds). The British Psychological Society: Leicester; 277-287.
- Jahoda, M. 1982. *Employment and Unemployment: A Social-Psychological Analysis*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Jahoda, M., Lazarsfeld, PF., Zeisel, H. 1972. *Marienthal: The Sociography of an Unemployed Community* [orig. publ. 1933]. Tavistock: London.
- Parker, I. 1997. *Psychoanalytic Culture: Psychoanalytic Discourse in Western Culture*. Sage: London.
- Parker, I. 1999. Critical psychology: Critical links, *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, **1**: 3-18.
- Parker, I. 2001. Review Essay on M. Billig 1999. *Freudian Repression: Conversation Creating the Unconscious*, *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, **11**: 69-73.
- Parker, I. 2014. *Psychology after Psychoanalysis: Psychosocial Studies and Beyond*. London: Routledge.
- Richards, B. 1989. *Images of Freud: Cultural Responses to Psychoanalysis*. Dent: London.
- Sampson, EE. 1989. The deconstruction of the self. In *Texts of Identity*, Shotter, J, Gergen, KJ (eds) Sage: London; 1-19.
- Schepeler, E. 1993. Jean Piaget's experiences on the couch: Some clues to a mystery. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, **74**: 255-273.
- Whittle, P. 2000. Experimental psychology and psychoanalysis: What can we learn from a century of misunderstanding. *Neuro-psychoanalysis*, **1**: 233-245.