

THE FREUD FILES

How did psychoanalysis attain its prominent cultural position? How did it eclipse rival psychologies and psychotherapies, such that it became natural to bracket Freud with Copernicus and Darwin? Why did Freud ‘triumph’ to such a degree that we hardly remember his rivals? This book reconstructs the early controversies around psychoanalysis, and shows that rather than demonstrating its superiority, Freud and his followers rescripted history. This legend-making was not an incidental addition to psychoanalytic theory but formed its core. Letting the primary material speak for itself, this history demonstrates the extraordinary apparatus by which this would-be science of psychoanalysis installed itself in contemporary societies. Beyond psychoanalysis, it opens up the history of the constitution of the modern psychological sciences and psychotherapies, how they furnished the ideas which we have of ourselves, and how these became solidified into indisputable ‘facts’.

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Books by both authors have been recipients of the Grady Award from the National Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis.

The Freud Files: An Inquiry into the History of Psychoanalysis

Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen
and
Sonu Shamdasani



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-50990-9 — The Freud Files
 Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, Sonu Shamdasani
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India
 79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521509909

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First published 2012

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Borch-Jacobsen, Mikkel.

The Freud files : an inquiry into the history of psychoanalysis / Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen and Sonu Shamdasani.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-72978-9 (pbk.)

1. Psychoanalysis – History. 2. Freud, Sigmund, 1856–1939. I. Shamdasani, Sonu, 1962– II. Title.

BF173.B68127 2012

150.19'5209–dc23

2011020724

ISBN 978-0-521-50990-9 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-72978-9 Paperback

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Cambridge University Press
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For Charlotte and Maggie

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Acknowledgements

This book began in 1993 as an inquiry into Freud historians and their work. We had become aware of the upheavals that had affected Freud studies since the 1970s, which were completely transforming how one understood psychoanalysis and its origins. Intrigued by the new histories of the Freudian movement, we decided to interview the key players to gather their testimonies in a collective volume. These interviews were transcribed and annotated (we reproduce a few excerpts in the following), but the volume itself remained unfinished, for in the meantime our investigation had changed.¹ Quite quickly, it became apparent that it was not possible to situate ourselves with the neutrality and ironic detachment that we had initially adopted. The stakes were too high, and too much remained to be researched and verified before one could attempt to pass judgment on the endless controversies around psychoanalysis. Instead of describing them from the outside, we became drawn in, and here put forward our own contribution to the history of the Freudian movement.

This book is the product of this engagement, but also an attempt to regain, through historical reflection, some of the distance that we at first maintained towards our object of study. We wanted to study the history of the history of psychoanalysis and to understand better the basic issues of this fascinating and conflictual field – fascinating because of the conflict. We wanted, in the end, to draw consequences from historical criticism for the understanding of this strange movement. For any reckoning with the status of psychology, psychiatry and psychotherapy in today's societies at some point requires coming to terms with Freud and his legacy.

We would like to thank all those who accompanied us in this task and above all the historians who agreed to be interviewed. Many became friends (when they were not already) and guides in the minefields of Freud studies: Ernst Falzeder, Didier Gille, Han Israëls, Mark S. Micale, Karin Obholzer, Paul Roazen, François Roustang, Élisabeth Roudinesco, Richard Skues,

x • Acknowledgements

Anthony Stadlen, Isabelle Stengers, Frank J. Sulloway, Peter J. Swales. Many others deserve our gratitude for their help, hospitality, advice, support and criticisms: Vincent Barras, Bill Bynum, Henry Cohen, Frederick Crews, Todd Dufresne, Jacques Gasser, Angela Graf-Nold, Henri Grivois, Malcolm ‘Mac’ Macmillan, Patrick Mahony, George Makari, Michael Neve, Enrique Pardo, Eugene Taylor, Marvin W. Kranz, Fernando Vidal, Juliette Vieljeux and Tom Wallace. We also thank those in the public and private archives that we worked in for their assistance. We would like to thank Philippe Pignarre, editor and friend, for his immediate interest in the project and valuable advice during the final stages of its composition. At Cambridge University Press, we would like to thank Andy Peart for taking on the project, and Hetty Marx for her patience with the endless delays.

The French edition of this work appeared from Éditions du Seuil in 2006. This edition has been revised and rewritten. We would like to thank John Peck for his editorial suggestions and Kelly S. Walsh for providing draft translations of chapter 3, and sections of chapters 2 and 4. His work on chapter 3 was made possible by a grant from the Graduate School of the University of Washington, which is gratefully acknowledged.

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