

## Preface

The figures interviewed for *Against Freud* are well known for their contributions to Freud scholarship. They include a pioneer psychiatrist, a clinical psychologist and pioneer psychoanalyst, a literary critic, a trained sociologist, a physics teacher, two historians, and three philosophers. Each has earned a reputation as a staunch critic of Freud and psychoanalysis. Each has published significant works, some of them classics, on the subject of psychoanalysis. And each, at some point in his or her career, has been reviled by some and lionized by others. All, I submit, have something important to say about psychoanalysis, roughly one century after its creation (ca. 1897–1900).

*Against Freud* is designed for two primary audiences. First and foremost, it is designed for interested lay readers. Why? Because the pace of Freud scholarship has made it nearly impossible for anyone but the most dedicated scholar to keep up with current thinking about the state of psychoanalysis. Moreover, given the volume of works published annually combined with the presence of sometimes-hidden agendas, lay readers barely know where to begin or, more frankly, who to trust. Arguably, in no academic field is such a high degree of suspicion, contempt, and disagreement—in short, distrust—more apparent than in Freud studies. It is certainly a peculiar situation for a theory and practice that Freud believed was based on objectively true scientific discoveries. Yet controversy and division were probably inevitable, given the different interests involved. On one side are the clinicians, themselves divided along strict and often mutually exclusive party lines, who as a group are the least likely to care about the coherence of psychoanalytic ideas. On the other side are the academics and theorists, themselves divided according to disciplinary and intellectual norms, who as a group are the least likely to care about everyday concerns about therapy. Between them run the gamut of interested participants,

from middle- and upper-middle-class analysands, who visit psychoanalysts for help with their life problems, to all variety of artists, who, sometimes willy-nilly, incorporate psychoanalytic ideas into their works.

By providing a venue for some of Freud's most prominent and aggressive critics of the last thirty-five years, this book provides a foundation on which lay readers can build their own ideas and opinions about Freud, psychoanalysis, and contemporary criticism. *Against Freud* is organized around a central theme: the decline of psychoanalysis in the late twentieth century. This theme has the great merit of providing new and occasional readers of Freud the chance to understand things from an overt and coherent perspective. Moreover, this critical approach to psychoanalytic culture is valuable for its own sake. Because despite a decade of media interest in the "death of psychoanalysis," the truth is that most psychoanalytic literature remains pro-Freudian in crucial ways. Freud is still very much with us, and not just in the mundane use of clever ideas such as penis envy and anal character. Vested interests run deep, informing social policy and entire worldviews, making this kind of book not just useful but absolutely necessary.

So what kind of book is this? Nowhere else will you find a book devoted to the frank musings of prominent critics of psychoanalysis. And nowhere will you find a more immediately accessible and coherent discussion about the problems in, and limitations of, psychoanalysis. Beginners in psychoanalysis and interested lay readers will certainly find this material invaluable if they are inclined to make informed decisions about Freud's work and legacy.

Second and perhaps surprisingly, this book is designed for writers and scholars who dabble in psychoanalysis without knowing much about its inner debates and multiple complexities. Self-styled *bricoleurs* and interdisciplinary scholars often have a tough time with the field of psychoanalysis, which is already so thoroughly cross-disciplinary that confusion has always been the norm, not the exception. Think about it: just as Freud himself sampled widely from literature, philosophy, neurology, natural science, mythology, medical hypnosis, and more, theorists after him threw into the mix other ideas borrowed from surrealism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, Marxism, cybernetics, structuralism, poststructuralism, and mathematics. As a result, readers are routinely baffled by a

field that defies understanding, even among those who make it their life's work. *Against Freud* provides the much-needed inside story, and occasionally some dirt, about the theory, practice, and business of psychoanalysis across a range of critical perspectives and specialities. I submit that even sophisticated readers will appreciate the collective insights of such a knowledgeable group.

In fact, by listening in on conversations with Freud's most informed and aggressive critics, we can all learn more about this truly difficult but always fascinating field of study. Questions are posed, issues are discussed, and risks are taken. What was it like for the psychiatrist Joseph Wortis to be analyzed by Freud himself? To what extent does Marxism influence Wortis's thinking? According to Esther Menaker, herself trained as a psychoanalyst in Freud's Vienna, what kind of analyst was Freud's daughter, Anna? What good is child analysis anyway? According to the historian of medicine Edward Shorter, is psychoanalysis a form of medical malpractice? How did Shorter land himself in hot water when he emphasized the Jewish milieu in which Freud lived and worked? Does the historian of science Frank Sulloway think that psychoanalysis is a pseudoscience, a religion, or both? What role has the legend of Freud played in the transmission of psychoanalysis? How did literary critic Frederick Crews get interested in Freud? What does he think are the essential mistakes of psychoanalysis? After posing the question "Was Freud a Liar?" in 1973, does the philosopher Frank Cioffi now believe that Freud in fact dissembled? Why does he now think that Karl Popper's doctrine of falsification is not the best way to understand the limitations of psychoanalysis? How did Allen Esterson, who studied and taught physics, ever get involved with psychoanalysis? What did Freud's seminal case studies teach Esterson about Freud and psychoanalysis? Does Han Israëls really believe that the field of Freud studies is overrun with psychopathic personalities? Why is he fed up with debate over Freud's famous seduction theory? Why is French philosopher Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen so interested in the history of suggestion and hypnosis? Since his days as a deconstructionist, has he become a naive positivist or, perhaps worse, an intemperate Freud basher? Why, according to me, are so many bad books written on psychoanalysis? What do I have to say about the relationship between psychoanalysis and contemporary literary and cultural theory?

The following interviews provide answers to pressing questions about Freud's life, work, and enduring legacy. As befits real conversations with experts in the field, they are by turns serious, chatty, funny, contentious, lighthearted, seditious, informative, and, above all, teacherly. The reader gets a real taste of the personalities involved, their likes and dislikes, and their ways of thinking, and will find that, while these critics of psychoanalysis are in broad agreement about Freud and psychoanalysis, they are by no means a homogeneous bunch. I submit that there is no better introduction to their thought than by hearing what it is they have to say about their own work, even as they unpack what they see as the essential problems in psychoanalysis.

Naturally, the interviews have been edited for repetition, flow, simple errors, and overall coherence. Whenever possible the interviewee has had an opportunity to qualify his or her words, adding to some statements and removing others. These features are hardly limitations, however, since each interview was explicitly intended, if not designed, to be recorded, transcribed, and edited for future readers. The editing means that some of the normal idiosyncrasies of speech—hums and haws and false starts—have been removed for the sake of readers. Although such editing is entirely typical of interviews, especially with academics, it should nonetheless be acknowledged.

The interviews were originally conducted by me; two like-minded colleagues, Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen and Sonu Shamdasani; and my friend and colleague, the Toronto gestalt therapist Antonio Greco. When appropriate, some interviews were updated in 2005. That said, I alone am responsible for selecting and editing the final product. Finally, a word about the inclusion of an interview conducted with me by Greco. This interview, included at the urging of my editor, presents an opportunity for readers to know better the views of the person responsible for editing and selecting content for this book. Transparency is at the heart of criticism, and it begins with me. But I also hope that my discussion about postmodernism widens the scope of the book, which after all touches on many facets of the contemporary reception of Freud and psychoanalysis. I hasten to add that, while this interview closes the book, its placement says nothing about the evolution of Freud criticism from, say, Wortis to me. It is rather meant to suggest that skepticism about the role of Freud and contemporary theory is in

short supply. In this respect, *Against Freud* ends with a live provocation and an indication of debates to come.

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*Against Freud* opens with an economical introduction on the life and work of Sigmund Freud, written not from the perspective of filial piety but from the perspective of current Freud criticism. Because of decades of misinformation and myth-building, this perspective is sometimes called the “revisionist” reading of Freud. Others prefer, more simply, to call it the true—or, at any rate, the less-false—reading of Freud. The idea here is to clear a space for thought to begin about psychoanalysis, a field that almost everyone assumes they know something about—whether it is the theories of repression, free association, and the Oedipus complex, or the practice of lying on a couch and talking—even though they often aren’t sure if what they know is actually true or how what they know fits, or doesn’t fit, with what Freud himself thought. This introduction will hopefully put us all on the same footing as we begin to listen in on the discussions that follow.

I have also included a short suggested reading section on useful books and articles on the subject of psychoanalysis. Interested readers of *Against Freud* may find, in the end, that they want more details about Freud criticism. First, however, they may want to obtain some direction on the classic secondary texts of Freud studies and to read what advocates of psychoanalysis think about its purported decline. Needless to say, many people disagree with the critical views collected here, citing either the tone or substance of one argument or another. But actually, perhaps unsurprisingly, there is no consensus in this respect. A partisan of psychoanalysis will often agree with many of the criticisms collected here but will nonetheless take a stand on a particular issue or set of issues. Another partisan will defend an entirely different issue or set of issues. Taken together, as Crews and others have pointed out, the partisan commentators grant legitimacy to nearly all the claims made by the different critics. The shorthand for this process of division, not only between proponents and opponents of Freud but also within their ranks, is called the Freud wars—itself a fairly complex subset of the so-called culture wars, at least in the United States. Readers are well advised to keep this conflict in mind as they listen to critics do their best to convince them that psychoanalysis died long before the “psychoanalytic

century” actually ended. That I agree with them obviously doesn’t mean they are right. It is up to you to read them and decide for yourself, which is precisely the *raison d’être* of this book.

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Parts of this book have appeared before in English, and I am grateful for permission to reproduce them here. The introduction appeared as

“Sigmund Freud, 1856–1939” in *New Makers of Modern Culture*, edited by Justin Wintle (London: Routledge, 2007: 524–28). The Wortis interview appeared as “An Interview with Joseph Wortis” in the *Psychoanalytic Review* 83, no. 4, August 1996: 589–607, and is reprinted with permission of the Guilford Press. The Crews interview appeared as “The Making of a Freud Skeptic: An Interview with Frederick Crews” in *Skeptical* 7, no. 3, 1999: 42–49. The interview is reprinted with permission of the Guilford Press. A version of the Dufresne interview by Antonio Greco appeared as “Psychoanalysis, Parasites, and the ‘Culture of Banality’” in *Killing Freud: Twentieth-Century Culture and the Death of Psychoanalysis* by T. Dufresne (London: Continuum, 2003) and is reprinted with permission of the Continuum International Publishing Group.

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*Todd Dufresne*  
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