

Freud and Cocaine/ Freud and Otto Gross/ Psychoanalysis and  
Addiction

I drew up my Prolegomena to all future Systems of  
Political Economy. I hope it will not be found redolent  
of opium.

De Quincey, Confessions of an English Opium  
Eater.

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A man [Otto Gross] known only to very few by name--  
apart from a handful of psychiatrists (Freud, Jung, et  
al) and secret policemen--and among those few only to  
those who plucked his feathers to adorn their own  
posteriors.

Anton Kuh

I have had news of Gross from Jones . . . .  
Unfortunately there is nothing to be said of him. He is  
addicted and can only do great harm to our cause.

Sigmund Freud

A certain amount of attention has recently been paid to  
Freud's early drug episode, his "love affair with cocaine" (1884-  
1887), including its possible relationship to the birth of

psychoanalysis. Desiring early fame and material success, Freud looked for a key in medicine and thought he had found it in cocaine. Freud championed the drug in glowing terms; he called it, Stanley Edgar Hyman writes, his "magic carpet" and "thrust it on all and sundry, including his sisters, friends, patients, colleagues--everyone" (1954:17). He contributed to the death of a dear friend, believing that cocaine would wean Ernst Fleischl von Marxow from his addiction to morphine: Fleischl died of drug poisoning with Freud nursing him (1). Attacked for his behavior, he reacted by censoring this episode from his professional history although it entered surreptitiously through the famous meditation on dreams.

Reversing this official silence, some later writers have made cocaine responsible for psychoanalysis. In her book The Freudian Fallacy, E. M. Thornton attempts to turn all of psychoanalysis into the symptomatology of Freud's cocaine addiction. Roger Dadoun advances a parallel thesis in a much more generous and metaphoric form: for him, psychoanalysis becomes a symptom of addiction (but not, as Thornton would have it, of Freud's addiction) and a gross example of the return of the repressed. Scott Wilson argues for a comparable agency for Freud's addiction to tobacco, which

remained the unanalyzable yet indispensable support and supplement to the day-to-day work of psychoanalysis.

Indeed it could be argued that the psychoanalytical community, in the form of Freud's circle, was a family of addicts and codependents. Freud was irritated by friends who did not smoke and, according to Hans Sachs, "consequently nearly all those who formed the inner circles became more or less passionate cigar-smokers" (164) (2).

As if to deny such an impossible connection, addiction was placed outside the reach of psychoanalysis. Freud developed only the most rudimentary theories on the subject and denied that psychoanalysis could effectively treat addicts. Addiction, it would seem, was the blind spot of psychoanalysis. According to Freud, the cocaine episode was an "allotrion," a break that results when a coherent discourse is ruptured by a foreign idea (Loose 8). Paralleling the expulsion of addiction, the earliest dissident that Freud read out of the psychoanalytic movement was a cocaine addict therapist named Otto Gross.

Looking back on his cocaine episode, Freud described it as "a side interest, though it was a deep one" (Byck 255). He had first become interested in the drug after reading a report of how Dr. Theodore Aschenbrandt, a German army physician, issued it experimentally to some Bavarian soldiers and it overcame fatigue. He set himself the task of writing a complete history of the drug--"I am occupied in collecting everything that has been

written about this magical substance in order to write a poem to its glory"--the essay Über Coca, which appeared in the year 1884 (Byck? ). Ernest Jones noticed a stylistic extravagance and a personal warmth in this early production, "as if he were in love with the content itself. He used expressions uncommon in a scientific paper, such as 'the most gorgeous excitement,' etc. He heatedly rebuffed the 'slander' that had been published about this precious drug" (53).

Whether Freud was ever addicted to cocaine remains an open question. There are indications that this may have been the case: in the essay and letters of the period he glorified the effects of the drug. In fact, he rendered the drug invisible by insisting there was no drug effect; it produced "health" itself. He wrote of the "exhilaration and lasting euphoria, which in no way differs from the normal euphoria of the healthy person . . . . [You] possess more vitality and capacity for work . . . . In other words, you are simply normal, and it is soon hard to believe that you are under the influence of any drug" (Byck 9). He also denied the drug effect by denying addiction: "Absolutely no craving for the future use of cocaine appears after the first, or even repeated taking of the drug; one feels rather a certain curious aversion to it" (Jones 53-54).

As he hoped, there was fame and fortune to be gained from the medical application of cocaine, but not for him. Ironically,

Freud hit upon one of the only applications that would bear fruit and then gave it away to his ophthalmologist friend Leopold Konigstein, to whom he suggested investigating the drug as an anaesthetic for the eye. When he returned from a visit to his fiancée, Martha Bernays, he found that still another friend, Carl Koller, "to whom I had also spoken about cocaine, had made the decisive experiments" (Jones 50). He blamed this loss on Martha; had he not left Vienna to see her, he would have shared in the discovery (3).

The local application that Freud pursued instead was the use of cocaine as a cure for morphine addiction (widely hailed in the American medical press); his intervention in the treatment of Fleischl turned out badly. Koller's fame rested on a "use beneficial to humanity," while Freud was soon to be denounced by a Berlin psychiatrist, Albrecht Erlenmeyer, for having introduced the "third scourge of humanity." Erlenmeyer presented cocaine as a dangerous and a poisonous drug that indeed led to addiction. "The man who had tried to benefit humanity," Jones wrote, "was now accused of unleashing evil on the world" (62).

Freud then sealed this chapter of his career: Über Coca and a subsequent paper, "Remarks on the Craving for and Fear of Cocaine," were not included in the Standard Edition. He continued to give cocaine a wide berth: when Theodore Reik suggested that the protagonist of his psychoanalytic writings resembled the

English detective Sherlock Holmes, he answered that he preferred to think of him instead on the model of Giovanni Morelli, the famous detector of art forgeries (Hyman 1962: 313).

Fifteen years after these attacks, Freud had abandoned material medicine and discovered psychoanalysis. His great epic poem was to be not Über Coca but The Interpretation of Dreams. Several commentators have suggested an underground causal relationship rather than the apparent sharp break between the cocaine episode and the discovery of psychoanalysis (4). The most interesting of the scientific writers, Peter Swales, suggests that "Freud's 'libido' is merely a mask and a symbol for cocaine; the drug, or rather its invisible ghost, haunts the whole of Freud's writing to the very end." Freud repeatedly reminded his readers that the "neuroses bear a distinct resemblance [elsewhere, "the greatest clinical resemblance"] to conditions caused by psychoactive chemicals." Swales goes one step further and takes Freud's "resemblance," his metaphoric relationship, to be a metonymy, a theory of "sexual toxins": "In effect, then, Freud's early theory of somatic sexual neuroses was predicated upon the hypothesis of a chemical substance, noxious when excessive or depleted--which is why this early theory is referred to as Freud's 'toxological theory of neuroses'" (274). If Swales is correct what we see here is Freud surreptitiously bringing addiction back into the analytic frame as a model for neurosis.

In a more poetic vein, Roger Dadoun suggests that psychoanalysis emerged as a consequence of the suppression of cocaine, a counter formation: "At approximately the same time, Sherlock Holmes and Sigmund Freud performed the same gesture, the first injected, the second ingested cocaine. For both, cocaine sustained and nourished a remarkable intellectual movement that one could consider constitutive of both the detective novel and psycho-analysis" (69).

Dadoun's suggestion may not recommend itself as history of science, but we do know that psychoanalysis was based on another monumental act of suppression, the suppression of parental seduction, a comparable move from the material to the phantasmagoric realm. We also know that pharmacology and mental illness, particularly the psychoses, are deeply involved with one another: "In 1845, J. J. Moreau de Tours presented a comprehensive theory of psychosis based on a model of hashish intoxication. This work . . . was the forerunner of the mescaline and LSD "model" psychoses, also advocated as prototypes for an organic or toxic theory of psychosis" (Byck xix).

Both Thomas De Quincey and Freud wrote books on dreams. We see De Quincey's dream theory through his drug use, whereas with Freud we see his drug use through his dream theory. If Confessions is driven by opium, so is The Interpretation of Dreams, in Dadoun's reading, driven by cocaine or the suppression

of cocaine. The link between the cocaine episode and psychoanalysis surfaces in two of the core dreams in Freud's 1900 work: the dream of Irma's injection and the dream of the botanical monograph.

Freud took cocaine the night he dreamed the famous dream of Irma's injection, the "Specimen Dream" which forms the centerpiece of The Interpretation of Dreams--the dream which revealed that the fulfilment of a secret wish lies at the heart of every dream,. The dream has been read as expressing guilt about his cocaine-taking. In it Freud met Irma, a family friend and patient, whom he had diagnosed as hysterical and treated by analysis. He became alarmed that she was really suffering from an organic illness, and his senior colleague M confirmed this. It became clear her illness had been caused by a toxic injection given by another of Freud's colleagues, his family doctor Otto: "We were directly aware, too, of the origin of the infection. Not long before, when she was feeling unwell, my friend Otto had given her an injection of a preparation of propyl, propyls . . . . propionic acid . . . . trimethylamin (and I saw before me the formula for this printed in heavy type)" (5). The dream ended with Freud censuring Otto's practice, saying that "Injections of that sort ought not to be made so thoughtlessly" and adding that the syringe had probably not been clean (4.107).



In the monograph dream, Freud dreamed that he had written a monograph with dried plant specimens attached to the illustrations. In the analysis he remembered his own earlier monograph on a plant, coca, which allowed Koller to make his medical breakthrough. The day after the dream he had a day-dream about cocaine:

If I were ever afflicted with glaucoma, I would go to Berlin, and there undergo an operation, incognito . . . . The surgeon, who would not know the name of his patient, would boast, as usual, how easy these operations had become since the introduction of cocaine; and I should not betray the fact that I myself had a share in this discovery.

Freud then turned to his last memory of cocaine, another book, a Festschrift which stated yet again that that the discovery of the anaesthetic properties of cocaine had been due to K. Koller. This should have been a book about Freud. He is reminded of a Berlin friend who wrote him "'I am very much occupied with your dream-book. I see it lying finished before me and I see myself turning the pages.' How much I envied him his gift as a seer! If only I could have seen it lying finished before me!" His book on cocaine would become the book on dreams (4.169-172).

Within the early psychoanalytic movement, Otto Gross (1877-1920), was most strikingly Freud's Other, the analyst who repudiated repression and embraced both perversion and politics. He was also Freud's Same-As-Other, a brilliant psychoanalyst and a cocaine addict. He appears in a D. H. Lawrence novel, Mr. Noon, because of Lawrence's intimacy with one of Gross's lovers, Frieda von Richthofen, and he is described by the Frieda character as simply living on drugs, and "he was so beautiful, like a white Dionysus": "He was almost the first psychoanalyst, you know--he was Viennese too, and far, far more brilliant than Freud" (127). He was the first analyst to be expelled by Freud, and he is the most completely forgotten of all the dissidents. Rik Loose is the only contemporary writer to touch on the deep relationship between the two men. Freud and Jung broke off an analytic relationship with Gross--"It is possible to speculate that it was Gross's addiction to cocaine that caused resistance in Freud [to analyzing him]"; Loose suggests that Gross "was the waste product of their desire and therefore also the waste product of the psychoanalytic establishment" (44) (6).

But it was not only Otto Gross who was expelled from psychoanalysis as the constituting condition of the new discipline; addiction was expelled as well, and Loose suggests that it was precisely the Gross affair that blocked Freud and Jung with respect to theorizing addiction (7). Freud devoted some

thought to the nature of addiction, attaching it to the practice of masturbation: "It has dawned on me," he wrote to Fliess in 1897, "that masturbation is the one major habit, the 'primal addiction' and that it is only as a substitute and replacement for it that the other addictions--for alcohol, morphine, tobacco, etc.--come into existence" (date: SE 2.272). But that was all. Other psychoanalysts (Marie Bonaparte, Sándor Radó, Karl Menninger, among them) declared that addiction is a symptomatic form of infantile suckling: "For, as we have repeatedly shown, the predilection to wine, alcohol, and drinking, however deeply tinged with later acquired homosexuality, primarily derives from the first nutrient proffered the child--the milk of the mother's breast" (Bonaparte 523).

Something about this connection led Freud to the far-from-obvious conclusion that addiction could not be treated by psychoanalysis. In a 1916 letter to Sandor Ferenczi, he wrote that "drug addicts were not very suitable for psychoanalysis because every backsliding or difficulty in therapy led to further recourse to the drug" (Byck xix). Even worse, in a startling turnabout, Freud envisioned psychoanalysis brought to a halt by addiction: "The part played by this addiction [masturbation] in hysteria is quite enormous; and it is perhaps there that my great, still outstanding, obstacle is to be found, wholly or in part. And here, of course, the doubt arises of whether an

addiction of this kind is curable, or whether analysis and therapy are brought to a stop at this point and must content themselves with transforming a case of hysteria into one of neurasthenia" (2.272). The result of this horrifying thought is that addiction was simply shut out from discourse.

During his short life, Gross was praised as a brilliant doctor and philosopher and regularly committed to institutions as a dangerous lunatic (8). His conception of psychoanalysis moved from a scene of doctors and clinics to one of revolutionary anarchists in the streets. He was by all accounts a charismatic and influential figure--"a personality with an almost irresistible radiance": one of his few eulogies claimed that "Germany's best revolutionary spirits have been educated and directly inspired by him" (Sombart 136 and Heuer, "Otto") (9).

Ernest Jones, who met him in Munich in 1908, where Gross introduced him to psychoanalysis, called him "the nearest approach to the romantic ideal of a genius I have ever met," adding, "Almost everyone who came under his spell was subjected to fascination from which he could hardly escape" (Jones 173 and 177). Freud told Jung that he, Jung, was "the only one capable of making an original contribution; except perhaps for O. Gross" (Freud-Jung Letters 126). Speaking of the delicate task of treating Gross, Freud wrote,

I originally thought that you would only take him on for the withdrawal period and that I would start

analytical treatment in the autumn . . . . but I must admit that it is better for me this way . . . . the difficulty would have been that the dividing line between our respective property rights in creative ideas would have been effaced; we would never have been able to disentangle them with a clear conscience (94) (10).

Gross was also a lifelong drug addict. He became addicted in 1900 when he traveled to South America as a medical doctor. He was institutionalized often for his drug addictions and died of pneumonia in Berlin in 1920 after being found in the street near-starved and frozen.

Gross began his psychiatric career as a champion of Freudian doctrine. He and Jung defended Freud's theories at the first international Congress on Psychiatry and Neurology in Amsterdam in 1907. His ideas of mental illness and its treatment, however, changed as a result of his exposure to the Bohemian atmosphere of the Schwabing district in Munich, particularly the anarchist world of Erich Mühsam and Gustav Landauer. In a 1907 letter he told his wife Frieda that "the enormous shadow of Freud lies no longer over my path" (Michaels 38). What emerged was an anti-authoritarian psychiatry that sought to emancipate the patient from all hierarchical structures such as patriarchy, a therapeutic program in which individuals could freely choose practices like drug-taking or suicide. U. Raulff said of him, "He was not just a psycho-analyst--he was a psycho-anarchist and thus

stands for the subversive potential of analysis--which earned him the epithet of the 'devil underneath the couch'" (Heuer, "Devil").

Gross developed what might be called a "libidinal psychoanalysis" devoted to the release of individual erotic potential as a precondition for social and political change (?). Psychoanalysis was a weapon in a countercultural revolution aimed at overthrowing the existing order, not a means to force people to adapt better to it: "Gross was thus the first of Freud's disciples to do what many have done since: to argue for sickness as a sign of fundamental health, and to fight for those revolutionary libertarian implications of psychoanalysis that Freud deliberately refused" (Turner 143). Gross and Freud were in total disagreement on the subjects of repression, sublimation and perversion. Where Freud saw discontent as the price to be paid for civilization, Gross saw "eternal discontent" as the only hope for a glorious future. Eternal discontent had entered the world when Cain killed his brother: "this act is the birth of revolutionary protest" (Mitzman 105).

This was the time of the first counterculture, the turn-of-the-century sexual revolution, and Munich, Schwabing, and Gross were very much caught up in the spirit of that movement. "Otto Gross, 'erotic Dionysus,' drug addict and psychoanalyst, was the electrifying figure at the center of the 'erotic revolution'"

(Wilson date:118). According to a onetime friend, the Czech novelist Franz Werfel, he was even the author of the phrase "sexual revolution" (Heuer, "Devil). He took lovers and fathered children freely. Most notable among the former were Frieda and Else Richthofen. He idolized Frieda as the perfect woman, had a charismatic influence on her and, through her, on her next lover, D. H. Lawrence. He was also implicated in a series of scandals, assisted suicides of patients and lovers: "Gross was the great breaker of bonds, the loosener, the beloved of an army of women he had driven mad" (Noll 70).

Like Freud, Jung had also been impressed with Gross, to the point of psychic identification: he wrote Freud that "in Gross I discovered many aspects of my own nature, so that he often seemed like my twin brother" (McGuire 156). Jung wrote his paper "The Significance of the Father in the Destiny of the Individual" with Gross, although in later editions he denied Gross' influence, and he based his differentiation of extroverted and introverted character types on concepts that Gross had formulated twenty years earlier.

The great influence of Gross on Jung, however, was precisely sexual liberation, transforming his life and producing the spiritual leader that would hold sway in the coming century. Thus, Gross was also the cause of Jung's break with Freud--the

man who persuaded him of the therapeutic value of adultery as a cure for every kind of neurosis. Richard Noll writes that

Gross captivated Jung with his [sexual] theories . . . his Nietzscheanism, and his utopian dreams of transforming the world through psychoanalysis . . . . He heard of the seductions of the von Richthofen sisters, of illegitimate children, of vegetarianism and opium and orgies . . . . and listened, amazed, as Gross informed him of neopagans, Theosophists, and sun worshipers who had formed their own colonies in Jung's Switzerland" (84) (11).

Specifically, Gross freed Jung to fuck a Jew--what Freud would later accuse him of in reference to the psychoanalytic movement--since the immediate fruit of this sexual liberation was an affair with a patient, Sabina Spielrein.

At the Salzburg Congress of 1908 there was an emblematic exchange between Gross and Freud: Gross compared Freud to Nietzsche and hailed him as a destroyer of old prejudices, an enlarger of psychological horizons, and a scientific revolutionary, to which Freud replied, "We are doctors, and doctors it is our intention to remain" (Turner 143). Gross's discontent with classical psychoanalysis had to do with its theoretical timidity and patriarchal associations. He accused Freud of going over to the fathers (Green 1974:46). In his



struggle against patriarchy, Gross was influenced by J. J. Bachofen's ideas on matriarchy, a speculative history of gender which opposed early stages of matriarchal culture to the later patriarchy. In 1913 he wrote "The coming revolution is a revolution for the mother-right" (Heuer "Devil"). Jung was converted to Bachhofen too. Freud's Totem and Taboo was an answer to these theories of matriarchal history. In Freud the primal horde throws itself on the father; in Gross the horde throws itself on the matriarchs and enslaves them and human history begins.

The rebellious stance against patriarchal authority had its correlative in Otto Gross's lifelong rebellion against his father, the famous legal philosopher Hanns Gross. Otto was engaged in a rebellion which led him, as Martin Green states, to turn himself into just such a deviant and degenerate as his father condemned ( ). Throughout his life Otto was punished by his father and a series of father surrogates, either with hospitalization for drug addiction or psychiatric treatment for mental instability (12). In 1913, Gross's father had him arrested as an anarchist and interned in an insane asylum near Vienna (on an affidavit by Jung declaring him to be a dangerous psychopath). He was freed after his supporters initiated an international press campaign. Franz Kafka had attended lectures by Hanns Gross and critics have suggested that Otto's illegal imprisonment may

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