FREUD, JUNG AND BOAS: THE PSYCHOANALYTIC ENGAGEMENT WITH ANTHROPOLOGY REVISITED

by

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Sigmund Freud’s and C. G. Jung’s turn to evolutionist anthropological material after 1909 is usually seen as a logical progression of their long-term interest in such material. It is also seen that they used this material ignorant of the significant challenges to the evolutionist paradigm underpinning such material, in particular the challenges led by Franz Boas. This paper argues otherwise: that both psychologists’ turnings to such material was a new development, that neither had shown great interest in such material before 1909, and that their turnings to such material, far from being taken in ignorance of the challenges to evolutionist anthropology, were engagements with those challenges, because the evolutionist paradigm lay at the base of psychoanalysis. It argues that it is no coincidence that this engagement occurred after their return from America in 1909, where they had come into first-hand contact with the challenges of Franz Boas.

Keywords: psychoanalysis; anthropology; Freud; Jung; Boas

It will be recognized that here again the anthropological phenomena, which are in outward appearance alike, are, psychologically speaking, entirely distinct, and that consequentially psychological laws covering all of them can not be deduced from them.

Franz Boas, Clark University Conference, 1909

Sigmund Freud’s overt engagement with anthropology is synchronic with his turn to the social application of his theories; that moment, epitomized by Totem and taboo (1912–13), when psychoanalysis left the clinic to become one of the most profoundly influential ideologies in the twentieth century. This was, Alfred Tauber argued in 2010, the inevitable outcome of Freud’s long interest in anthropology, comparative mythology and the origins of religion. It is an argument with a deep pedigree. Ernest Jones in 1958, accepting that C. G. Jung’s Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido (Transformations and symbols of the libido) (1911–12) was the catalyst for Totem and taboo, asked rhetorically why Freud had not followed Jung ‘in investigating the realm of Greek mythology and comparative religion with which he was already so familiar’ but instead had taken on the ‘unfamiliar field of Australian Aborigines’. Jones answered himself that Freud had long been ‘aware

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of the unconscious significance of animals and the totemistic equation between them and the idea of the father."  

Jones’s question and his answer promoted the belief in Freud’s ‘long familiarity’ with comparative mythology, comparative religion and anthropology. Indeed, Edwin Wallace, in his influential *Freud and anthropology: a history and reappraisal* (1983), argued that *Totem and taboo* was not a response to Jung at all but the logical outcome of Freud’s long engagement with anthropology, citing ‘direct evidence that before 1900’ Freud had read at least three evolutionist anthropologists—John Lubbock, E. B. Tylor and Herbert Spencer—and there was ‘a strong probability that he was familiar with’ others.  

This impression of a long engagement with evolutionist anthropology has become set. In 2003 Celia Brickman gave Freud credit for having long been aware of evolutionist anthropological material, quoting passages from ‘1900’ and ‘1905’, and citing Wallace as an authority.  

The belief that Freud’s interest in evolutionist anthropology, mythology and comparative religion long predated his overt use of such material has survived intact through the recent attacks on the ‘Freudian legend’. Yet it needs to be challenged, because it may obscure the real impetus behind both Freud’s and Jung’s engagements with anthropology and related fields. Here I suggest that their turns to anthropological and mythological material were responses to a suddenly recognized challenge to the evolutionist paradigm—which underlay the theories of psychoanalysis and which both had to this point taken as given—while on their visit to America in 1909. In positing this I argue that it is not coincidence that two weeks after his return from the USA Jung announced to Freud his investigations into mythology and comparative religion; or that a few weeks later Freud began his study of Leonardo da Vinci’s childhood in which he turned to the study of mythology. Jung’s work would culminate in *Transformations* and a far more historical approach to psychology. Freud’s interest in mythology, primitivity, and so on, would result in significant insertions into subsequent editions of *Interpretation of dreams* and other major works, and, of course, in *Totem and taboo*. Importantly it began the expansion of the psychoanalytic project from psychotherapy to social and cultural critique, particularly through the new major journal of the movement: *Imago*.

**Freud’s ‘long familiarity’ with anthropology and mythology**

Edwin Wallace’s ‘direct evidence’ of Freud’s early familiarity—before 1900—with evolutionist anthropologists is a cursory reference to ‘the standard works of Sir John Lubbock, Herbert Spencer, E. B. Tylor’ towards the beginning of *Interpretation of dreams*. Freud’s subsequent discussion did not draw on these ‘standard works’ but on a nineteenth-century German study of attitudes to dreams in classical antiquity, which Freud claimed as an ‘echo’ of the prehistoric attitude to dreams (a claim premised on the evolutionist paradigm). One cannot help but suspect that Freud had not read the standard works of the British authors at that point, at least not in reference to dream theory. More importantly, however, both the reference and the discussion were insertions into the 1914 edition of *Interpretation*. Similarly, the passages that Celia Brickman cites (see above) as evidence of Freud’s early engagement—that is, before 1905—with such evolutionist materials were insertions into the 1919 edition of *Interpretation* and the 1915 edition of *Three essays on sexuality*. These citations
therefore cannot be used as evidence for Freud’s having had familiarity with evolutionist anthropology before 1900.

Indeed, after 1911, Freud inserted many passages into new editions of both works that greatly increased their anthropological, mythological and classical content (including in the 1914 edition of *Interpretation of dreams* two chapters by Otto Rank, ‘Dream and creative writing’ and ‘Dream and myth’, which were dropped from editions after 1922). These insertions have helped foster the impression of Freud’s long interest in such material, an impression most often taken for granted and unexamined—see for instance Jones's question above; or Wallace’s remark ‘it is fascinating to watch Freud, the life-long aficionado of mythology, being drawn along by similar’ interests in Jung;15 or Peter Gay’s throw-away reference to ‘Freud’s prized Greek myths’16 in a biography that does establish Freud as a collector of antiquities from his early adulthood but fails to establish in Freud any early attention to comparative mythology and the origin of religion. Indeed, a look at Freud’s work before 1909, particularly at the original editions of *Interpretation* and *Three essays*, shows only thin interest in such fields.

True, Freud makes many mythological allusions throughout his texts before 1909, such as his reference to Kronos and Zeus as Oedipal characters and notions of an ‘ancient’ despotic father in the original *Interpretation* (which Strachey claims is an early indication of the interests of *Totem and taboo*).17 However, Freud confused the myth (as he himself realized later, possibly after it was pointed out to him) with the story of Kronos castrating Uranus.18 Even if Freud had got the story right, the mythological knowledge required for this and his other references was not that of ‘a life-long aficionado’, but that held by most schoolboys educated in the Austrian and German Gymnasium system of the nineteenth century. Freud’s early allusions are confined to the narrow fields of classical mythology and the Bible: they show none of the breadth of Adalbert Kuhn’s ‘comparative mythology’—this would have brought Freud into close contact with Nordic mythology, for example.19

Freud’s correspondence with Karl Abraham before 1909—in relation to Abraham’s work on myth, which, along with that of Otto Rank, predated both Freud’s and Jung’s interests20—leaves the impression of Freud’s being introduced to the world of *Völkerpsychologie* and comparative mythology by Abraham. In Freud’s letter of 7 June 1908 he writes: ‘I was very much struck by the fact that you found such far-reaching agreement with our theories and statements among the great ethnopsychologists’ such as Heymann Steinthal and Adalbert Kuhn.21 And if Freud had had a long familiarity with the fields of comparative mythology and *Völkerpsychologie*, it is unlikely, given his prodigious output, that he would have asked Rank to contribute his chapter on ‘Dreams and myths’ to the 1914 edition of *Interpretation*. This is despite Freud’s claim in the original prefatory paragraphs (see below) to the essays that became *Totem and taboo*, that ‘from its very beginning, psychoanalytic research has pointed to the similarities and analogies between its finding on the psychic life of individuals and the findings of *Völkerpsychologie*. 22 Freud cites no examples and it is difficult to see where these indications of similarities arose before the excursions of Abraham and Rank in 1908—but neither Abraham’s nor Rank’s work on the relationship between dream and myth addressed the subject in an overtly evolutionist context as did that of Freud and Jung.23

None of this is to deny that Freud had had an early fascination with Mediterranean antiquity and saw in archaeology, in particular, an analogy with his uncovering of the underworld of the psyche. But this early ‘compulsion for antiquity’, as Richard
Armstrong has called it,\textsuperscript{24} does not reveal a student of comparative mythology or of comparative religion, still less a student of late-nineteenth-century anthropology. Neither do I deny that he had seen earlier the broader implications of his theories, but he had addressed these mainly in passing—in allusions in correspondence or in shorter writings such as his review of Von Ehrenfels’s \textit{Sexual ethics}.\textsuperscript{25} Despite suggestions otherwise, there is no indication that he intended to expand his work into social critique before this point.\textsuperscript{26} The opening sentence of the first edition of \textit{Interpretation} makes a clear claim to medical speciality: ‘...I have not, I believe, trespassed beyond the sphere of interest covered by neuro-pathology.’\textsuperscript{27}

\section*{The Evolutionist Paradigm}

Freud and Jung accepted a genetic psychic unity of humanity, but this unity displayed a hierarchic graduation of mental development from the ‘savage’ to the ‘civilized’, the civilized having obtained faculties not developed in the savage. This projection of development was universal, and the differences found in human societies in various parts of the world, including familial and social structures, beliefs, morals and languages, reflected different stages in the development. This had affinities with the evolutionist anthropology outlined in Lubbock’s \textit{The Origin of Civilization} (1870) and Tylor’s \textit{Primitive Culture} (1871), but for Tylor, in particular, these stages of development of culture and society did not equate with different states of mental development; rather, human psychic unity meant that all peoples had equal mental ability and all were capable of achieving the ‘highest civilization’. Freud’s and Jung’s view that the stages of cultural development reflected stages of mental development was far more in line with the evolutionist psychology of Herbert Spencer, in which it was understood that the Caucasian brain had developed structurally to the highest level: ‘we may infer that the civilised man has also a more complex or heterogeneous nervous system than the uncivilized man: and indeed the fact is in part visible in the increased ratio which his cerebrum bears to the subjacent ganglia’, wrote Spencer.\textsuperscript{28} But what Spencer shared with Tylor and Lubbock, and almost all evolutionist anthropologists, was a belief that the extant ‘savages’ and ‘barbarians’ represented windows into the history of human development. As Lubbock outlined in the opening pages of \textit{The Origin of Civilization}, the main interest in studying the various peoples of the world was to retrieve a constitutive history of how the civilized Caucasian had developed.\textsuperscript{29} At bottom, for all its collecting of stories and artefacts from around the world, the subject of nineteenth-century evolutionist anthropology was always the Caucasian European.

From the start Freud saw psychoanalysis as a symbiotic relationship between the ontogenetic and the phylogenetic, subscribing to the recapitulative thesis of Haeckel’s biogenetic law (as he had since his student days).\textsuperscript{30} It was a premise (though not necessarily drawn from Haeckel) held by Spencer and most evolutionists of the time.\textsuperscript{31} In this the ‘savage’ was given an equivalence to the (civilized) child in mental development. For Freud before 1909 this was an unexplored premise, with only a few direct references to it, such as his reference in \textit{Interpretation} to ‘primitive weapons’ now being found only in the (civilized) nursery.\textsuperscript{32}

Celia Brickman has claimed that Freud, in believing that the earlier stages of development remained, and remained active (if hidden), differed ‘critically’ from his ‘anthropological
However, it was not anthropological texts that were influencing Freud’s evolutionism in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As Frank Sulloway has shown, it was the evolutionism evident in the biological, neurological and psychological works that fundamentally influenced Freud through the last two decades of the nineteenth century. In such anglophone journals as *Mind* and *The American Journal of Psychology* Freud read the work of James Sully, George Romanes, Havelock Ellis, James Mark Baldwin, G. Stanley Hall and many others. Almost all of these thinkers subscribed to something akin to Haeckel’s recapitulation thesis, believing that in one way or another the earlier stages of development remained hidden and active within the psyche. None was more influential on Freud than the neurologist John Hughlings Jackson. Behind Hughlings Jackson, behind so many, lay Spencer. Two central aspects of Spencer’s theories were overwhelmingly important for Jackson. One was the ‘natural’ propensity to move from the simple to the complex. The other was that under certain conditions there could be dissolution—evolution going backwards. Hughlings Jackson took up these ideas to argue that mental illness was precisely this, a mental dissolution, a stripping away of the more highly evolved, more complex, controlling forces that let escape the earlier unruly stage of development. From this Freud drew the basic idea of regression, and of course the reason for the similarity of the mentality of the neurotic and the savage. (Frank Sulloway has gone as far as to call it the ‘Jackson–Freud theory of regression’.) As much as Freud liked to allude to Darwin, his own view of evolution, in which he saw the authigenic movement from simple to complex, drew more, no doubt indirectly, on Herbert Spencer.

**FRANZ BOAS AND CLARK UNIVERSITY, 1909**

Freud and Jung were celebrated visitors to the Clark University Conference of 1909. So, too, was Franz Boas. Boas had been the main challenger of evolutionist paradigm in the first decade of the century. E. B. Tylor, in his influential opening paragraph of *Primitive Culture* (1871), had claimed that the ‘uniformity which largely pervades’ cultures around the world was the result of ‘uniform action on uniform causes: and its various grades may be regarded as stages of development or evolution’. This view dominated anglophone anthropology: the varieties of peoples and races around the world were not exhibits of fundamental difference but of ‘grades’ of development along the scale from the savage to the civilized. Much of the emphasis on this point resulted from its being posited in opposition to polygenism—the argument between the polygenist and monogenist view of human origins having dominated anglophone anthropology in the decade or so before Tylor published his book. Franz Boas came from a different tradition. Not only could his anthropological interests be traced back to the concept of the *Volksgeist*, but he also came to those interests when the monogenist position, now bolstered by evolutionary theory, was well in the ascendency and the unity of humanity was an established consensus. In 1887, soon after he settled in the USA, Boas controversially complained about museum ethnological displays being ordered along strictly evolutionist lines. But it was his paper, ‘The limitations of the comparative method in anthropology’ (1896), that seriously challenged the evolutionist paradigm.

Boas’s objection to evolutionist anthropology was its presumption that like effects were the products of like causes and as such demonstrated universal laws of mental and social progress. The evolutionist paradigm, Boas argued, ignored the particular and distinct
geophysical and historical environments that shaped societies as much as, if not more than, any laws of uniform mental development. For Boas the overwhelming task of the anthropologist was not to discover the hierarchy of human development, as it was for Lubbock, Tylor and Spencer, but to understand the complex workings and histories of particular societies. In this he had been influenced by the original formulation of 
*Völkerpsychologie* by Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal in the mid nineteenth century, the aim of which was to determine ‘the psychological nature’ of a people.

At the Clarke University Conference in 1909 Boas presented a paper entitled ‘Psychological problems in anthropology’. This did more than reprise the theoretical theme of his 1896 paper. George Stocking has cited it as one of the most important articles to develop Boas’s thinking, offering as it did a ‘much more sophisticated view on cultural determination of behavior’. In it Boas described anthropology as dealing ‘with the biological and mental manifestations of human life as they appear in different races and in different societies’ (p. 371). Boas’s particular concern in his address was ‘the psychological laws which control the mind of man everywhere, and that may differ in various racial and social groups’ (p. 371). These were the ‘problems of psychology, though based on anthropological material’ (p. 371), and Boas’s particular concern was with ‘the psychological laws which govern man as an individual member of society’ (p. 373).

Boas cited Tylor’s ‘brilliant investigations on the development of civilization’, which ‘demonstrated the possibility of conceiving of the scattered phenomena as proof of certain tendencies of evolution of civilization’ (p. 373). However, Boas argued, it was wrong to convert this ‘possibility’ into ‘the assumption of a general similarity of mental reaction in societies of similar structure’ (p. 373). Such an assumption denied the complexity of the data, and one could not draw from such similarities ‘generalized laws governing the forms of thought in human societies’ without taking into account the specific histories and environments of a people (p. 374). He drew particular attention to one of the most debated, if not the most debated, concepts in evolutionist anthropology, totemism (pp. 374–375):

>a form of society in which certain social groups consider themselves as related in a supernatural way to a certain species of animals or to a certain class of objects. I believe this is the generally accepted definition of totemism; but I am convinced that in this form the phenomenon is not a single psychological problem, but embraces the most diverse psychological elements. In some cases the people believe themselves to be descendants of the animal whose protection they enjoy. In other cases an animal or some other object may have appeared to an ancestor of the social group, and may have promised to become his protector, and the friendship between the animal and the ancestor was then transmitted to his descendants. In still other cases a certain social group in a tribe may have the power of securing by magical means and with great ease a certain kind of animal or of increasing its numbers, and the supernatural relation may be established in this way. It will be recognized that here again the anthropological phenomena, which are in outward appearances alike, are, psychologically speaking, entirely distinct, and that consequently psychological laws covering all of them can not be deduced from them.

Psychology in anthropology was not invalid; indeed, not enough actual psychological study had been done (p. 378; emphasis added):
the concept of incest groups—those groups in which intermarriage is strictly forbidden—is omnipresent. But no satisfactory explanation has so far been given for the tendency to combine certain degrees of blood relationship under this viewpoint. Much material for this field of inquiry is contained in the works on comparative anthropology, but I believe a more thorough psychological analysis of the accumulated data may reveal important new information.

One of the final examples that Boas gave was that of primitive mythology in which ‘the same kind of tales are current over enormous areas, but the mythological use to which they are put is locally quite different.’ This alluded to Boas’s erstwhile mentor Adolf Bastian’s theory of ‘elementary ideas’ existing the world over, which would influence Jung’s concept of the archetype, and which Boas had sceptically referred to earlier in the same place as his comments on Tylor. Boas closed the address (p. 384):

In the preceding remarks I have tried to point out a direction in which anthropological data may be used to good advantage by the psychologist; that from a psychological point of view, the starting-point of our investigations must not be looked for in anthropological phenomena that happen to be alike in outward appearance, but that in many cases diverse phenomena are based on similar psychic processes, and that these offer to the investigator a promising line of attack.

Whom was Boas addressing? Certainly he would have had in mind the assumptions of the various ‘genetic psychologies’, in particular those of the conference’s host, G. Stanley Hall, with whom Boas had had a long and not always comfortable relationship. But the main target would have been the various debates over developments of beliefs, mentality and social structures, which had been grist to the mill of evolutionist anthropology, whose participants, even as they argued, all agreed that the anthropological data coming in from various places around the globe was the raw evidence for their competing theories of evolutionary stages of individual and social mental development. Totemism was a major site for these debates. Much of this evidence, such as the most influential ethnographies produced from Australia by Lorimer Fison and A. W. Howitt and by Baldwin Spencer and Francis Gillen in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, had of course been produced by ethnographers with no particular training or awareness of psychological practice. But the theorists in their armchairs, from Tylor to James Frazer, who received or directed research from afar, also had no training in psychology (a problem that Alfred Haddon had sought to address in his Torres Straits Expedition of 1898 by including three experimental psychologists in the team). Boas had conducted thorough investigations in the field, and for the most part his information was first hand. He was urging, first, that not too much be drawn from the application of evolutionist premises to analyses of superficial similarities; and, second, that more thorough and rigorous psychological research be undertaken within the context of anthropology. It was as much a challenge as it was a criticism.

THE EVIDENCE FROM THE COUCH

Many have lamented that both Freud and Jung seemed to have been either ignorant of, or indifferent to, the turn away from evolutionism in anthropology. Sonu Shamdasani has commented on Freud’s and Jung’s presence at Clark with Boas:
In terms of the history of psychoanalysis, [Boas’] paper could hardly have been more timely, or as the case may be, untimely, coming shortly before Freud and Jung embarked upon their colonization of anthropological material... it is not going too far to say that had they heeded [Boas’] recommendations for the negotiation of the interdisciplinary relation of anthropology and psychology, the fate and reception of their work in anthropology would have been totally different.50

However, it is not unreasonable to assume that Freud and Jung heard Boas’s address, or at least knew its content,51 and to then understand Freud’s and Jung’s ‘colonizations’ of anthropology as answers to Boas’s attack on the evolutionist paradigm in the relationship between psychology and anthropology. The correlation between the targets of Boas’s address and the subsequent forays of Freud and Jung is too coincidental. These forays were prompted by the recognition that the evolutionist paradigm was so fundamental to their understandings of the structure of the psyche that it could neither be abandoned nor be negotiated. Boas’s address more than challenged the evolutionist paradigm: it threw down the gauntlet to psychologists to investigate more deeply the anthropological material. Freud and Jung took up the gauntlet—but not quite as Boas had envisaged. Boas was calling for a more thorough psychological field investigation of various societies; he was asking that the theorists get out of their armchairs and experience individual societies in depth. When they did so, Boas seemed to imply, they would be chastened in their quest for evolutionist general laws. However, Freud and Jung had another site of exploration in mind. They remained in their armchairs, but they drew them up close to the couch, believing that there they could explore far deeper into the history of the human mind than any anthropological fieldwork. They believed that psychoanalysis had revealed truths about the history of mental development that no other method had or could, and that ‘the evidence from the couch’ had priority over all other evidence.52 This evidence would throw light on the anthropological material and show that Boas was wrong, the apparent was substantial, and that differences, for the most part, represented stages in development.

Famously, Jung explained that he had been drawn to psycho-cultural prehistory by a dream he had had on the ship back from Clark University: he found himself on the upper storey of a two-storey house in rooms of great refinement; when he descended to the ground floor he was in a much older era where the ‘furnishings were medieval’; descending to a cellar he saw that it dated to ‘Roman times’. In the floor was a stone trapdoor, which descended further to ‘a low cave cut into rock’: ‘The deeper I went, the more alien and the darker the scene became. In the cave I discovered remains of primitive culture, that is, the world of the primitive man within myself.’53 This dream, which Jung discussed in detail with Freud on board ship at the time, was a transforming moment, prompting him not only to formulate a different theory of dreams to Freud but also to see research into the development of human thought as central to his psychology. ‘I could not help but discover the close relationship between ancient mythology and the psychology of primitives, and this led me to an intensive study of the latter.’54

The study of mythology and the origins of religion became a central theme in Freud and Jung’s correspondence after their return from Clark University. In November 1909 Freud complained to Jung, ‘we are only wretched dilettantes’, but then, after a detailed letter from Jung—in which Jung disclaimed himself as a dilettante—Freud conceded, ‘these things cry out for understanding, and as long as the specialists won’t help us, we shall...
have to do it ourselves.‘55 An exchange in early 1910 shows the evolutionist direction in which both psychologists were taking their interests in myths. Jung wrote in January: ‘tried to put the “symbolic” on a psychogenetic foundation, i.e., to show that in the individual fantasy, the *primus movens*, the individual conflict, material or form . . . is mythic, or mythological typical.’56 Freud responded in February: ‘your deepened view of symbolism has all my sympathy . . . . True it is only a hint, but in a direction where I too am searching, namely archaic regression, which I hope to master through mythology and the development of language.’57

It is important here to understand, *contra* Wallace and others, that Jung, prompted by his mid-Atlantic dream (which it is hard to imagine was not itself prompted by Boas’s address), was leading the way.58 It is clear that Freud saw a draft of the first part of Jung’s *Transformations* in June 1910.59 The draft, now lost, included a version of what would become the first chapter of *Transformations*, ‘Concerning two kinds of thinking’: Freud responded to Jung almost immediately that he might be accused of ‘plagiarism’ because he had written his own ‘Two principles of mental action’ only a ‘few days before’ receiving the draft.60 There is no reason to accept this incredible coincidence. Without doubt Jung’s draft chapter prompted Freud to write his ‘Formulations for the two principles of mental action’, and he did not do so until months later.61 It is also clear that soon after receiving the draft Freud began to contemplate the essays that would make up *Totem and taboo*. The recapitulative premise, which had been largely unexamined in Freud’s work until this point, would now become manifest and overtly examined.

Jung opened part 1 of the published version of *Transformations* by declaring that Freud’s *Interpretation* had brought alive the past. Freud’s exposition of the Oedipal complex, wrote Jung, was as if one had found an ancient relic in a modern street. Jung announced that he was building on Freud’s work on dreams that had allowed ‘a glimpse away from the incoherent multiplicity of the present to a higher coherence of history’. Psychoanalysis was a historical method, and ‘just as the psychoanalytic conceptions promote understandings of the historic psychological creations, so reversedly historical materials can shed new light upon individual psychologic problems.’62 A primitive mode of thinking, Jung argued, still exists within the psyche of modern man. This is symbolic thinking, manifested in dreams, but also, importantly, in the myths and legends that have survived from ancient times. Jung quoted from *Interpretation* the passage that alludes to ‘primitive weapons’ as now ‘relegated to the nursery’. To Freud’s casual piece of recapitulative logic Jung brought a full phylogenetic explanation: ‘All this experience suggests to us that we draw a parallel between the phantastical, mythological thinking of antiquity and the similar thinking of children, between the lower human races and dreams . . . . the supposition is justified that ontogenesis corresponds in psychology to phylogenesis’ (pp. 24–25). Jung, later in the book, called for analysts to look at ‘the available ethnographic material under the assumption that the unconscious of the present-day man coins its symbols as was done in the remote past’ (p. 202).

It was the hermeneutics of the dream—not ideas of regression, or suppression, or a dynamic unconscious, or the evolutionist foundation (all of which were common)—that crucially distinguished Freud from others working in psychology at the time. Dreaming was hardly ignored in the psychological literature before 1900. The journals were dotted with articles looking at the nature of dreams, and many of these saw dreaming as an opening to the earlier existence of being human. In 1893 James Sully had written that the dream ‘strips the ego of its artificial wrappings and exposes it in its rude native nudity. It
brings up from the dim depths of our sub-conscious life the primal, instinctive impulses, and discloses to us a side of ourselves which connects us with the great sentient world. (Freud belatedly, and almost grudgingly, acknowledged in the 1914 edition of *Interpretation* that he had read this essay at the time of its publication.)

Yet in all these speculations—in which dreaming opened access to the primitive reaches of the mind by stripping away the later, more highly evolved, controlling defences, as Hughlings Jackson suggested—the content of dreams, delightful or terrifying as it could be, was, beyond a generalized sense, essentially ungraspable; it always remained a wild but inconsequential dance, a savage dance, beyond reason and thus beyond meaning. But for Freud the dream became much more than a site of speculation: it became the site of diagnostics and through that a hermeneutic. This was what drew Jung to Freud. To read even—perhaps especially—the original edition of *Interpretation*, stripped of discussions of symbolism and its additional ‘typical’ dreams and most of its archaic allusions, is to be drawn into a vast new understanding of the depth of being human (particularly being a civilized human), and that depth was in large part a historical depth, both ontogenetic and phylogenetic.

The slippages of dating, such as those by Wallace and Brickman, feed the partisan character of the historiography of early psychoanalysis. Claiming a continuity in Freud’s interests rather than a sharp development downplays the importance of the feud with Jung, not just in Freud’s shift to an interest in anthropology and prehistory, but also to the development of psychoanalysis as social/cultural critique. *Transformations* had clearly taken analysis beyond the clinic. In his initial public comment on part 1 of *Transformations*, Freud criticized Jung for ‘not going back far enough’. And in explaining his own forays into the field that Jung had opened up, he told Jung ‘my tunnels will be far more subterranean than your shafts’. He was primarily motivated to go deeper into the anthropological material than he perceived Jung to be doing because he believed he would there find evidence for the ‘psychological laws’ that would explain all the similar phenomena (the kind that Boas suggested could not be attributed to similar psychic processes). He thought that Jung had paid far too much attention to ‘Christian’ symbolism (which Jung could mix and match with the symbolism of classical antiquity). Thus Freud made Australia—which he called, in true recapitulative logic, the ‘youngest continent’—his central focus. The Aboriginal Australian was seen by most within evolutionist anthropology as the ‘most primitive’ survival. In the anthropological material from Australia, Freud was sure that he would find, via the hermeneutics of psychoanalysis, the evidence of the past psychic events that (pre)conditioned the modern mind, and in doing so not only counter Jung’s undermining of the centrality of sex in the psyche but also counter challenges to the evolutionist paradigm itself. (As Shamdasani has shown, if Freud drew on the Australian material of Spencer and Gillen, Fison, Howitt and others, via James Frazer and Andrew Lang, Jung, although he failed to indicate in his citations, was drawing on much the same material through the conduit of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. It is tempting here to speculate on how much this material had featured in personal conversations between Freud and Jung when they met at the Nuremburg conference in March 1910—particularly on the day they spent together after the conference.)

Freud came to believe that *Totem and taboo* would hasten the end of his relationship with Jung. But it would be wrong to see such a break as its purpose; rather, it was the outcome of their explorations of the material. When both delved into the recapitulative premises of
psychoanalysis through anthropology and prehistory, their respective differences, particularly in relation to the centrality of sexual drives, became more apparent and no longer easily glossed over. Freud and his immediate circle’s response to Jung’s foray was to recognize that psychoanalysis had to broaden its attention beyond psychopathology. The result was the establishment of a new journal, one that would replace Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Forschungen (then edited by Jung and in which the first part of Transformations had just been published) as the major vehicle for the movement: Imago: Zeitschrift für die Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften/Herausgegeben von Prof. Dr. Sigm. Freud/Redigiert von Otto Rank u. Dr. Hanns Sachs (Imago: Journal for the Application of Psychoanalysis to the Humanities/Issued by Prof. Dr. Sigm. Freud/Edited by Otto Rank and Dr. Hanns Sachs). The introduction by the editors proclaimed that the task of the journal was to apply the insights that psychoanalysis had gained of the individual psyche to that of the social and the cultural.74

The first article in the journal was ‘Die Inzestscheu’, the first essay that would make up Totem and taboo. In his prefatory remarks to the essay, Freud pointed to the excitement caused among psychoanalysts when, at the Second International Psychoanalytic Conference at Nuremberg in March 1910, a student of Jung’s read a paper on results of research conducted at Jung’s instigation that showed how much the fantasy imagery of the mentally ill resembled the imagery of the mythology of ancient peoples. This, Freud stated, opened up the possibilities of psychoanalysis’s excursions into Völkerpsychologie.75 There is a sense here of collegiality that would soon fade. In the preface to the book publication in 1913, which essentially replaced the prefatory remarks of the journal publication, Freud described Totem and taboo as applying ‘the findings of psychoanalysis to some of the unsolved problems of Völkerpsychologie’.76 The stimulus to write the work came from the desire to counter the methodologies of the Zurich school of psychoanalysis (that is, Jung) along with the ‘non-analytic psychology’ of Wilhelm Wundt. Jung was now on the outside.77

Wundt, in his perception of the limits of his own laboratory, also turned to Völkerpsychologie but contrasted his pursuit to that of Steinthal and Lazarus. Wundt wanted ethnological, mythological, philological and historical material to supplement the laboratory to throw light on mental processes and the development of those processes.78 His aim went beyond the individual: ‘[Völkerpsychologie],’ he wrote in 1912,

in its investigation of the various stages of mental development still exhibited by mankind, leads us along the path of a true psychogenesis. It reveals well-defined primitive conditions, with transitions leading through an almost continuous series of intermediate steps to the more developed and higher civilizations. Thus, [Völkerpsychologie] is, in an important sense of the word, genetic psychology.79

Although Freud saw himself as challenging many of Wundt’s conclusions (because Wundt was not an adherent of psychoanalysis), his use of the term is far closer to Wundt’s than to the Herderian tradition of Steinthal and Lazarus (a point of interest when we think of Boas’s roots). And Wundt’s concept of Völkerpsychologie is very close to the cultural anthropology of Tylor.

Freud explained that he would attempt ‘to deduce the original meaning of totemism from the vestiges [that] emerge in the course of the growth of our own childhood.’ This ontogeny as evidence of phylogeny was in itself nothing new—indeed, it was standard fare in
evolutionist theories at the turn of the century. But this was not Freud’s fundamental method. That is in the book’s subtitle, the title under which the four essays were originally published: ‘Some resemblances between the mental lives of savages and neurotics’ [‘Über einige Übereinstimmungen im Seelenleben der Wilden und der Neurotiker’]. Applying this hermeneutics of psychoanalysis to anthropological material would decipher the stages of development of the human mind—after all, the neurotic’s (and dreamer’s) regressive path leads back to both the ontogenetic (childhood) and the phylogenetic (prehistoric). Freud explained in the beginning of the first essay: if existing ‘savages and half-savages’ are representatives of primitive man, then ‘their mental life’ presents ‘a well-preserved picture of an early stage of our own development’; and thus ‘a comparison between the psychology of primitive people, as it is taught by social anthropology [Völkerkunde], and the psychology of neurotics, as it has been revealed by psycho-analysis, will be bound to show numerous points of agreement and will throw new light upon familiar facts in both sciences’ (p. 1). The ‘evidence from the couch’, which Freud saw as having priority in all affairs of the psyche, would now reveal what had escaped the ethnographers.

Freud does make direct reference to the Boasian position in Totem and taboo, only to dismiss it:

in the most recent literature on the subject (which is for the most part passed over in the present work) an unmistakable tendency emerges to reject any general solution of totemic problems as impracticable. (See, for instance, Goldenweiser, 1910.)

Alexander Goldenweiser’s ‘Totemism: an analytic study’ is seen as a watershed in the study of totemism, undermining fatally the concept that totemism represented a stage in development through which all societies went. At the time that he wrote the piece, Goldenweiser was completing his PhD (on totemism) under Boas at Columbia. It is worth looking at Freud’s characterization of this position as ‘impracticable’: it sidesteps Boas’s theoretical objections to the evolutionist paradigm by essentially saying that if anthropologists such as Goldenweiser, and by implication Boas, took advantage of the newly available key (psychoanalysis) they would be able to unlock the mystery and find a general solution practicable. Both Freud and Jung saw psychoanalysis (or analytical psychology as Jung would soon name his own practice) as a means of shedding new light on anthropological material; and wasn’t a new light on the anthropological material exactly what Boas had been asking for from psychology?

Conclusion

In the 1909 edition of Interpretation, prepared no doubt before he went to Clark, Freud added a sentence towards the end to describe the dream as the via regia to the unconscious. Jung cited this description approvingly in his 1912 New York lectures (his first clear distancing from Freud after he had written Transformations). However, both Freud and Jung were moving to see the dream as much more than this. As Shamdasani has put it, paraphrasing Freud, ‘the dream could be considered as the via regia into cultural history.’ At least the psychoanalytic hermeneutic, coupled with the modus operandi of evolutionist anthropology, was to become an influential means for understanding that history. The influence of both Freud’s and Jung’s forays into anthropology has been long, and has
initiated a complicated relationship between anthropology and psychoanalysis. In 1938, when Boas came to revise his *The mind of primitive man*, a work meant to undermine the evolutionist conception of ‘primitive mentality’, he singled out *Totem and taboo* as an example of the evolutionist fallacy:

Freud’s comparison of primitive culture and the psychoanalytic interpretations of European behavior seem to lack a scientific background. They appear to me as fancies in which neither the aspect of primitive life nor that of civilized life is sustained by tangible evidence.88

Yet Boas, a few pages earlier, gave credit to Freud for uncovering the importance of the influence of unconscious experiences. If the anthropology of *Totem and taboo* found few convinced readers in anthropology,89 and theories such as the Oedipus complex fell foul of relativism—as much as in the British tradition of Malinowski as in the American tradition of Boas—Freud would none the less be influential in the development of anthropology, even on Boasian students such as Margaret Mead.90 Jung, too, would have an impact, particularly on the influential theories of Victor Turner. For the most part, though, anthropologists who drew on Freud and/or Jung did so despite the linear evolutionist line evident in the psychologists’ works.

This has not been so apparent in the tradition of depth psychology. Embarrassed as many adherents of Freud have been by *Totem and taboo*,91 it has none the less been a fundamental influence on such later Freudian writers such as Melanie Klein and Jacques Lacan.92 Mostly this has been achieved by speaking of the underlying story of *Totem and taboo* as ‘Freud’s myth’, as though it were a parable or allegory.93 But Freud thought of the story as history, and the irony here should not be lost. *Totem and taboo* is a product of Freud’s desire to sublimate myth and religion with ‘science’, that is with reason and the recognition of reality as it was. The latter were the qualities of civilization, the former of savagery. Equally central as sexuality to Freud’s difficulty with Jung—a difficulty that became more apparent as each delved more into anthropology after 1909—was Jung’s promotion of the mythic as a positive in the midst of civilization. Freud would never retreat from his story of the primal crime, just as he would never retreat from the recapitulative premise or Lamarckian inheritance. He drew again and again on the story, in *Group psychology* (1921) and in his final major work, *Moses and monotheism* (1930). He could not retreat, because he knew that these were the foundations of his understanding of the history of being human. This is why a challenge such as that of Boas in 1909 mattered. The question is how much of this evolutionist paradigm, with all its claims of Western exceptionalism, still remains submerged in latter-day Freudian and Jungian theory and practice?

In this article I have been keen to tease out the correlation of the content of Franz Boas’s address to the Clark Conference of 1909 and the content of Freud and Jung’s forays into the subjects of anthropology, and to point to the synchrony of Boas’s paper and the psychologists’ turning to anthropological material, with a view to reinterpreting the motivations of both psychologists.94 It is too coincidental to imagine that Jung had his shipboard dream in October 1909 independently of Boas’s challenge in September 1909. As a final piece of concordance I offer this: Boas in his address had suggested that although we ourselves have hardly any definite taboos. . . . Supposing an individual accustomed to eating dogs should inquire among us for the reason why we do not eat dogs, we could only
reply that it is not customary; and he would be justified in saying that dogs are tabooed among us, just as much as we are justified in speaking of taboos among primitive people.

And Freud, as if answering this, wrote in his preface to Totem and taboo that he was far more assured in his treatment of taboo than of totemism because, unlike totems, ‘taboos still exist among us. . . . The social and technical advances in human history have affected taboos far less than the totem.’ (p. x).

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NOTES

10 Freud wrote to Sándor Ferenczi in November 1909: ‘my thoughts . . . are all with Leonardo Da Vinci and the Mythology’. Eva Brabant et al. (eds), The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi (tr. Peter Hoffer), vol. 1 (1908–1914) (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1993), p. 108; see also p. 98.


12 Freud did possess works by Lubbock, but they were biological works rather than anthropological works: Lucille Ritvo, Darwin’s influence on Freud: a tale of two sciences (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1990), p. 204.


15 Wallace, op. cit. (note 5), p. 60.


17 Freud, op. cit. (note 11), p. 274 and n. 2.

18 Freud, op. cit. (note 11), p. 274 and n. 2 (added in 1909); and comment to Ferenczi in November 1909: Brabant et al., op. cit. (note 10), p. 107.


24 Armstrong, op. cit. (note 19).


26 See, as well as Tauber, op. cit. (note 2), H. L. Kaye, ‘Was Freud a medical scientist or a social theorist? The mysterious “development of the hero”’, Sociol. Theory 21, 375–397 (2003), which plays too much on these earlier gestures.


31 ‘The infant European has sundry marked points of resemblance to the lower human races’, Spencer, op. cit. (note 28).

32 Freud, op. cit. (note 11), p. 566.
33 Brickman, op. cit. (note 7), p. 80.
34 Sulloway, op. cit. (note 30).
41 Ibid.
43 See Bunzl, op. cit. (note 40).
46 Regna Darnell, And along came Boas: continuity and revolution in Americanist anthropology (John Benjamins, Amsterdam, 1998), pp. 108–109. See also Hall’s 1904 classic study Adolescence (Appleton & Co., New York, 1904), especially the final chapter, ‘Ethnic psychology and pedagogy, or adolescent races and their treatment’.
51 Freud and Jung did not attend all the sessions of the Clark Conference, so it cannot be said for certain that they were in the audience for Franz Boas’s paper. However, given that Boas had originally been scheduled to give his address on the last session before lunch on the Tuesday but gave that up so that Freud, who had arrived earlier than expected, could give his first

See Kathleen V. Wilkes in Kitcher and Wilkes, op. cit. (note 35), p. 129.


54 Jaffe and Jung, op. cit. (note 53), p. 162; compare with: ‘I read a Greek or a Negro myth as if a lunatic were telling me his anamnesis—I lost myself in puzzling what it could possibly mean’: Jung, op. cit. (note 53), p. 22.

56 Ibid., p. 175.
57 Ibid., p. 177.
58 Shamdasani, op. cit. (note 50), ch. 4.

64 Freud, op. cit. (note 11), p. 89.

66 The slippages are helped by Strachey’s standardizing interventions in the Standard edition (see Joyce Crick, ‘Note on Translation’ in Freud, op. cit. (note 65), pp. xl–xlvi).


Title page, Otto Rank & Hanns Sachs (1912), ‘Entwicklung und Ansprüche der Psychoanalyse’, 
_Imago_ 1, 1–16 (1912).

Sigmund Freud, ‘Die Inzestscheu’, _Imago_ 1, 17–33 (1912), at pp. 17–18; the paragraph had the 
marginal head ‘Parallel of the ontogenetic and phylogenetic in the development of mental life’. 

Freud, _op. cit._ (note 69), p. ix.

In fact the only real engagement with Jung’s work in the text of _Totem and taboo_ is in two 
footnotes in the final essay, suggesting that Freud continued to see his work as aligned to that 
of Jung through most of the work’s instigation.

Danziger, _op. cit._ (note 44), p. 307—although his investigations were subject to many shifts; see 
Jahoda, _op. cit._ (note 44), ch. 11.

Wilhelm Wundt, _Elements of folk psychology: outlines of a psychological history of the 
(translation modified; italics original). The subtitle is curiously similar to that which Jung 
gave to _Transformations_, and was at about the same time.

Peter J. Bowler, _The eclipse of Darwinism_ (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 
1983), pp. 35ff; see also Stephen Jay Gould, ‘Pervasive influence’, in _Ontogeny and phylogeny_, ch. 5 (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1977); and also challenges to 
Gould in Robert J. Richards, _The meaning of evolution_ (Chicago University Press, 1992); and 
the same author’s _The tragic sense of life: Ernst Haeckel and the struggle over evolutionary 


A. A. Goldenweiser, ‘Totemism, an analytical study’, _J. Am. Folklore_ 23, 178–298 (1910); 


Freud made reference to the ethnographies of Boas but only through quotations from Frazer: 
Freud, _op. cit._ (note 69), pp. 53, 58 and 119.

C. G. Jung, _Jung contra Freud_ (tr. R. F. C. Hull; introduction by Sonu Shamdasani) (Princeton 


There were exceptions such as Géza Róheim, but even he became less enthusiastic later in his 
life (see Paul A. Robinson, _The Freudian left_ (Harper & Row, New York, 1969)).

See Michael Silverstein, ‘Boasian cosmographic anthropology and the sociocentric component 
of mind’, in _Significant others: interpersonal and professional commitments in anthropology_ 

See Rene Girard, _Violence and the sacred_ (tr. Patrick Gregory) (Johns Hopkins University Press, 

Lacan’s ‘Father’ is associated with the primal father of _Totem and taboo_. Bruce Fink, _The 

See, for example, Eric Santner, _On creaturely life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald_ (Chicago University 

It is worthwhile pointing out that Boas’s address was published in 1910 in _The American Journal 
of Psychology_, edited primarily by Stanley Hall, in an issue that published other lectures from 
the Clark Conference. The immediately previous issue had published papers by Freud, Jung 
and other psychoanalytic contributors. Because, even in the first edition of _Interpretation_, this 
journal was one that Freud referred to, it is reasonable to believe that he had received these 
issues, and no doubt so had Jung.