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## CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGICAL RE-FORMULATION OF EGO-DEFENCE INTO EGO-CONSTRUCTION

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## **Abstract**

The developing self is a complex concept that recurrently occupies a variety of academic disciplines, and that is yet to be clarified from a holistically, transdisciplinary standpoint. For instance, psychoanalytical theories offer detailed insight into the intraindividual psychodynamics of personal development. Cultural psychological theories, on the other hand, stress a culture's influence on a person's day-to-day development and advance a detailed account of semiotic, i.e., culturally mediated, sign construction that underlies psychological processes and results from it at the same time. Importantly, and what a cultural psychological standpoint therefore offers, is a view on culture that withdraws from conceiving it as an own entity (e.g., cannot be calculated as an external factor), but views it as deeply entangled with the formation of personality development. Both theory strands thus each complexly address 'sides of the same coin', namely the phenomenon of the developing self, but have not yet been systematically linked with each other from a holistic perspective. Therefore, this thesis addresses the question, how an integrative perspective of psychoanalytical psychodynamics can be synthesized with cultural psychological metatheory on development. More precisely, I theoretically explore how psychoanalytical theories of ego defence mechanisms help furthering an analysis of ego construction. By using the concept of ego construction, I argue that cultural psychological construction processes that are entangled with people's engagement with their culturally laden environments can further elaborate psychoanalytical theories on ego defence. To approach ego defence, this project departs from Freudian psychoanalytic theory. It draws on the differentiation between needs and wishes that leads to an inner tension where defence mechanisms help in understanding the tension upon delayed gratification. Pushing beyond this traditional perspective and by assuming a high entanglement of needs and wishes, the defence needs to be recognized as an ongoing process, conceptualized as a continuous and recurring process rather than as mechanisms. It is a central conclusion of this Ph.D. project that,

therefore, concepts of defence must leave their descriptive level to overcome the problem of cause and effect, allowing an understanding of development as open psychodynamic *and* cultural system.

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## Introduction

Both, cultural psychology and psychoanalysis offer various mutual points of contact, but their resulting mutual benefits have not yet been systematically approached. In my dissertation *“From ego defence into ego construction”* I therefore suggest a developmental synthesis of cultural psychology and psychoanalytical metatheory on ego defence. On the one hand I argue that this allows a better understanding of psychological theory development to decrease the gap between practical clinical work and theoretical considerations. On the other hand, and vice versa, this synthesis extends cultural psychological considerations with a detailed inner-psychological perspective that provides access to complex inner-psychic dynamics.

*But how is such a synthesis development possible?* To start with, it is essential to address and understand the pre-assumptions in synthesis development, as there immediately seem to appear manifold problems: At its basis, a synthesis needs to deal with different levels of definitions, contradictive premises, that in some cases can even derive from different schools in the very same paradigm, and last but not least with methodological controversies. Therefore, the critical reader will annotate that we would need to centrally stress the “limitations” of synthesis development and withdraw from arriving at rash synthetic conclusion(s). Furthermore, the heterogeneous theory landscape of cultural psychology and with it, its pluralistic theoretical foundation cannot allow single “right” conclusions and interpretations. Therefore, it needs an ongoing and provocative open framework, which (at least partly) allows ideas of synthesis wherever possible.

*How does this dissertation contribute to modern science?* At first, by providing insight into the complex and diverse field of psychoanalytic and cultural psychological theory, allowing us to derive a better understanding of the problem from multiple perspectives. Second, identifying the relevant aspects of the problem, and third, offering a new, overarching

perspective from which theoretical considerations derive that lead us to further a development of a conjoint analysis of psychoanalysis and cultural psychology.

*How can we dissect the problem into its relevant aspects?* To identify a starting point, I suggest that it needs a closer look on everyday interaction that can be understood as a dialogue between the subject “I” and all sorts of objects I rely on and/or communicate with. As Kellermann (2008) points out, such interactions are tools, as: “Life cannot be cured. The best we can do is to offer the patient the ability to develop tools with which to struggle and to struggle better. No more, no less (p. viii)”. However, not only psychoanalysts, or in a broader sense healthcare professionals, provide patients with interactional “tools.” It is the patient him\*herself who develops the major and most profound set of tools, consciously as well as unconsciously. Psychoanalysis conceptualizes these tools as defence mechanisms. By the classical talking cure invented by S. Freud (1949), the analysand needs to learn about and understand the necessity of his\*her symptoms in life, progressing personal development to experience relieve from suffering from symptoms. A. Freud (1936) centrally furthered the early understanding of defence mechanisms, although most of her work remains at a level of description. Until today, her contribution “The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence” is considered one of the most influential readings existing in psychoanalysis. From a developmental perspective, the main interest does not aim at locating and introducing a descriptive understanding of defence mechanisms, but aims to understand their ability to transform and influence personal decisions and how they help in developing higher mental structures in personalities. The core interest of her analysis stresses understanding the difference between manifestation and development of defence mechanisms, making visible the process from Ego-defence, the “warding off” of an inner-psychological conflict that shapes Ego-construction, or in other, more common terms: the development of the self. Her analysis derives from clinical case analyses in descriptive understanding, as is common to psychoanalytic research.

However, I argue that we need to overcome the solely descriptive and case-analytic way to approach ego defence and change our focus to re-conceptualizing the notion mechanisms by considering them rather as complex open processes on a theoretic level. Clinical psychoanalysts centrally work with the hypothesis that identity formation exactly derives from ego defence mechanisms – that the "I" as a mediator between unconscious forces is accessible by asking for what it wards off. However, though this warding-off is considered a dynamic process, its description often remains on levels twodimensional levels of going back and forth: The "I" against the "warded off". I argue that modern psychoanalytic theory needs to extend this perspective by moving beyond this. It substantially needs to systematically approach the constant developmental tasks the "I" continually faces that go beyond just two dimensions, as they are entangled with the many facets of human (cultural) conduct of life.

Above that, ego construction is not only an intra-individual process a single person *does*, but is is a task of integration between a human being and the other. In psychoanalytic relational theory, this happens between the subject and the object – in cultural psychology, this is an interaction between the I and the *Umwelt* (cultural environment). Trying to combine both "dimensions" from a philosophical point of view, Foucault (1987) exemplifies that "[...] mental illness has its reality and its value qua illness only within a culture that recognizes it as such" (p. 60). He analyses how institutionalised ways of talking that socio-culturally construct ways to be ("subject positions") forms individual actions. Foucault therefore hardly ever talks about individuals but rather uses conceives individuals as agents, as they never fully act individually but always act within discourses and act discursively. In contrast to cultural psychology, Foucault, as well as psychoanalysis oppose two entities: Individually acting persons and their outer counterpart. However, I argue that there is more to understand than merely two dimensions by splitting defence mechanisms into a collective and an individual entity. Cultural Psychology offers thinking about the relation between the entities

and not about the identification of its difference. Dualistic approaches as divisions into individual and collective entities seem dysfunctional and are misleading in gaining theoretical insight as pointed out in Mihalits (2017). Very easily put, someone can get lost in justifying and identifying the collective or individual, missing the actual target in exploring new accesses of the relationship in between these entities to better understanding human development.

*Why is such a perspective of use for analyzing defence mechanisms?* Defence mechanisms are constructions which are not existing out of the moment; they are the summary of all our experiences in the past while interacting with our present existence. It is more a continuum through which human beings go through in their actual psycho-cultural-genesis. At this point I suggest to summarize: First, psychoanalysis needs to understand the ego construction as an ongoing process of a person and therefore accessing individual development. Otherwise psychoanalysis loses its potential by solely trying to cure someone's symptoms by the concrete idea of mechanistically fixing something (which I doubt that can be found in the psyche or more concretely in psychic defence). Second, the structural understanding that development is neither the change of inner nor outer external factors, but the processual interaction between the two perspectives (and maybe more). This is why I propose that it needs a dialectic understanding cultural psychology can provide.

To further elaborate on the entanglement of cultural psychological dialogicality and psychoanalytic inner-dynamics of ego defence and construction, the dissertation is divided into four papers as well as a final concluding chapter on future prospects, discussing possible ways of implementation of the theoretic considerations in a wider scientific theory development context as well as in the practical therapeutic situation.

In *article one*, I show the possible impact and importance of cultural psychology on clinical phenomena. A short case study of a traumatized patient who is in psychoanalytic treatment gives the opportunity of a practical example showing the importance of bringing clinical practical work and cultural psychology into conversation. This becomes apparent in the fact that trauma can be repressed but never be erased. Dominantly, at least two perspectives contribute to a fruitful discussion: First, from a clinical perspective that claims that trauma is an ongoing process (Becker, 2009; Khan, 1963; Lifton & Mitchell, 1995; McDermott, 2011; Minow, 1998). Second, and from a cultural psychological perspective following Valsiner (2000, 2007), as time can be understood as an irreversible object. Strategies of integration need to be found in working with patients to lead to a “a posteriori” re-evaluation of the traumatic situation. In the case study, the therapist introduces a metaphor of aesthetics, found in Japanese culture, offering a strategy for further development for the patient. The art of so-called “Kintsugi” is used for repairing broken pottery. Interestingly, the breaking points of the shards are not minimized during the gluing process but are deliberately made visible by adding golden pigments to the glue. Breaking and repairing do not only become an inevitable part of the history of the object, but also a valued as an aesthetic ornament which helps the patient in constructive re-evaluation of the traumatic situation by metaphoric comparison of the own situation of feeling “broken” and the process of repair.

Departing from this sketch how psychoanalytical thought profits from cultural psychology and vice versa, *article two* deals with the transformation of defence mechanisms from a theoretical level into common scientific research practice. It shows the impact of how misinterpretations can lead into critical and questionable theoretical grounds or in short – what happens if levels of quality get confused with levels of quantity. Though the use of statistical approaches for the concept of defence mechanisms takes on greater significance during the past years, it did not contribute to the functional understanding and definition of

defence mechanisms. On the contrary, it more or less tests isolated assumptions without enough theoretical reflection upon psychoanalytic theory construction as well as the inaccurate use and interpretation of psychoanalytic data itself made results varying and unprecise, not adding value neither empirically nor from a theoretic perspective. Centrally, this paper aims at identifying the disregard in discussions of the ontological status of defence mechanisms and addresses its resulting epistemological consequences linked with. The distinction between constructs, referred to as explanatory terms and phenomena, do not – as their empirical referents get easily confused during the study of defence mechanisms – contribute to a theoretical model with explanatory value.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, we can conceptualize these inner-psychic processes as operating defence mechanisms. Therefore, *article three* summarizes existing theoretical consideration on defence and shows the qualities of psychoanalytic defence mechanisms and tries to find common grounds in theoretical considerations that allow new synthesizing developments in theory. Predominantly, the role of different levels of hierarchical organization as well as considering defence mechanisms not solely as processes in action with the individual but also with its environment and flexibility in change is discussed. Different defence mechanisms do lead to diverse levels of psychic integration, both intra- and inter-individual between human beings.

*Article four* addresses the question how to define the relationship between theoretical considerations and practical applications against the backdrop of previous findings. Here, there are two main problems to discuss: First, the difficulty of transferring existing general psychological theories into useful tools for practice. Second and considering the high complexity psychological phenomena involved in psychological practice, current academic psychology seems to be unable to successfully deal with this complexity. Whereas phenomena in clinical practice are dynamic and indeed need a dialogical perspective (Hermans, 2001,

Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), existing perspectives are largely static and ontological in their nature of argument. Research on the psychotherapeutic process needs a bridging between dialectical thinking and clinical practice and to recognize the developmental nature of therapy. For the discipline of psychology, it seems surprising that there have been only few efforts yet, for more systematically developing dialectical perspectives (Basseches, 1989; Georgoudi, 1984; Greenberg and Pascual-Leone, 1995, 2001; Kvale, 1977; Riegel & Riegel, 1972; Riegel 1975, 1978, 1979; Rychlak, 1976; Verhofstadt-Deneve, 2000, 2001, 2007). The paper concludes by providing an overview of possible directions in dialectical psychology while discussing the gap in clinical practice by giving various practical examples.

The chapter *Conclusion* discusses ideas prepared to be presented as oral presentation at the 11<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Dialogical Self Conference<sup>1</sup> and continues on researching the problem identified in the four pre-mentioned papers: Based on the fact that social power structures are asymmetrical when examined more detailed, the focus will be on analyses in the field of psychoanalysis that are controversial up until now. The use of the construct of defence mechanisms can help to point out such asymmetric power structures. Analyzing the forces within the self, we can see how a person deals with inner psychological conflicts and extend this knowledge by understanding the forces that are to be considered in dialogue with its environment. In short, psychoanalysis enables us to recognize asymmetric power relations (both conscious and unconscious), but it is not possible to pursue further development within it, since asymmetry is understood at a purely descriptive level. This overlooks the developmental, cultural psychological perspective. The justification may be based on the ambivalence of the development of theories of psychoanalysis per se, as well as on the

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation title: "Beyond Homestasis: The Utopia of Equilibria and How Human Beings Live in Systems of Autopoiesis"



scientific environment and society of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Vienna. The imperative of "objectivity" of the 20th century itself opened the doors for primarily positivistic concepts to find their way into the social sciences. In the case of psychoanalysis, the assumption of an "equilibrium", a kind of homeostasis of forces, which later found its way into science more generally as a psychodynamic model, is still valid, even if not immediately apparent at first glance. Challenging these modalities of equilibrium and homeostasis offer more insight and a better understanding of the complexity of the defence mechanisms, as well as to show the necessity of a developmental and dynamic perspective. Here, I discuss the concept of autopoiesis, which allows more complex dynamics in development. I argue that this will serve as a starting point for future considerations. For instance, Baldwin (1897) states that:

*a man is a social outcome rather than a social unit. He is always in his greatest part, also someone else. Social acts of his – that is, acts which may not prove antisocial – are his because they are society's first; otherwise he would not have learned them nor have had any tendency to do them. (p. 87)*

Following Baldwin's statement, I suggest that the change from ego-defence to ego-construction happens through the ability to symbolize and being able to use a dialectical understanding for progressing intersubjectivity: Ego-defence becomes Ego-construction through the intersubjective relativity. I argue that defence mechanisms cannot solely get interpreted as a one-way street in analysis by looking at the patient. Other dimensions also need to get interpreted, likewise "what would get lost without having defence-mechanisms in operation". Dialectics can offer a fruitful collaboration in better understanding the developmental perspective of psychoanalytic defence mechanisms.

The ultimate goal is to overcome static causal entities and to shift the view to generic dynamic process: from defence to construction by dialectics.

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## Article 1: The Case of the Vase. How to overcome traumatic life ruptures by mediating signs of civilization?

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to show the impact and importance of cultural psychology on clinical phenomena as well as psychological treatment by giving practical examples e.g. psychological trauma: It can be repressed but cannot be erased and therefore psychotherapeutic treatment consists of supportive elements as well as therapists' containment to lead to a final revaluation of patients' traumatic situation. The gap in patient's perception between the desire of "turning back the clock" and living in reality often seems insurmountable. Shame and fear of being judged often play a massive role within these therapeutic alliances. In metaphoric language, patients tend to look for a sort of undamaged or unbroken aesthetic which never can be reached. Using this metaphoric term of aesthetic might also bring cultural psychology into action, offering a different point of view, leading to a better understanding in patients' behaviour. As an example, the concept of Kintsugi, a Japanese art of repairing pottery, which treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, might help patients to allow constructive revaluation of traumatic situations. Discussing this example should not mislead to the idea of any cultural supremacy but may bring some awareness in how much cultural psychology could impact on patients' successful treatment within the framework of irreversible time.

**Keywords:** Kintsugi, trauma, repair, life course, time

## **In between Culture and Time**

Culture is inherent in humans' everyday life. Its particular manifestations within the person change during the lifespan as the self gets transformed and sometimes even seems to vanish out of one's personal point of view, but its impact on human life cannot be denied participating in a more and more globalized growing world. This statement might be shared quickly on a level of common sense by many as examples of miscommunication can be found easily detecting "transculturality" in their focus of attention. But being more precise, it needs to be clarified that culture itself cannot be understood as an exclusive factor which sheds light into various areas. It can only develop and be identified within a mutual correspondence of human beings and needs to be understood in a processual way. Having that in mind, a deeper understanding of cultural processes and its impact on human beings seem not only eligible but also possible to investigate on. Culture is about meaning making processes and gets mediated by signs. The goal of this theoretic paper is to detect such scopes of meaning making processes by investigating metaphorically on collective ways of handling life course ruptures, some of which become viewed as "traumas". Traumas are inherent to human experiences and surpass the individual and group capacity to deal with situations. Being traceable in both, individual as well as collective level, it needs to be clarified that the major interest of this work can be found in its collective entity. In the latter case, the focus of this paper, we pay special attention to the role played by culture. Indeed, culture acts as a tool mediating the process by which human beings struggle with traumatic situations. Obviously calling something 'culturally mediated' does not explain, but itself needs explanation, whereas on the following pages it will be tried to give exactly such explanation by the use of two specific metaphors of sign-mediation over time, using culturally established techniques of reformation. More precisely, on the one hand by giving an example of a "restorative" process; and on the other hand, borrowing a concept from the Japanese context, so called "Kintsugi", a

process we could denominate as a “joinery”. Cultural mediation happens through signs – which are presentations (*Vorstellungen*) where something is made to represent something else for some function. Types of signs are variable and need to be understood in the life course and concept of irreversibility of time. Concluding this manuscript, a first interpretation of irreversibility of time, its impact on culture of daily life course and exemplarily the function of culture should be made visible.

## **Why Trauma?**

The interpretation of cultural tools in a metaphoric way dealing with trauma might look farfetched at the beginning. Attention and insight to this phenomenon was growing first by given quotes of patients in psychoanalytic sessions who suffer from trauma: “If I would simply be able to travel back in time and change my past” example wise, shows the gap in patient’s perception between the desire of “turning back the clock” and living in today’s reality. This often seems insurmountable for them. Shame and fear of being judged often play a massive role within these therapeutic alliances focusing abuse in many ways (e.g. war, rape, sudden death, etc.). But trauma doesn’t necessarily mean to be understood as trauma, reading contemporary literature. It occurs as necessary to clarify that even if in everyday discourse the term trauma is often used interchangeably if not even synonymous with the word stress, but doesn’t mean the same at all. Trauma can stimulate stress and lead to an increased stress level but also functions on various levels, as the Webster online college dictionary (2017) points trauma out as “a painful emotional experience, or shock, often producing a lasting psychic effect and, sometimes, a neurosis.” Of course, a definition given in an American college dictionary represents the common language use and lacks the specific detail of time, which Moore and Fine (1990) seem to be more precise about, as they specify trauma as a

[...] disruption or breakdown that occurs when the psychic apparatus is suddenly [marked by the author] presented with stimuli, either from within or without, that are too powerful to be dealt with or assimilated in the usual way. A postulated stimulus barrier or protective shield is breached, and the ego is overwhelmed and loses its mediating capacity. A state of helplessness results, ranging from total apathy and withdrawal to an emotional storm accompanied by disorganized behaviour bordering on panic. Signs of automatic dysfunction are frequently present. (p. 199)

The framework of time seems to take an important part in traumatic experiences, as the wish of redoing or reinventing the past is a core element in patients' perception. Moreover, the illusionary idea of reversibility of time might point out a more general need of concrete stability in life actions which fits exactly Benight and Bandura (2004) who describe the general need of self-efficacy as a coping strategy in recovery from different types of traumatic experiences. Using the words of a patient that would mean, it is about "me being in the position of taking decisions and not decisions taking position upon me". As mentioned earlier, trauma can operate on diverse levels, whereas the so far described individual level is only one to be talked about. Trauma does not necessary imply to be more than an individual process but also can be detected on collective levels, also called by the name of cultural trauma in literature. Alexander (2004) says that „cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identities in fundamental ways" (p. 1). Still having definitions of individual trauma in mind, it seems that the only difference between collective and individual trauma is detected in a certain number bigger than one to call it collective. Therefore, the segregation of individual vs. collective trauma only makes sense for quantification but does not add any information to the quality of

traumas' phenomenon. Furthermore, the segregation between individual and collective traumas seem artificial, as trauma always will be understood by patients in a personal way affecting individual as well as collective life strategies. This suggests for current considerations that it is more suitable to speak about events/triggers who cause traumatic reactions.

Events/triggers can be called collective if affecting plural individuals versus events/triggers provoking single cases be assumed individual. The reason for this precise differentiation can be found in its explanation of the way of response to single/multiple case triggers/events. Responses on a traumatic situation are individual whereas these individual responses are at the same time covered by collective strategies. Furthermore collective responses also get collectively interpreted in a framework of culture, as Foucault (1987) points out that "[...] mental illness has its reality and its value qua illness only within a culture that recognizes it as such" (p. 60). *Figure 1* tries to clarify the relationship between collective and individual strategies by pointing out these connections. Starting with an inevitable traumatic event (encircled cross) in the past, the current evaluation in the present of the event leads to a response for future evaluation of the traumatic event. This response is individual as well as collective at the same time. In *figure 1* I try to amplify that responses are generated simultaneously whereas collective/cultural responses always include individual responses.



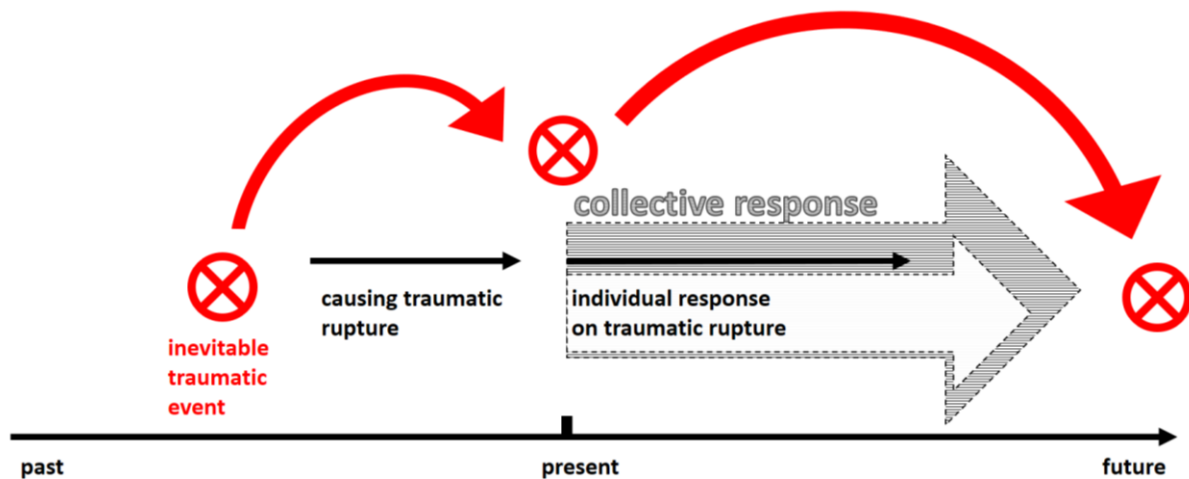


Figure 1: Response strategies on trauma

My further interest in this paper is to investigate on collective responses. The following examples will show the possibility of variation in response and need to be understood metaphorically. In daily reality, these sort of “ideal types” might not be detectable that clearly, whereas for more concrete explanation this figurative way might be succeeding. Strategies need to be understood as social representations, dealing with trauma.

### Culture as a “tool” – Restoration vs. Integration

Collective response strategies or its’ social representations do vary in high quantity. The following examples do not shoe entire possibilities, they are moreover chosen to deal as borders framing the phenomenon being detected in between. More precise, talking about a “restorative” process on the one hand which defines itself by generating the state of origin and, on the other hand, borrowing a concept from the Japanese context, by a process we could denominate as a “joinery”, called Kintsugi. Processes of conservation are also part of restoration but only symbolize stagnation whereas there is no need in further discussing in here. Let’s imagine that a vase has flown into pieces and we consider that as a traumatic event or at least as a noteworthy rupture in life events of the vase. The following examples should show how to possibly deal with this rupture:

In the first case, the underpinning idea is to bring a broken object, such as our example of pottery, back to this original form. In this case, the goal is to reassemble the “pieces” of an original model to cast its first form. The transformations underwent by this object, or in other words, the “traumas” it went through, over time are considered to be flaws or “distortions” that deviate the respective object from this primal version. As a consequence, we could say that the central goal of the restorative process is recasting the “original” state of a certain object before it suffers any “decay.” This wish of original conditions emerges a problem on two diverse levels: The first level is to be detected in acknowledging irreversibility of time. Therefore, once our symbolic vase is broken, it might be glued and it is nearly not possible to see any scratches in between broken fragments, but still they are there. Restauration in this case is an illusion which always make trouble focusing reality due to irreversibility of time. On the second level, a more metaphoric one, psychoanalysis comes into play. Following the psychoanalytic framework, memory can be repressed but cannot be erased, as Freud (1963) points out. Using his model of memory, he outlined in his book “the interpretations of dreams”, Billig (1999) summarizes precisely that “the mind retains the original ‘memory-trace’ (or ‘Mnem.’), left by the perceptual experience, but the memory-trace cannot enter consciousness” (p. 150), which leads to compulsive repetition in its outcome. This repetition can be also found in the idea of restauration as well as contemporary psychotherapeutic treatment. Billig writes:

[...] These repressed memories continue to haunt the adult psyche, whatever in recalled memories, dreams or in the symptoms of neuroses. Because the original traces, or memories, have not been erased, they can be recovered in the course of careful therapeutic work. Once they are exposed, the adult problems – or the haunting of the psyche – will be alleviated. (Billig, 1999, p. 150)

A statement which gets highlighted by Kihlstrom (1996) who points out that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (p. 297). To overcome trauma reintegration of problematic experiences into humans’ personal lifespan is needed, which restauration cannot offer. So now the question is, how to proceed with our example of the vase?

### **Offering the possibility of integration: Kintsugi**

In contrast, the Japanese cultural history offers an opposite approach for “traumatic” events, here understood as the process of transformation of an object or experience over the course of irreversible time: Instead of aiming at the restoration of a ‘primal’ version of a given object, the focus is enhancing the process by which such an object could incorporate, as part of itself, all the flaws or imperfections (i.e., the “traumas”) it has been facing over time. This cultural-regulated process is known as *kintsugi* (“to patch with gold”) or *kintsukuroi* (“to repair with gold”), translated by Holland (2008). For our considerations Kintsugi channels the psychological experience in such a way that faults are considered as being part of the history of an object, rather than something to be disguised or overcome. In our practical example this would mean that our vase will be renewed using gold (see *figure 2*) and in contrast to the idea of restauration, the sites of fracture are made highly visible, using this precious metal. Instead of reducing the vase to functionality, value gets detected in its rupture.



*Figure 2: Mishima ware Hakeme type tea bowl, with gold lacquer kintsugi repair work, 16<sup>th</sup> century*

Originally applied to the context of the pottery, both these cultural-framed paths could be taken as apparently opposing metaphors dealing with the struggle of traumatic situations in its boundedness to time whereas the second example of Kintsugi allows the possibility of re-integration of the event into personal lifespan and therefore possibly overcome trauma.

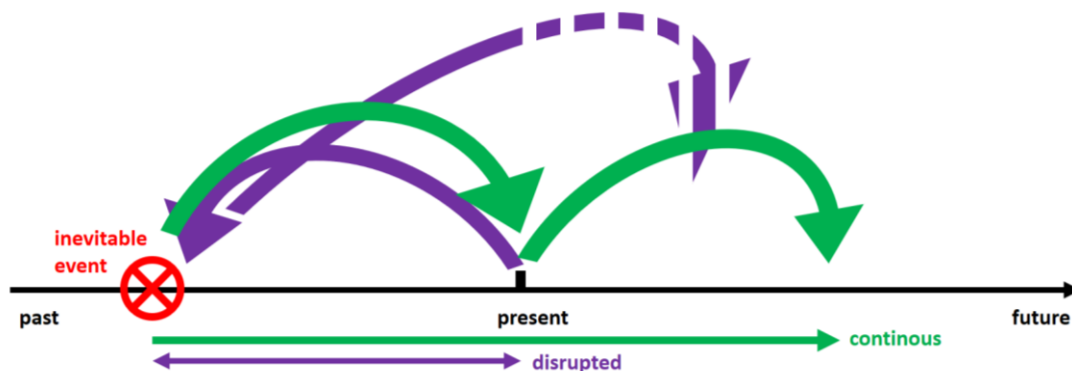
### **Conclusion: The idea in generalizing?**

Acknowledging pre-discussed examples on a more abstract level, the main interest can be manifested in the occurrence of time. Only because of the existence of time we can consider terms like e.g. insanity or mental diseases and identify them as social representations. Foucault (1987) mentions that although it is possible to describe the appearance of illness, its conditions are still unknown:

It would be a mistake to believe that organic evolution, psychological history, or the situation of man in the world may reveal these conditions. It is in these conditions, no doubt, that the illness manifests itself, that its modalities,

its forms of expression, its style, are revealed. But the roots of the pathological deviation, as such, are to be found elsewhere. (p.60)

These roots might be detectable looking at diverse civilizations and their multiple ways in treatment of symptoms e.g. trauma as described previous. *Figure 3* gives a summarizing overview about current findings: Whereas the inevitable event is a necessity in producing trauma, its response can lead to disrupted (e.g. restauration) or continuous (e.g. kintsugi) understanding of time.



*Figure 3:* Comparison of trauma strategies over time

Preliminary Riegel already pointed out in 1977 that “development and change is possible but requires a radical reversal in our basic conceptions” (p. 4). He brings it exactly at the point by figuring out that science needs

to be founded upon the notion of contradictions between concrete events for which identity, balance, and abstract competencies are merely special and momentary states that immediately converge into the flux of new changes.

The foundation for such a science of development and change has been laid in dialectical logic. One of its most important and intriguing concepts is the concept of time. (p. 4)

Current discussion should underpin Riegel's understanding by accepting that dialectical logic is found the following: It is not preliminary about memory or time, it is about the connection of both of them. Memory of inevitable events/ruptures in life evaluated with the necessity of time in producing individual and collective personality traits.

### **Taking a look into future**

Furthermore, previous described example shows that culture can also be seen as a common collective good. Trauma is not only about the problem of suffer in personal life and its individual coping strategies but also about the existence of collective answers through culture. The reintegration of individual life time into collective perspectives seems eligible. Further research is desirable attempting the possibility in generalizing from the example of trauma to more universal validity. I conclude with the words of Kellermann (2008) that "life cannot be cured. The best we can do is to offer the patient the ability to develop tools with which to struggle, and to struggle better" (p. viii). Complementing on this quote it needs to be said that some tools might already be offered by the collective by agreeing in the construct of time.

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## Article 2: The Conceptual Tragedy in Studying Defense Mechanisms

Mihalits, D. S., & Codenotti, M. (2020). The Conceptual Tragedy in Studying Defense Mechanisms. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*. doi:10.1007/s12124-020-09515-6

### Abstract

The concept of defense mechanism is interwoven with psychoanalytic theories of anxiety and psychic conflict. From its first formulation in 1894, its usefulness resides in the degree to which it helps to explain otherwise mysterious phenomena. Statistical approaches to the study of defense mechanisms, which have significantly increased in popularity in the past three decades, test isolated assumptions without reflection on how these are integrated into psychoanalytic theory, nor on what should be regarded as psychoanalytic data. Consequently, their results and their models have not provided useful insights into psychoanalytic theory. This paper aims to show how these issues in statistical approaches largely stem from disregarding discussions on the ontological status of defense mechanisms and the epistemological consequences linked to them. Studying defense mechanisms as they are manifested in external lifestyles, clouds the distinction between constructs (explanatory terms) and phenomena (empirical referents), which is furthermore necessary for a theoretical model to have explanatory value. Concrete examples are given regarding problems in statistical conceptualizations of defense mechanisms as well as the cursory explanations these tend to describe. Implications for future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis, Defense mechanism, Resistance, Psychoanalytic theory, Conceptualization, Statistics, Explanatory terms, Phenomena, Theoretical model



## Introduction

The concept of defense mechanisms is embedded within the core of the psychoanalytic theory. It is very insightful in explaining how the psyche develops, and it has always been key to understanding various patterns of symptoms since its first formulation in 1894. Therefore, it is undoubtedly one of the most insightful concepts psychoanalytic theory has to offer, both for clinical and everyday life phenomena. Together with this ingenious idea, Freud also left us with some complex issues regarding it. He did not concern himself with systematizing the concept from a semantic, ontological nor epistemological point of view (Kris 1947). His daughter Anna, “the child psychologist”, did not focus on conceptual issues regarding defense mechanisms, but was slightly more concerned with the empirical study of defenses and their useful application in the clinical context. In the early second half of the nineteenth Century, many eminent psychoanalytic authors elaborated on the psychoanalytic theory of defense mechanisms, resulting in a variety of perspectives and conceptualizations (which Cooper 1989, summarised quite elegantly). There were many areas of disagreement between scholars, mainly stemming from their different theoretical frameworks (e.g., object-relational theory, Self-psychology, intersubjectivism). A key point in the argument -and in any psychoanalytic theory- was how defense mechanisms, psychic conflict and affects interacted and related to each other.

Around the 90s, there was a change in the scope of most research regarding defense mechanisms: in the past three decades, researchers seem to have been more concerned with making the concept of defense mechanisms and its related hypothesis’ accessible to statistical analysis. Theoretical discussions seem to have taken a backseat in recent models, as these emphasize the need for operational definitions which allow the transformation of defense mechanisms as constructs into observable and measurable variables. The focus has been on the definition of discrete defense mechanisms as behavioral patterns, in the hope of

objectively assessing them through reliable experimental or self-report methods. In this process, the distinction between explanatory constructs and the phenomena they are meant to explain got lost. What has been lacking in this approach is the abductive movement – in other words, surprisingly few insights regarding the concept of defense mechanisms have resulted from statistical studies, but more importantly, few new questions have arisen. “Scientific” investigation along these lines has gone on for more than 40 years. Therefore, it might be time to evaluate different epistemological approaches that became more or less fruitful during the last decades.

In this respect, reintroducing Wallerstein’s (1967) distinction between ‘defense mechanisms’ as constructs and ‘defenses’ as phenomena – which has unfortunately lost popularity – seems favorable. It might appear like a simple linguistic distinction, but its implications are quite strong for the epistemological approach to an empirical inquiry regarding defenses. In simple words, one could easily say that all these changes refer to the interrogative pronoun of “how”: For example, there is quite a difference in asking “how many defense mechanisms are there?”, instead of “which criteria give a distinction between defense mechanisms that are useful to explain these phenomena?”. Elaborating on Wallerstein’s distinction, Sjöbäck (1973; 1993) brings into focus another critical point: defense mechanisms are often considered without taking into account neither what their empirical referents are, nor what their original explananda were. This paper aims to show how the confusion that has arisen in statistical models of defense mechanism largely stems from the positivistic discourses regarding science underlying them and the resulting disavowal of Wallerstein’s (1967) and Sjöbäck’s (1993) reflections regarding the ontological status of defense mechanisms and their epistemological consequences.

The paper starts (Section 2.a) by discussing the importance of considering defense mechanisms as constructs to allow a fruitful epistemological approach for the development of

psychoanalytic theory. Section 2b debates some unfortunate consequences of not considering defense mechanisms in close relation with their empirical referents. Furthermore, using the example of some specific psychoanalytic concepts, in this section, the authors try to explain how closer and, in our view, more faithful reading of the original psychoanalysts' works leads to quite a different picture than the one depicted by "statistical" authors. Sections 3a and b give an overview of statistical approaches to the study of defenses and then highlight problems in their conceptualization of defense mechanisms. The last part of the paper (3.c) gives an example of how explanations coming from statistical data can be quite superficial and lacking in insights.

## **Theoretical Discussions Are by no Means End in themselves**

### **Cleaning Dirty Questions: Do Defense Mechanisms Exist?**

Authors who are asking "what is a defense mechanism?" typically give two classes of answers, which reflect very different ways of understanding the question. The first type of answer consists in giving a definition of defense mechanisms, highlighting the functions they serve and what "triggers" them. The second way of understanding the question will function as the starting point of this section: the answer should tell us what the ontological status of defense mechanisms is. Should defense mechanisms be regarded as a concrete entity? If defense mechanisms are seen as processes, the question would be asking what 'process' means: does a process exist? Another essential point that must be clarified to give a satisfying answer is whether defense mechanisms have an agents. Defining defense mechanisms without first having discussed this matter adequately, can lead to quite some confusion.

Ontological discussions might be seen as opening a Pandora's box. However, Sjöbäck (1973) and Wallerstein (1967) have given us quite a simple – albeit not widely accepted – answer, that helps in making order during the process of theory-making: a 'defense mechanism'

is a construct, an explanatory term that originally “denoted a way of functioning of the mind, invoked to explain how behaviors, affects, and ideas serve to avert or modulate unwanted impulse discharge” (Wallerstein 1967, p. 135). Therefore, defense mechanisms are not an entity, do not have an agent and are not a ‘process’. Wallerstein (1967) calls the phenomena which defense mechanisms shed light on (their empirical referents) ‘defenses’ – a term that encapsulates behaviors, affects and ideas. From this perspective, it is inappropriate to talk of “the use of denial “or“ the discovery of defense mechanisms ” as these statements all imply an ontological existence of defense mechanisms. Wallerstein’s terminology will be used in this paper. However, this semantic distinction is not relevant per se, but rather because of the epistemological implications and the approach to empirical investigation that it implies. Any conceptualization of defense mechanisms (as any scientific theory) should state, as clearly as possible, the realm of phenomena which its constructs wish to explain. When the distinction between explanatory terms and explananda gets lost “the result is a perturbing confusion because one important aim of explanatory endeavors (i.e., theory making) gets lost, namely: that of subsuming a great and (as to varying observable characteristics) bewildering number of phenomena under a few classifying definitions.” (Sjöbäck 1993, p. 26).

The usefulness of a construct lies in the extent to which it explains certain phenomena. An example of this can be found by asking the reason for the success of the concept of Abwehr (defense) itself: when it first appeared in Freud’s writing (1894), it was very insightful concerning the explanation of “mysterious” egodystonic behavioral patterns typical of hysterical women. When the psychoanalytic model wished to explain a vaster range of phenomena (e.g. different kinds of neurosis), the concept of defense was consequently revisited and reconceptualized. Quite frequently, theoretical discussions between scholars who advocate different models of defense mechanisms are due to the underlying discourse that attributes an ontological existence to defense mechanisms, which, therefore, would have “real”

properties. The discussion would have more constructive flavor if they were to focus on the fact that the difference in their conceptualization of defense mechanisms stems from the fact that the two conceptualizations wish to explain different phenomena, and therefore should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but somewhat useful for different purposes. For example, Brenner's (1975) statement that not only anxiety but also depressive affect can trigger defenses should be judged with regard to whether it proves useful for understanding specific behavioral patterns (as intended here the term includes all psychoanalytic data such as wishes, dreams, etc.) typical of depressed patients. If, after examining sufficient psychoanalytic data it would prove to be useful in doing so, one should consider whether it could be useful also to explain a broader range of phenomena. The epistemological consequence of distinguishing between constructs and empirical referents is that a researcher's aim should not be gathering data to better "describe defense mechanisms and how they function", but rather trying to understand which phenomena are parsimoniously explained by specific conceptualizations of defense mechanisms.

Why do so many scholars who study defense mechanisms deny the importance of distinguishing between explanatory constructs and their explananda? Perhaps Vaillant (1992), gives us a first hint: "because Freud, unlike Wallerstein (1983), does not distinguish the forever invisible defense mechanism or process from the sometimes visible defense contents or defensive behaviors, I, too, have chosen to ignore the distinction" (p. 8). Although it is true that Freud did not make the distinction, this does not seem like a valid reason to disregard it. Freud was not so interested in the systematization of knowledge nor semantics, but as psychoanalytic theories and data grow, these become of paramount importance – as Kris (1947) pointed out already more than 80 years ago. The real point of dispute should humbly be whether the distinction is useful or not for the growth of psychoanalytic knowledge regarding defense mechanisms. There might be a more plausible explanation regarding Vaillant's

disavowal of Wallerstein's distinction: he vehemently advocated defense mechanisms should be included in the DSM (e.g. 1994). The DSM does not give etiological explanations, but an epidemiologically valid taxonomy of symptomatology – it has no place for explanatory constructs. The only way for defense mechanisms to be included in the DSM was for them to be operationalized, reliable, descriptions of behavioral patterns that were statistically proven to be associated with psychopathology. A posteriori it is hard to think of what psychoanalytic theory gained from the brief affair defense mechanisms had with the DSM. Another explanation regarding the lack of reflection on the ontological status of defense mechanisms could be that statistical approaches aim towards making defense mechanisms objective, measurable variables, by defining them regarding behavioral patterns – the “manifestations” of defense mechanisms. If one wishes to elaborate a theory that does not reduce defense mechanisms to behavioral patterns and whose flexibility allows to give insights for phenomena in different contexts (clinical and non), Wallerstein's distinction is critical to allow abductive reasoning and contextualization of theoretical constructs.

Not distinguishing between a construct and its explananda is closely linked to (and possibly caused by) another problematic tendency in psychoanalysis: reifying ideas. This tendency largely stems from the influence “brain mythology” (Hirnmythologie) had on Freud's style of theorizing, and from the fact that his use of metaphoric language often does not allow to discern what he be considered to be a “fact” from what is just a metaphoric example. Indeed, it was usually not his interest to do so. Sjöbäck (1973) highlights two undesirable consequences of the tendency to reify. The first disadvantage is that theorists no longer modify hypotheses solely if this increases their explanatory usefulness, and also that they no longer feel free to remove hypotheses that lack explanatory value. The second disadvantage is that theorists amplify psychoanalytic theory with propositions that have little or no reference to observational data, and justify these proposition as “statements about ‘what is really going on

inside people's heads'" (p. 32). The result of both of these consequences would be that "the theory becomes burdened with concepts seemingly having little or no explanative function, while concepts which are truly explanatory become charged with cumbersome surplus meanings, beclouding their references to observable data." (p. 32).

Cramer, a very active author that has widely contributed to the statistical study of defense mechanisms, had stressed the importance of considering defense mechanisms as constructs (1991), but claims in her most recent book (2006) that "to understand how defense mechanisms function, it helps to believe that [they] exist" (p. 12, emphasis added by the authors). This statement seems quite controversial: if they are constructs, they do not function (since constructs have no agents), rather they explain and postulate causal chains between phenomena. It would seem that, although she starts by considering defense mechanisms as constructs, she does so without paying attention to the epistemological consequences of the distinction between explanatory terms and phenomena. In case she would have done so, the question of "understanding how defense mechanisms function" would have never come up. Her position seems close to that of Gillett (1987), which Sjöbäck has thoroughly discussed (1993). It seems as though assuming the ontological existence of defense mechanisms stems from considering "the study of defense mechanisms" the subject of research. How could we study something if it does not exist?

Perhaps a quotation regarding the hermeneutic approach to history could help ease their concerns: "To see history [exchange with 'psychoanalysis'] as interpretative rather than simply uncovering does not detach it from reality; rather, it regards reality as knowable through different possible understandings that are partially constructed by the knower." The positivist view of science as an accumulation of knowledge that leads closer and closer to the truth has long been unpopular among philosophers of science – e.g. since Khun (and most

physicists, as Sjöbäck points out 1993), it is the time that psychology also rid itself of this misleading worldview.

A consequence of considering defense mechanisms as constructs is that attributing a status of consciousness/unconsciousness to them is nonsensical. As Wallerstein (1967) highlights, “Freud [1900] made this same point in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, stating that the psychical systems are only assumptions in accord with which the phenomena of the dream may be more meaningfully ordered and understood, the systems, which are not in any way psychical entities themselves and can never be accessible to our psychical perception” (p. 136). What can be conscious or unconscious is the contents of the defenses (behaviors, affects, ideas explained by defensive processes following Gill 1963). Discussing mental processes reaching or not reaching consciousness (as Freud often did) is an example of reification, which can cause much confusion as previously discussed, and should, therefore, be avoided. According to Gill (1963), saying that defense is unconscious can “mean all or any of three things: that the person may be unaware that he is defending himself; or that he is unaware of the particular behavior or affect or idea which constitutes the defense; or that he is unaware of the cause, the drive representation, that prompted the defense” (Wallerstein 1967, p. 136, emphasis from the original text). Statistical approaches seem to ignore Gill’s remarks. In section 3b there will be an example of how this led to a very misleading way of understanding defense mechanisms as unconscious.

### **Asking Wrong Questions, Looking for the Right Answers: How Many Defense Mechanisms Are There?**

“The term ‘defense’ is often used to refer both to explananda (empirical referents) and to explanatory constructs. The result will be that we get lost in an unmanageable, endless list of ‘defenses’ (because practically all types of



experience and behavior may, according to the basic assumptions of the theory of defense, have defensive aspects, certain conditions prevailing).”

(Sjöbäck 1993, p. 26).

Recently, scholars of defense mechanisms seem to be deaf towards Sjöbäck’s echo of what Wallerstein (1967) had previously stated. Vaillant’s book (1992) starts by charting “Freud’s discovery of 17 distinct defenses” (p. 4), to stress the importance of distinguishing individual defenses one from another. Not distinguishing between defenses and defense mechanisms plagues his list with the same confusion that Wallerstein (1967) highlighted in Bibring et al.’s glossary (1961). Together with the most classically accepted (according to Sjöbäck 1973, p. 194) defense mechanisms (such as undoing, isolation and repression) his list includes defenses (specific behavioral patterns), such as “hypochondriasis”, “Phantasy” (not fantasizing!) and “humor”. Also, McWilliams (2011) makes no distinction in her recent book between defense mechanisms and defenses, listing them together. Sjöbäck’s statement (the initial quote of the section) seems prophetic when one looks at more recent books, such as “101 defenses: How the mind shields itself” (Blackman 2004). Davidson and MacGregor (1998) talk of how “unfortunately, the total number of defense mechanisms remains in dispute, and [this] has caused considerable consternation for researchers and clinicians alike” (p. 969). Statistical research aims to see how people’s “level of usage” of certain defense mechanisms (treated as a trait variable) are associated with other variables (e.g. “successful life adjustments”).

In light of this recent tendency, Brenner’s controversial article from 1981 offers some fine meal of thought regarding the empirical referents of defense mechanisms and the concept of “defensive repertory”. His position regarding modes of defense and ego functions can be summarized as follows: (1) ego functions are all-purpose (2) “there are no special ego functions used for defense and for defense alone” (p. 561) and (3) “modes of defense are as

diverse as psychic life itself” (p. 561). If ego mechanisms used for defense can also be used for non-defensive purposes, it is misleading “to identify defenses primarily by the method used to achieve the purpose of defense- repression, reaction formation, displacement, etc.” (p. 565). Instead, “it is the function served by what one does that determines whether it is properly called defense” (p. 565). The warning to be taken from Brenner’s ideas is that superficially identifying the presence” of a defense based on a behavioral pattern (e.g. the seven “behavioral manifestations” used by Cramer, e.g. 2014, in the DMM to identify each defense) is wrong- or at least highly speculative. The only way to understand whether certain behaviors (in the broad sense) serve a defensive function is through a psychoanalytic interpretation that relates these behaviors to psychic conflict and a reduction of anxiety (or depressive affect, in Brenner’s view).

His critique of the concept of “defensive repertory” is also of much interest for this paper:

The range of each person’s [defensive] repertory is as broad as his range of ego functions. Particular symptoms, however, do involve characteristic defensive patterns, sometimes by definition. It is only if attention is concentrated on one or more prominent symptoms and the rest of a patient’s mental functioning is ignored that one can make out a case that the patient has a special repertory of defenses [...]. As a matter of practical necessity, one focuses analytic attention principally on such troublesome features of a patient’s mental life and, by extension, on the defenses involved in their genesis and dynamics (pp. 567 – 568).

The usefulness of specific defense mechanisms (as constructs) in explaining specific phenomena (e.g. specific symptomatology) is not put into question, as Vaillant (1992) would

have us believe. What is put into question is the appropriateness of explaining “the entire gamut of [a person’ s] mental life, normal as well as pathological” (p. 568), using his defensive repertoire. This statement does not seem so extreme when taking into account the original explananda of psychoanalytic theory in 1937 when A. Freud’ s landmark monograph on defense mechanisms was published:

Since the theory of psychoanalysis is based on the investigation of the neuroses, it is natural that analytic observation should, throughout, have been primarily focused on the inner struggle between the instincts and the ego, of which neurotic symptoms are the sequel. The efforts of the infantile ego to avoid unpleasure by directly resisting external impressions belong to the sphere of normal psychology. Their consequences may be momentous for the formation of the ego and of character, but they are not pathogenic. When this particular ego function is referred to in clinical analytic writings, it is never treated as the main object of investigation but merely as a by-product of observation (p.73-74).

It is clear that the explananda were neurotic symptoms. Ego functions that cannot lead to pathology are excluded from the theoretical model, and similarly, behaviors not related to neurotic symptoms are omitted as empirical referents of the theory. Anna Freud’s position is in line with that of her father, who stated in “Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety”: “It will be an undoubted advantage, I think, to revert to the old concept of ‘defence’, provided we employ it explicitly as a general designation for all the techniques which the ego makes use of in conflicts which may lead to a neurosis” (Freud 1926, p. 162, emphasis added by the authors). When A. Freud re-presents the case of Little Hans in her 1936 monograph, she is explaining his dreams and phantasies using defense mechanisms because she has the a posteriori knowledge that the child had a phobia. The original explananda of specific defense

mechanisms were specific symptomatologies. The mechanism of “repression” which in 1894 was synonymous with defense, was used to explain the symptoms typical of hysteria, whereas “Isolation” for those of obsessive neurosis and “displacement” was related to phobias. Taking this into account, it does not seem controversial to state that specific defense mechanisms have specific patterns of behaviors (symptoms) as their empirical referents. Therefore, using them to explain a person’s behavior, in general, would be misleading.

Brenner (1981) points out another disturbing tendency which is an ultimate example of not distinguishing between construct and phenomena: referring to symptoms as defenses (“When a paranoid man is convinced that another man wants to attack him, his conviction is a symptom, not a defense” p. 565). What follows is that we cannot know (and can never test) whether specific defense mechanisms could explain behaviors other than their original explananda if the defense mechanism is confused with the symptom it originally wished to explain (e.g., as is done by Vaillant 1971, with his definition of “psychotic denial”).

When facing the question of “how many defense mechanisms there are”, Brenner’s idea that “modes of defense are as diverse as psychic life itself” (p. 561), does not seem so radical or problematic as long as we keep in mind the distinction between defense mechanisms and defenses advocated in this paper. “Modes of defense” is synonymous with what we call “defenses”, and of course there is no limit to a possible set of behaviors, affects and ideas that can be explained by defense mechanisms. Although there is no limit to the number of specific defense mechanisms that can be postulated, each specific defense mechanism will be evaluated regarding how parsimoniously it can explain certain phenomena. What is critical is that its connection with its empirical referents is not lost and that its explanatory value is continuously revised based on new empirical data. Taking this into account, it might be alarming how scholars usually refer to Freud when evaluating the number and nature of specific defense mechanisms. Sjöbäck highlighted this in 1973, and most recent approaches also start

from the defense mechanisms “discovered by Freud”. Many things have changed from Freud’s time on. We do not claim that Freud’s considerations should be disregarded in any way but implicate that in case we wish to explain phenomena that were not present at Freud’s time, or that he wasn’t interested in, it seems to be plausible that we should consider conceptualizing new (or reconceptualizing old) defense mechanisms instead of trying to explain these phenomena with some defensive process Freud described himself.

## **Trying to Make Psychoanalytic Theory Falsifiable: Is it the Right Way to Go?**

### **Brief Overview of Statistical Approaches: Their Goals, Assumptions, Results and Problems**

“Since the failure of psychoanalysis to define defenses for the DSM-III and Brenner’s disavowal of the usefulness of the concept, efforts by Meissner (1980), Vaillant (1987), and the compilers of the DSM-III-R glossary (American Psychiatric Association 1987) reflect our progress in building on the process begun a century ago by Sigmund Freud and in providing psychoanalysis with a differentiated, consensually defined hierarchy of defenses.” (Vaillant 1992, p. 24).

One of the first attempts to statistically investigate defense mechanisms was made by Vaillant (1971), in a longitudinal study which assessed (through the analysis of biographical data) that defense mechanisms could also be observed in a non-clinical population, and that defense mechanisms which were “mature” according to the theoretical model actually correlated with the degree of “successful life adjustments”. Baumeister et al. (1998) examined empirical evidence to determine which Freudian defense mechanisms are “supported” and which are not by “scientific” evidence. Cramer (2006) lists the “premises” of the theory of defense

mechanisms that may be empirically tested (p. 18) (e.g. use of defenses changes with age; excessive use of defense is associated with psychopathology; defenses are effective because they function out of awareness) and her book is largely dedicated to discussing the evidence relevant to these assumptions. She devoted particular efforts towards pursuing the attempts of A. Freud and Spitz to order defenses chronologically.

All these authors have as a Leitmotiv in their work the academic psychology's discourse regarding the questions "what empirical scientific investigation is about?", having far-reaching implications on their epistemological approach, their methodology and the definitions of defense mechanisms in use. A vital point of this discourse is that science can only investigate observable phenomena, which must be a priori labeled and categorized objectively and reliably. Therefore, the existence of defense mechanisms is postulated (or defense mechanisms are "assumed to exist"), and then operationalized, mutually exclusive, definitions of specific defense mechanisms are given. Theoretical assumptions of the psychoanalytic theory of defense mechanisms are also operationalized so they can be tested as a hypothesis. P value after p value, this epistemological approach managed to give evidence in favor of various theoretical models, such as a chronological ordering of denial, projection and identification (e.g. Cramer 1987) and a hierarchy of defense mechanisms from the most immature, associated with psychopathology, to the most mature, used by "healthy" people (e.g. Vaillant 1971).

The main problem with this approach is that, by starting with a preconceived scheme of how to categorize behavior and without reflection regarding how these operational definitions influence the gathered data, research results are quite sterile and lack useful insights. One will be able to find statistical relationships between specific well-defined behavioral patterns, measured in a particular way. However, these results have no relationship to more general abstract constructs which are, ultimately, what we use to explain phenomena. The results of this kind of studies are used to infer relationships between abstract constructs, which will

be misleading. Starting with a distinction between explanatory constructs and explananda as seen critical and in case we want empirical results to explain and refer to something more general than a specific behavioral pattern measured by a specific method: the whole point of constructs is, as previously stated, to tell us something about a different variety of phenomena, which are similar enough to fall into the same category.

Vaillant (1971) motivated his choice to discuss defense mechanisms “as they are manifested in external life-styles” (p. 107) with the fact that “defenses cannot be directly visualized but, rather, they are appreciated by their systematic distortion of those events that we can see” (p. 108). What he means by “those events that we can see” is overt behaviors. If the field of inquiry is limited only to those phenomena which can be reliably classified and assessed (overt behaviors), any psychoanalytic model will no longer be parsimoniously explanatory. Psychoanalysis differs from academic psychology mainly because its data include wishes, dreams, phantasies, nuances in speech etc.. “The value of a sustained inquiry into subjective experience” (Mitchell and Black 1995, p.206) is not only a principle of psychoanalysis but also a necessity for psychoanalytic interpretations and the growth of psychoanalytic theory.

Vaillant’s claim of following Freud and his daughter’s legacy (illustrated in the citation at the start of the section) is most troubling. In his book (1992) he states that methodological difficulties “hampered earlier efforts by Anna Freud and her Hampstead co-workers to uncover the developmental sequence of defense mechanisms. To construct such a chronological continuum requires rater reliability, which in turn means rendering ephemeral defensive processes subject to empirical study” (p. 24, emphasis added by authors). Anna Freud and Hartmann (e.g., 1950) used and advocated the use of direct, longitudinal observation. This method was not regarded as empirical by Vaillant, whereas gathering self-report data every 2 years via “extensive questionnaires with many open-ended autobiographical questions and by occasional interviews” (1971, p. 110) should be. A. Freud was always clear on how

“academic methods” – “which by their very nature are unable to penetrate the barriers between the conscious and unconscious mind” (1965, p. 33) – could not give insight to psychoanalytic theory. Also, regarding the methodology needed for diagnostic screening, Anna Freud’s position was very distant from the objective, reliable and descriptive approach advocated by Vaillant:

“the same ‘flair’ for the unconscious which can turn a correct analytic therapist into a ‘wild’ analyst, is a most useful attribute for the analytic diagnostician who, by means of it, will turn otherwise arid and unrewarding surface manifestations into meaningful ‘material’.”

If one considers, for example, A Freud et al.’ (1965) “Metapsychological assessment of the adult personality”, it is hard to think she would consider the presence of defense mechanisms in the DSM (as operationalized behavioral patterns) as a success for psychoanalysis.

### **Lack of Conceptualization in Recent Statistical Approaches**

“Psychoanalysis is in sore need of systematization, because without it the experimenter is likely to continue to test isolated and misconstrued propositions, unaware of their actual theoretical context.” (Rapaport 1959, p. 136).

Books on defense mechanisms by statistically oriented authors (Cramer 2006; Vaillant 1992; McWilliams 2011) do not lack theoretical statements regarding the conceptualization of defense mechanisms, but they lack a discussion of them. Quotations from Freud and other psychoanalytic authors are very popular, but the complexities and controversies regarding the theory of affect and psychic conflict are ignored. Complex theoretical models can hardly be operationalised. By looking at given definitions of defense mechanisms, it becomes clear that the meaning of key concepts has been flattened. In the DSM-III-R defense mechanisms are referred to as “patterns of feelings thoughts or behaviors [...] that arise in response to



perceptions of psychic danger” (American Psychiatric Association 1987, p. 393). If we define them as patterns of phenomena, the explanatory value of the concept of defense mechanisms is lost. Vaillant, stayed true overtime to the definition he gave in 1971, referring to defenses as processes: “Defense mechanisms refer to innate involuntary regulatory processes that allow individuals to reduce cognitive dissonance and to minimize sudden changes in internal and external environments by altering how these events are perceived.” (1994, p. 44). There is no reference to psychic conflict, anxiety or the pleasure principle. These psychoanalytic terms have been avoided and substituted by “cognitive dissonance” and “minimizing sudden changes in internal and external environments”. It is not specified how these are to be conceptualized, and the role of “cognitive dissonance” in the psychoanalytic model thus remains obscure. In the DSM-IV, the definition of “defense mechanisms (or coping styles)” refers to “automatic psychological processes that protect the individual against anxiety and from the awareness of internal or external dangers or stressors. Individuals are often unaware of these processes as they operate” (American Psychiatric Association 1994, p. 751). Defense mechanisms are referred to as “automatic processes”. Vaillant had called them “involuntary”, the heritage of the fact they were considered unconscious mechanisms. Unconscious was changed into “automatic” or “involuntary” - simpler terms, that needn’ t much explanation. The psychoanalytic model of defense mechanisms is highly dynamic, and it is misleading to regard defense mechanisms as “automatic”. Cramer (2006) refers to defense mechanisms as “unconscious mental mechanisms” (p. 7), but in her “working definition” she refers to them as “mental operations that occur outside of awareness” (2014, p. 2). It seems as though mechanisms, operations, processes are all used indifferently and are therefore not conceptualized. Furthermore, it is curious how Cramer chooses to operationalize “unconscious” with “[something] that occurs out of awareness”. Also, mental contents that are preconscious could not “come into awareness”.

The status of defense mechanisms as “unconscious” was critical for Cramer (1998) in distinguishing them from coping strategies as she does not agree with the DSM-IV! Even if she started one of her books (1991) with Wallerstein (1967) and Gill’s (1963) arguments regarding “unconscious defense mechanisms”, it seems as though she did not integrate them in her later theoretical model: “the conscious/unconscious status of the mechanism involved is one factor that clearly differentiates defense from coping mechanisms. Defenses are repeatedly defined as unconscious processes while coping processes are typically described as conscious strategies” (1998, p. 924). The other clear criteria that would differentiate the two processes is that of intentionality, whereas the dimensions of normal/pathological, dispositional/situational, hierarchical/non-hierarchical did not. What is concerning though, is that Lazarus and Folkman (1984), do not consider coping strategies to necessarily be intentional nor conscious, so the DSM-IV might be right, and defense mechanisms might have no independent place in psychology! A prime example of how considering defense mechanisms as “real processes” can be very misleading. The very problem of distinguishing defense from coping mechanism is quite trivial if one considers them as constructs: they are two different constructs that explain phenomena in very different ways. It may very well be that in certain cases the same behavior could be interpreted as codetermined by a defensive process by a psychoanalyst (in case it is found to be related to psychic conflict and reducing anxiety) and as a coping strategy by a cognitivist. There are two different ways of explaining resulting in looking at different things. If one considers defense mechanisms as embedded with the theory of anxiety and that of psychic conflict, it is hard to think the question of how to “differentiate” them from coping strategies would even come up. The need to differentiate them in mutually exclusive categories arises only after operationalizing the psychoanalytic concept and thus taking it out of the psychoanalytic discourse. Stress becomes synonymous with anxiety, psychic conflict with cognitive dissonance, the pleasure principle disappears, and

“unconscious” means “automatic” or “outside of awareness”. The psychoanalytic theory should not be flattened into two dimensions so that it can be “statistically verified”. Doing so leads to quite superficial and misleading explanations, as the example in the next section shows.

### **Explanations?**

In “Defense mechanisms: 40 years of empirical research” (2015) Cramer summarises the results of most of her studies concerning defense mechanisms. She has found evidence that supported a chronological ordering of denial, projection and identification. This discussion will not regard the appropriateness of this evidence, but the explanation that is given as to why the use of certain defense mechanisms would decay as children grow. The approach taken by Cramer was to choose a possible theoretical assumption that might give an explanation and to test the resulting hypothesis, then: “According to theory, lack of awareness is one of the reasons that defenses are successful - that is, we are unaware that we are ‘deceiving’ ourselves.” (2014, p. 4). Cramer and Brilliant (2001) saw that the “level of understanding” of denial and projection (assessed by measuring the child’s explanation of the behavior of a character who was “exhibiting that defense” – examples can be found in page 304 of their article) was negatively associated with their respective levels of usage. The conclusion was that “once the function of the defense is consciously realized, its usefulness declines and a new, cognitively more complex and not yet comprehended defense takes its place” (p. 4).

The first problem is methodological. The independent variable (level of understanding of the defense mechanisms) was not manipulated, and so we cannot speak of causal relationships. The other problems in their conclusion mainly stem from how the “theoretical assumption” is operationalized. The fact that bringing a defense -and its relation to psychic conflict and certain affects – into consciousness reduces its efficacy is a key tenet of psychoanalytic theory (if we intend ‘defense’ as Wallerstein (1967) does). Stating that “understanding” a

defense mechanism (such as denial) will make it so the person no longer “uses it” - exhibits behaviors explainable by that defense mechanism- is quite different. What defenses would a trained psychoanalyst who “understands all of them” use? If a clear distinction had been kept between constructs and phenomena, it is hard to imagine how this confusion could have arisen. What can become “ineffective” once “brought into consciousness” is a specific defense, not every defense that can be explained by the same defense mechanism?! Another critical point is that “understanding” is assessed by how the child infers causal relationships between events of a story that he is not being parted. Just putting some statements in a causal chain has nothing to do with how defenses are brought into consciousness in psychoanalytic therapy.

Furthermore, they do not discuss psychoanalytic theory regarding their “theoretical assumption”, nor integrate their conclusions with psychoanalytic data. Psychoanalytic discussions regarding their “theoretical assumption” by no means lack debating for example, Brenner’s (1982) lengthily discussed idea that defenses would disappear during analysis (e.g. p. 82). Almost 70 years ago Hartmann (1950) raised the question of how “maturational sequences underlying the intellectual or motor achievement may bear on a child’s ego development and his ways of solving conflicts” (p. 9). However, it is hard to see how statistical studies have brought any new insights into this topic. Cramer and Brilliant (2001), do not even talk of conflict (nor did they consider that children’s behaviors might not be related to conflict or a reduction of anxiety). If the gathered data is selectively and systematically filtered (and furthermore not even longitudinal) and if these results are not integrated with data from the analytic setting, it is hard to see how these studies can be insightful for psychoanalytic theory. The risk is that they will be building a completely independent theory that lacks any explanatory value and deceptively uses specific psychoanalytic terms.

## Conclusions

The theory of operationalized defense mechanisms built from (and for) statistical research is not a continuation of A. Freud and Spitz' s work, and it is misleading to consider it as such. A key and necessary part of the psychoanalytic investigation is the sustained inquiry into the subjective experience (Mitchell and Black 1995), which is completely lacking in statistical studies. The discourse in academic psychology regarding science would like to make us believe that theories are scientific only if supported by empirical studies that involve measurement: it is essential that Psychoanalytic theories not be adapted to this misleading view of science, else wise they will lose their explanatory value. We wish to highlight two critical matters that future empirical research should take into account if wanted to be insightful for the psychoanalytic theory of defense mechanisms. The first implies a reflection on what should be regarded as “psychoanalytic data” - which is utterly absent in statistical approaches. Although Brenner (1982) has a rather extreme position regarding this matter, other authors, starting with Hartman and A. Freud have lengthily discussed the substance expressing a different opinion. The second regards the problems involved in explaining everyday life phenomena with defense mechanisms. If one wishes to do so, Brenner' s (1981) considerations should be taken into account, and there should be more attention in trying to determine whether certain behaviors are actually associated with psychic conflict and with a reduction of anxiety (or depressive affect). In case the gathered data does not allow doing so, this should be taken into account when concluding. The epistemological approach presented in this paper has a few exciting consequences for future work regarding the psychoanalytic theory of defense mechanisms. As Sjöbäck pointed out in 1973, there is a sore need for systematic reviews that aim to uncover the empirical referents and the original explananda of different defense mechanisms and the concept of defense mechanism in different theoretical models. To the authors' knowledge, no progress has been made on this front. Such a work would

be a great starting point for empirical research, and it would allow a better contextualization of defense mechanisms that is necessary to review old hypothesis' and formulate new ones. A second point that should be taken into account is that empirical research should not aim to find general laws, or test certain hypothesis, but rather gather data that allows judging how parsimoniously specific models of defense mechanisms can explain certain phenomena. Our hope is that denial will no longer be a useful explanatory construct for any scholar' s attitude towards discussions regarding the ontological status of defense mechanisms. Concluding, we would like to answer Vaillant' s claim that "without a consensus on terminology, the empirical study of defenses is hampered" (1992, p. 23), with the idea that "the power of a science seems quite generally to increase with the number of symbolic generalizations its practitioners have at their disposal" (Kuhn 2012, p. 183). So we may not need to defend defense mechanisms' entity for the future!

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### Article 3: From Ego Defence to Self-Development: Offering a Dynamic Model Theory

Mihalits, D. S. (in review). From Ego Defence to Self-Development: Offering a Dynamic Model Theory. *Culture & Psychology*

#### Abstract

This essay addresses developing a deeper understanding of individual development by using the metatheoretical framework of psychoanalysis. It draws on psychoanalysis in its conceptualization as a treatment method and employs the concept of defence mechanisms to explain and relate to ego personality constructions. Whereas the concept of defence mechanisms is repeatedly adopted in empirical and practical work, little importance is currently attached to its theoretical foundation. Therefore, this paper aims at an integrating theoretical perspective on defence mechanism and explicitly withdraws from interpreting primarily empirical studies and considerations. Employing a developmental psychological perspective, I argue that the interpretation of behavioral patterns cannot happen “distanced” and “simplistically”. I criticize that today’s developmental psychology fails to access a main developmental issue: the need to understand specific behavior of specific individuals in specific settings. This paper therefore addresses the spheres in which defence mechanisms operate in a developmental manner by asking for the underlying theoretical constructs.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalytic theory, Psychoanalysis, Defence mechanism, Resistance, Conceptualization, Phenomena, Personality Development; Developmental Psychology, Theoretical models

## Introduction

This article highlights points of contact of psychoanalysis and cultural psychology. Both, psychology and psychoanalysis offer various points of reciprocal interaction. Nevertheless, their resulting mutual benefits have not yet been approached systematically. Therefore, this paper follows the already existing idea of Salvatore and Valsiner (2014) as well as Salvatore and Zittoun (2011) who contributed in identifying possible ways for synthesis. In their understanding, developmental psychology becomes the hotspot of a human's personal higher mental interaction from multiple perspectives, including those of conscious/unconscious, macro/micro-genetic, object/subject, inner/outer, etc. movements to name but a few possible varieties. Nevertheless, though multi-layered systems (e.g. Valsiner, Marsico, Chaudhary, Sato & Dazzani, 2016) do help in achieving concise explanations of developmental descriptions, the processual structure of developmental phenomena are yet relatively unexplored phenomena to research. In short, we are currently unable to understand the specific behavior of a specific individual in a specific setting looking solely at empirical data (Valsiner, 2016; Shanahan, Valsiner & Gottlieb, 1997). But why? Looking at academic psychology, we learn from the past that the way of simplifying psychological phenomena and the tremendous focus on collecting empirical data might lead to empirically founded conclusions, but not necessarily to solutions. I argue that psychoanalytical metatheory on defence mechanisms can offer insight to complex inner-psychological dynamics. This is why I argue that we should look at the beginnings of psychoanalysis which started more than a century ago with a core focus in being a treatment method of mental illness and explore its value for deepening developmental psychological perspectives. Its approach, including the understanding of defence mechanism, still influences today's theoretical and practical thinking in psychology. More concretely, psychoanalysis is outstanding in its description from a person-centered point of view. Even more crucially, in therapeutic relationship, therapists try to develop an

understanding for the patient by interpreting the core interests of the patient him\*herself. To arrive at this understanding, there is the need to look at where these individual processes can help explaining individual behavior in exchange with one's concrete (socio-cultural) environments.

Cairns (1986, p. 99) claims that “for any empirical investigation, the logic of the research task and the nature of the phenomenon should be the criteria against which the adequacy of a given design or statistical analysis is judged”. Furthermore, Mihalits & Codenotti (2020) showed how misleading the usage of psychoanalytic data can be in case explanans and explanandum are mixed up in any way. Developmental psychology is in need of “true” development, as Cairns & Valsiner claim, as

[...] it is not enough to establish that a variable has an influence, since most sane analyses are concerned with influential effects. For developmental problems, the real task is to determine how the influences are differently weighed and organized across relationships and across time. (1982, p. 9)

Psychoanalytic theory of defence mechanisms offers interesting insights into a direction of constructive (developmental) problem management. The first part of the paper will address the diverse concepts, psychoanalytic defence theory offers to remedy this gap. To approach this, I will start by analyzing the various theoretical strands of psychoanalytic theory.

To start with, Fine (1979) summarizes the problem as follows:

It is a common though wholly incorrect practice to divide psychoanalysis into different ‘schools’ each of which is supposed to have different theories and different techniques. Yet closer examination all too often reveals that these differences are figments of the imagination or when they do exist, are

maintained with a ferocious tenacity by their partisans that does not yield to any rational discussion. (*Fine, 1979, p. 2*)

In this regard, theoretical considerations from all different psychoanalytical “schools” was chosen for this article to contribute to an overall theoretical understanding. Furthermore, this paper follows the suggestion of Greenberg and Mitchell (1983), who mentioned that

[...] for student and practitioner alike, the current state of psychoanalytic theory, with its complexity and heterogeneity, often seems overwhelming. [...] a broad spectrum of theoretical positions, each with a distinct line of conceptual development and its own idiosyncratic language beckons the analyst. Communication among the various schools is minimal. Their adherents often attempt to bring order to conceptual complexity by declaring one position the ‘true psychoanalysis’, rendering unnecessary any attempt at integration, synthesis, or comparison with other viewpoints. This leads to costly clarity. (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1981, p. 1)

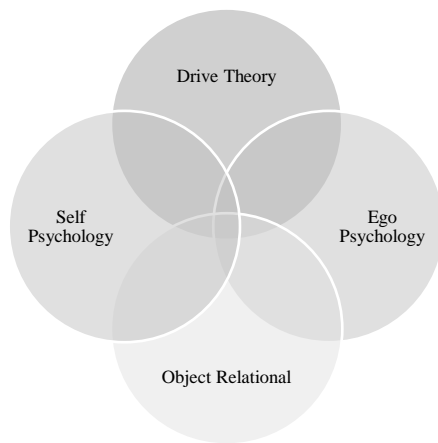
Therefore, the main goal is to clarify defence mechanisms theoretically, by allowing controversial ideas of multiple theoretical strands to be discussed together progressing towards perhaps synthesis. As this paper can only provide a first insight to an overarching theoretical discussion, this article aims at offering at least some stones in plastering the street for gaining so-called “truth” in developmental phenomena. In a second step, I aim at unifying diverse theoretical perspectives into a first attempt of a general theoretic model.

### **Why Defence Mechanisms or what development to be found there?**

T. Mann gave a speech on S. Freud’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1936 in Vienna. In this speech, Mann tried to summarize the work of psychoanalysis, as he understood it himself:

For, unless I am greatly mistaken, it is just this confrontation of object and subject, their mingling and identification, the resultant insight into the mysterious unity of ego and actuality, destiny and character, doing and happening, and thus into the mystery of reality as an operation of the psyche – it is just this confrontation that is the alpha and omega of all psychoanalytical knowledge. (Mann, 1936, p. 280)

Though Mann was not a psychoanalyst, he already understood the core need of developmental tasks in psychoanalysis. He explains that “reality being an operation of psyche” is basically a construction, happening between the “subject and the object”, between the “I” and its counterpart. That, he says, is the begin and end of all psychoanalytical knowledge. Practically speaking that means we need to track down, detect and formulate a significant path which connects the alpha with the omega, to understanding the whole process of therapeutic development. This path can be detected by the interpretation and understanding of defence mechanisms. Following Appelbaum (1994), basically four different traditions or so-called “schools” of psychoanalysis contribute to the understanding of defence mechanism. As already mentioned, all diverse traditions should be interpreted and kept in mind, trying to find a universal direction of defence theory. In this regard, it is necessary to understand that theoretical constructs are not detached from each other but have ‘loose’ ends which I argue can be tied together. For a better understanding *Figure 1* tries to show the interaction of all four mainstreams in theoretical development. Beside core theoretical phenomenal description, contributions that are off core are also to be taken into account.



*Figure 1: Strands of Psychoanalysis*

Additionally, and interestingly, especially Schafer (1968) highlights the developmental moment of defence mechanisms. He explains that the study of defence will remain as long incomplete, as defence mechanisms are solely considered a “warding off and renunciation”. Instead, he suggests, that defence mechanisms also should address “implementations, gratifications, and positive assertions”.

Fine (1979, p. 297) adds that “the extension of the defense concept has in fact become so broad that little theoretical content remains [...] it almost seems as if anything can be used as a defense against something else”. It gives the impression that it is difficult to define the small path that theory of defence has to walk on, not being classified as “widespread and imprecise, or one-sided use of the word defence by itself, according to which any tendency that clashes with and more or less overrides another tendency is said to be a defence against it” (Schafer 1968, p. 52). It becomes apparent that defence theory is already in deep need of clarification, as newer debates arrived, as Copper (1989, p. 865) adds: “Within the past 20 years diverse trends have emerged in psychoanalytic understanding of the defense mechanism concept, involving elaborations of both the intrapsychic and object relations context”.

Moreover, Appelbaum (1994) divides theories of defence mechanisms in their outcome of knowledge and therefore splits contributions into three different accounts: (1) Those regarding conceptualization (e.g. answering questions on definition and what phenomena to be included, likewise Brenner (1982) mentioning that defence is solely based on its function), (2) those of development (e.g. defence based on specific developmental concerns like Klein (1934) saying that object relations from birth to early childhood lead to particular understanding in defence mechanisms) and (3) those concerning pathologic perspectives (e.g. like Kernberg (1976) who describes “splitting” in border-line personality disorders). I argue that for the current analysis, this categorization seems arbitrary and maybe even misleading: It provokes the idea that clinical examples do not have theoretical implications, that developmental papers in some sort are limited in relevance for clinical treatment, and especially regarding this paper, it would mean that theoretical considerations of defence are in contrast to developmental description. Strikingly however, this is simply not the case, if we want to understand development in its core functionality. Development does not mean to describe different phases in life or the increase or decrease in occurrence of phenomena guided through defence mechanisms in stepwise, gradual considerations but by understanding them as being in a model of continuous flow.

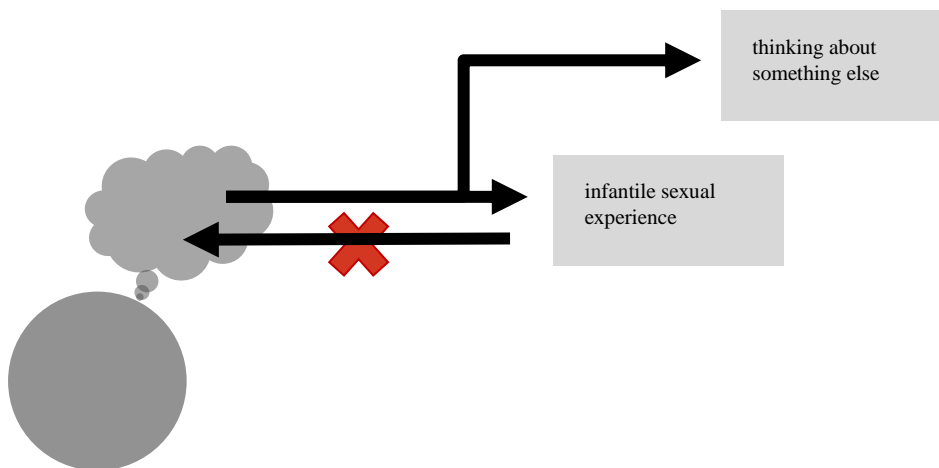
### **Defence Mechanisms – the beginning**

But where do theoretical considerations of defence mechanism even start? Following van der Leeuw (1971) the initial idea of defence by S. Freud can already be divided into three different periods. This shows that already Freud himself was struggling in defining optimal theoretical considerations showing the need in further elaborations for understanding developmental processes.



### *The first period of defence – “A conscious act”*

In the first period of defence theory development, Freud (1894) explains that during psychoanalysis “patients can recollect as precisely as could be desired their efforts at defence, their intention of ‘pushing the thing away’ of not thinking of it of suppressing it” (p. 48). In this sense, defence mechanisms are a conscious act of thinking (cognitive function) which is primarily used to ward off infantile traumatic sexual experiences (see *figure 2* for better understanding). The warding off happens as a conscious act, leading to the possibility of putting affective charges towards, at that time by Freud undefined, different directions.



*Figure 2: Defence being a conscious act*

Furthermore, Freud (1894) gives the following theoretical explanation summarizing his theory at that time:

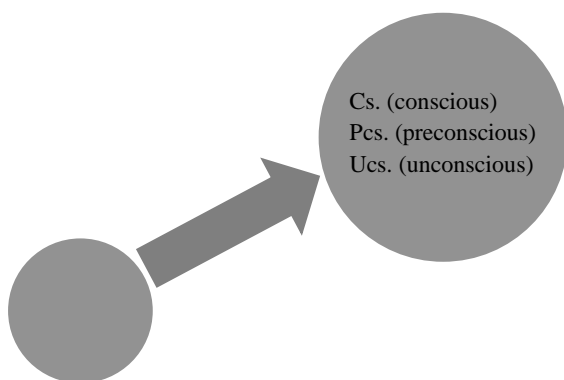
For these patients whom I have analyzed had enjoyed good mental ability up to the moment at which an occurrence of incompatibility took place in their ideational life – that is to say, until their ego was faced with an experience an idea or a feeling which aroused such a distressing affect that the subject decided to forget about it because he had no power to resolve the contradiction between the incompatible idea and his ego by means of thought activity.

(Freud, 1894, p.47)

Summarized by Laplanche & Pontalis (1973), ideas become separated from their original affective charges this leads to the use of defence. In that sense, Freud also speaks about “psychological abstraction” concerning defence – which will immediately lead us to the second period, as he claims that there is an internal process which leads us to see the “external” phenomenology of neurotic symptom.

### ***Second period of defence – the topographical model and repression***

For the regulation and discharge of mental energy, Freud (1900) introduced the topographical model. A differentiation between conscious (Cs.), preconscious (Pcs.) and unconscious (Ucs.) forces regulate the inner psyche of a human being (see *figure 3*). The typology follows two principles, the pleasure principle and the reality principle (see *figure 4*). Conscious forces are described as all aspects a person is aware of at present time. Preconscious forces are represented as aspects, people are currently not aware of, with the special ability in becoming aware, once the focus of attention would switch upon interest. Unconscious aspects are entirely inaccessible for the consciousness and are warded off by counter-forces. At the time of this model, Freud describes repression as the only defence mechanism in place. The Ucs. follows the pleasure principle which means that its ultimate interest can be seen in gratification. On the other hand, the Pcs. follows the rules of the reality principle which means that it seeks its limitations within reality.



*Figure 3: Defence and the topographic model*

Beside describing the quality of defence as a process of “anti-cathexis”, Freud also introduces a way of evaluating its opposite, so-called “Cathexis”: It means the drives seeking discharge within consciousness. Anti-cathexis leads to defence and repression.

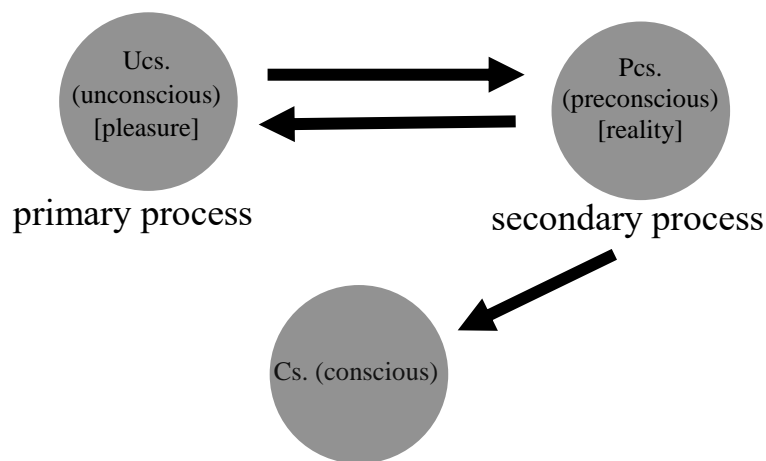


Figure 4: Defence and the structural model

### ***Third period of defence – defence and the structural model***

In the third period of defence, Freud introduces the structural model in psychoanalysis.

Therefore, Freud clarified in 1923 that instinctual wishes belong to the ID, whereas the EGO delays and opposes instinctual wishes from reaching consciousness. In his explanation, the term SUPEREGO stands for the development in light of the parental identification and the constitution of moral standards of the psychic apparatus. Defence gets an additional, protective role, too and arises from the perception of danger. Freud says (1926): “It is always the ego’s attitude of anxiety which is the primary thing and sets repression going” (p. 109).

Therefore, anxiety conditions defence in the structural model. In contrast and in the topographic model, anxiety is the result of repression (the sexual wish that is banned in unconsciousness and only makes its turn back into consciousness by becoming a neurotic symptom and showing anxiety). Figure 5, the so-called iceberg model, initially drawn by Freud, shows the interaction of the second and the third period for better understanding.

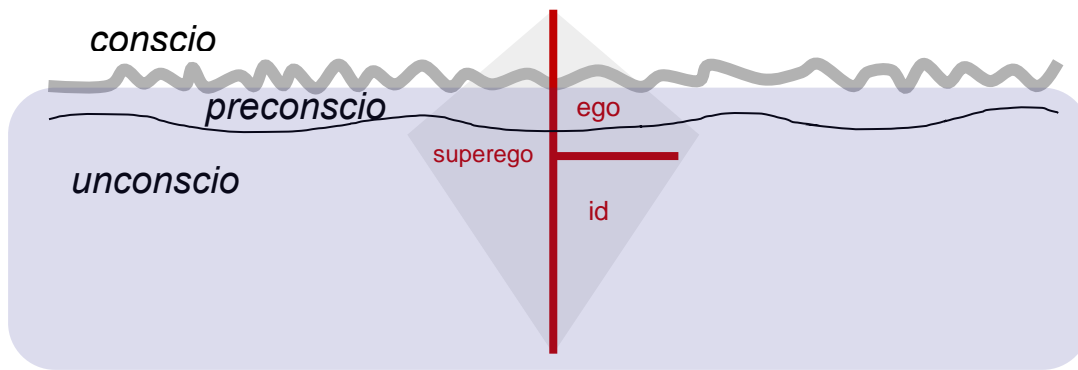


Figure 5: The popular iceberg-model

By that time, defence becomes a function of the ego responding to instinctual forces. Freud (1926) additionally explains:

Thus the danger of psychical helplessness is appropriate to the period of life when the ego is immature; the danger of loss of the object, to early childhood when he is still dependent on others; the danger of castration to the phallic phase; and the fear of his superego to the latency period. Nevertheless all these danger-situations and determinants of anxiety can persist side by side and cause the ego to react to them with anxiety at a period later than the appropriate one; or again several of them can come into operation at the same time. (Freud, 1926, p. 142)

Freud introduces a time condition in the third period. As in the first two periods, time was always found in the current present, the third period now evaluates the change of conflicts over time.

### ***The Impact of Anna Freud***

A. Freud (1936) follows the work of her father and gives a first descriptive evaluation and systematization on defence mechanism. Literally, she introduced the term defence mechanism as we basically refer to it today, and started to describe different mechanisms of

defence within chosen case studies in her book *The ego and the mechanisms of defense*. What is new in A. Freud's writings is that the motivation for defence can also be found in external reality, as Greenberg and Mitchell (1983) state. They see the contribution of A. Freud in introducing defence as directed against external perception. Brenner (1980) comments on the work of A. Freud that "defense is an aspect of mental functioning which is definable only in terms of its consequence: the reduction of anxiety and/or depressive affect associated with a drive derivative or with superego functioning" (Brenner, 1980, p. 73).

By now, I conceptualize the addressed theoretical strands as theories of action, in the way that they described primarily active elaborations of defence and later its description as mechanisms. The following chapters will analyze theoretical considerations that are reactions on the primary introduction. Nevertheless, some primary statements are used in the "reaction" part of the paper for providing a better clarification and problem description.

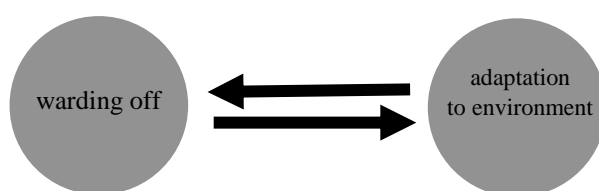
### **The inwards – outwards debate**

In the psychoanalytic literature, defence has mainly two perspectives. The first perspective views defence as an entity itself whereas the second describes defence as something seen at the horizon of one's personality, offering an outer perspective following descriptively the track of defensive behavior. Sitz (1957, 1983) furthermore divides defence into "defense directed inwards" (also named defence) and "defense directed outwards" (named resistance). Loewental (2000) adds that „resistance consists of defence being expressed in the transference" (p. 133). Furthermore, he explains that "'Defense' and 'resistance' are usually regarded as two separate and distinct concepts" (p. 133). Whereas the first gets used in describing general psychic functioning, the latter refers to therapy. A distinction far from being constant as "clinical observations indicate a frequent overlapping of these two mental functions of positions" (p. 133), what complicates the clear distinction of phenomenal interest. Describing defence mechanisms as having their own entity seems arbitrary: the theoretical interest gets

manifested in observing the goals defence mechanisms do achieve, especially by looking at the transformation between inner and outer aspects of personality. Fenichel (1945), for instance, states:

The motives of defense are rooted in external influences. However, the external world as such can not repress. It can only compel the ego to develop repressing forces. Without an intrapsychic institution that represents and anticipates the external world, no defense and no neurosis could arise. An original conflict between the id and the external world must first have been transformed into a conflict between the id and the ego before a neurotic conflict can occur. (Fenichel, 1945, p. 131)

Therefore, defence mechanisms can be seen as something that navigates forces and leads to development by translating/de-coding the inner to the outer world and vice versa. Mahler and McDevitt (1968) give an example for explaining the relationship between defence as warding off inner impulses and at the same time cooperating with the environment of an outside social world (see *figure 6*).



*Figure 6:* Warding off vs. environmental adaptation

The function of warding off impulses is in straight relationship with the adaptation to the environment.

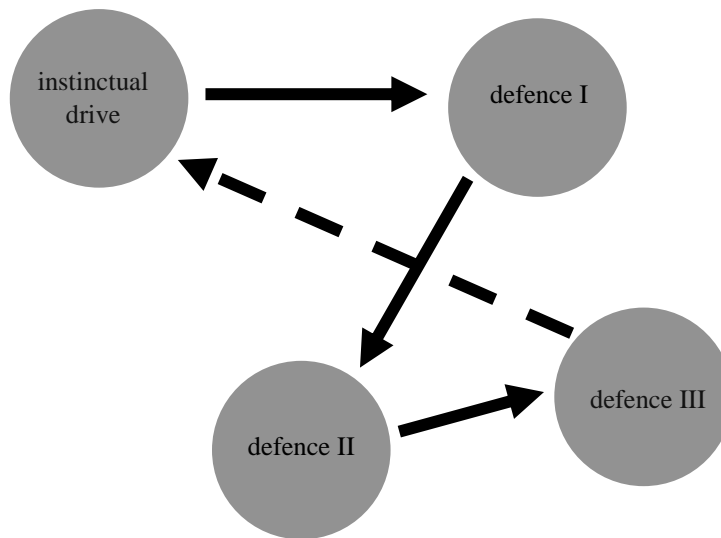
### **The individual-collective relationship**

The last paragraph already mentioned the need in dense of operating with its environment. In a next step we need to think about if this is meant to be discussed only facing the individual or does the relationship with the environment not also include the acknowledgment of the collective? Freud describes it in 1921 as follows:

The contrast between individual psychology and social or group psychology, which at a first glance may seem to be full of significance, loses a great deal of its sharpness when it is examined more closely. It is true that individual psychology is concerned with the individual man and explores the paths by which he seeks to find satisfaction for his instinctual impulses; but only rarely and under certain exceptional conditions is individual psychology in a position to disregard the relations of this individual to others. In the individual's mental life someone else is invariably involved, as a model, as an object, as a helper, as an opponent; and so from the very first individual psychology, in this extended but entirely justifiable sense of the words, is at the same time social psychology as well. (Freud, 1921/1966, p. 69)

Furthermore, Freud mentions that his individual psychology „is at the same time social psychology as well” (Freud, 1921, p. 69). The question is: where does the individual become social and as in my understanding vice versa?

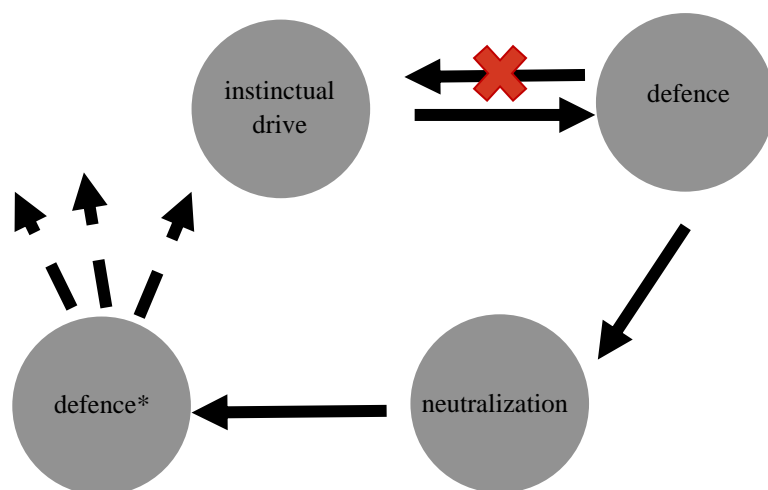
Gill (1963) presents a possible answer to that question seeing defence within a hierarchical arrangement (*figure 7*), allowing an interpretation of relationship between individual and collective understanding.



*Figure 7: Defence against defence mechanisms*

In addition, H. Hartmann (1939) describes the ego as being a product of biology: “What develop as a result of defense against an instinctual drive may grow into a more or less independent and more or less structured function. It may come to serve different functions like adjustment, organization and so on” (1939, p. 123). Greenberg (1983) adds: “Hartmann approaches psychological development as a problem of evolution and adaptation. His interest is in developing those aspects of Freud’s theory which delineates the mechanisms that enable man to survive in his environment” (p. 236). In Hartmann’s understanding, defence mechanisms serve the purpose of adaptation; this need in adaptation allows itself to be its motivational force by itself. Nevertheless, the question of Rapaport stays so far unanswered: “What maintains the defenses once they are established?” (p. 891). Rapaport explains that secondary autonomy and neutralization might be possible in defence mechanisms (see *figure 8*).





*Figure 8: Defence maintenance, systematic relations*

Viewed from “internal” perspective, defence mechanisms get an own entity which cannot happen as Mihalits & Codenotti (2020) have already shown. Nevertheless, it could be an interesting contribution in better understanding the individual and collective relationship defence mechanisms do interplay with.

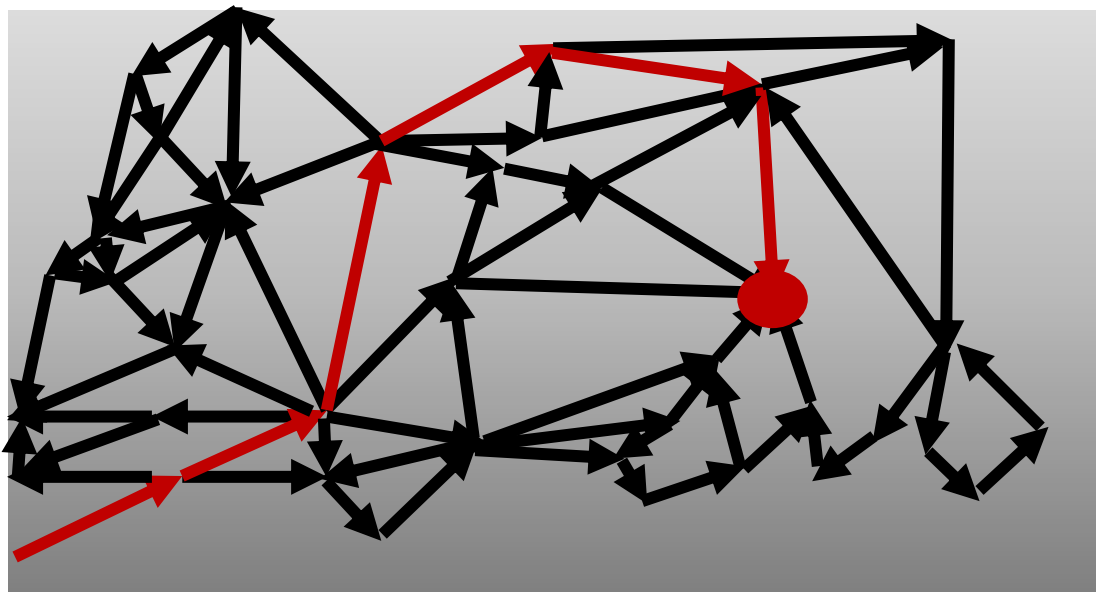
## Conclusion

Acknowledging the theoretical implications discussed in this paper, it is possible to conclude in some more general schemes showing the framework of defence modalities. The following examples should help in better understanding the different aspects of theoretical considerations of defence mechanisms. In *figures 9 to 11* the left down corner is understood as a starting point of defensive action in personal development. More precisely, whereas general arrows (drawn in black color) should indicate the possibility of decision taking in defence, the red arrows do show the possible path in personality development using defensive structures. The red circle indicates a presumed goal in development accessed via its defensive red arrows. In comparison (not part of the scheme as not of central interest), development without defensive structures would result in a straight arrow between the left down corner and the red circle in achieving the goal. Therefore, it is shown that defence only exists due to conflict by

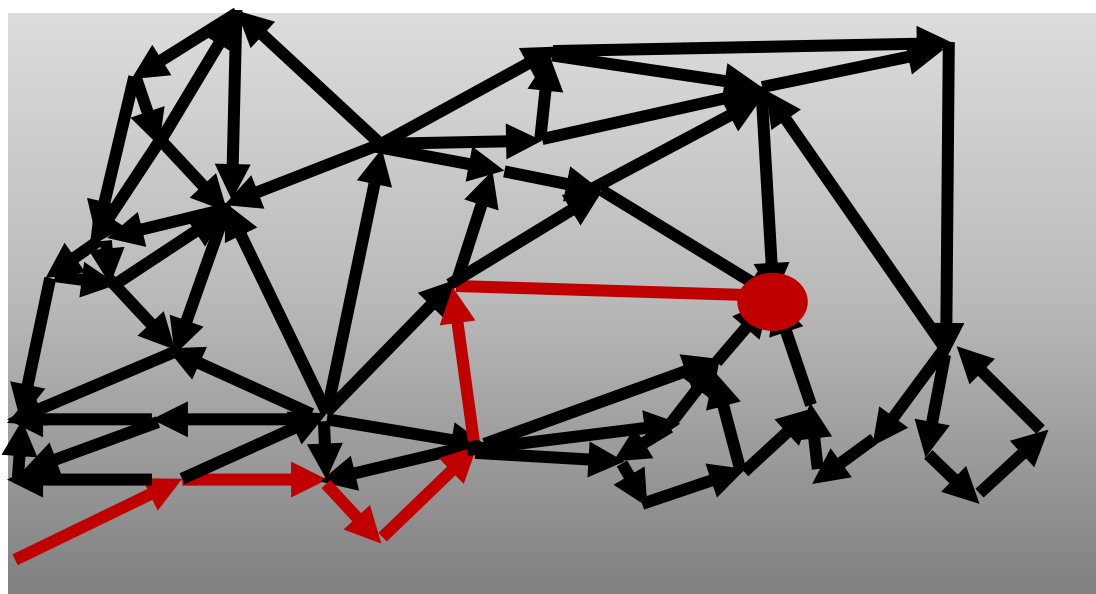
not directly (pleasure principle) reaching the pre-set goal. Defensive structures are needed as a sort of alternative route in development (following the reality principle). The change of gray shading in *figures* 9 and 10 should furthermore indicate the possibility of changes in the structural and topographic model. Due to complexity in visualization, *figures* 11 to 13 do not have any grey indication, even though of course, its assumptions are relevant for interpretation.

### **Statement 1: Misleading Idea of Static Individual Defence**

*Figures* 9 and 10 show two possible defensive structures used by a person as described in psychoanalysis. No matter what kind of defence mechanisms we consider for the *figures*, it becomes evident that once defence is established, it is in some way fixed. Comparing *figure* 9 with *figure* 10, we see that even though the outcome in reaching the goal might be the same, the conflict got solved via diverse defensive mechanisms. What might be easily overseen in describing defensive structures, is that there could also be development between the figures. At first, *figure* 9 seems reasonable in allowing us to identify the development of defensive structures reaching the pre-set red goal in the scheme. In analogy, the same can be found in *figure* 10. Nevertheless, it might be possible that *figure* 10 is already the development of *figure* 9 (or vice versa). Therefore, the interpretation of single defence mechanisms might work on a descriptive level, but need to be seen from a developmental perspective, too. The contextualization of defence mechanisms need to be handled within personality development in a broader sense than their primal area of behavioral explanation. Only in that way, a static understanding can be overcome and allow developmental thinking.



*Figure 9: Person example 1*

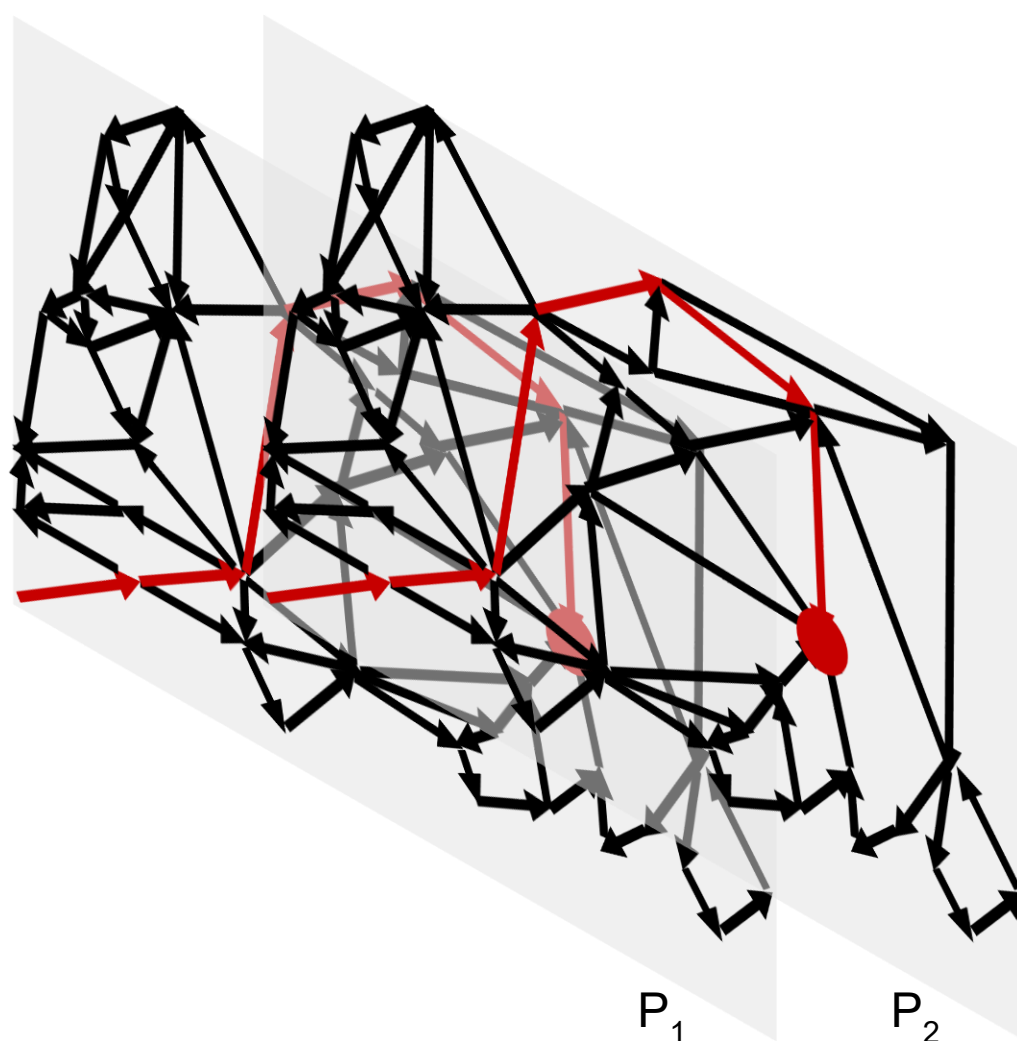


*Figure 10: Person example 2*

**Statement 2: Is there something like collective defence?**

In case some authors understand defensive structures as not solely being inner to a person, structures get described as the object or environment in opposition to a centrally discussed individual. In some way, the word collective gets used for accumulating the same defensive behavior observed at various individuals: Multiple individuals have the same individual defence

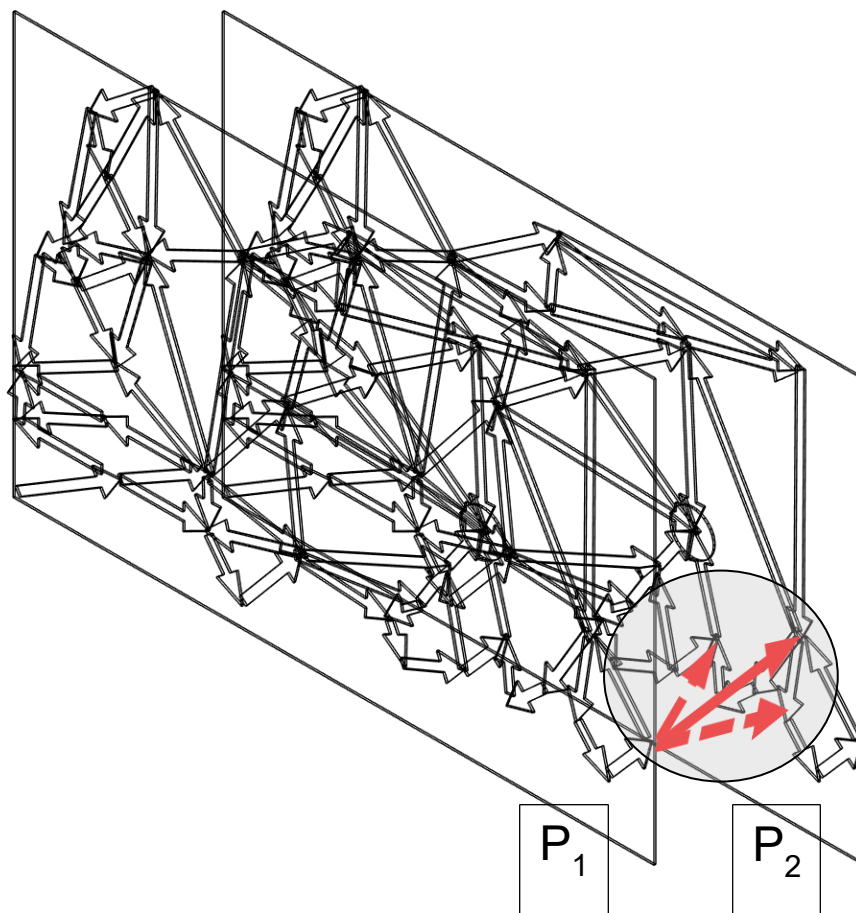
strategy in common, as *figure 11* indicates and might be discussed as a group of individuals. In this figure, person 1 (P 1) and person 2 (P 2) do make use of the same defensive mechanism. The meaning of “collective” is solely used for naming the addition of multiple persons. There is no description that would indicate that the defence of P 1 has anything in common with P 2 beside being identical in description. It is more about a parallel existence of the same behavior monitored at multiple individuals. Furthermore, there cannot be found any descriptive explanation on the relationship between defences of P1 and P2.



*Figure 11:* Example of two individuals using the same defensive structures

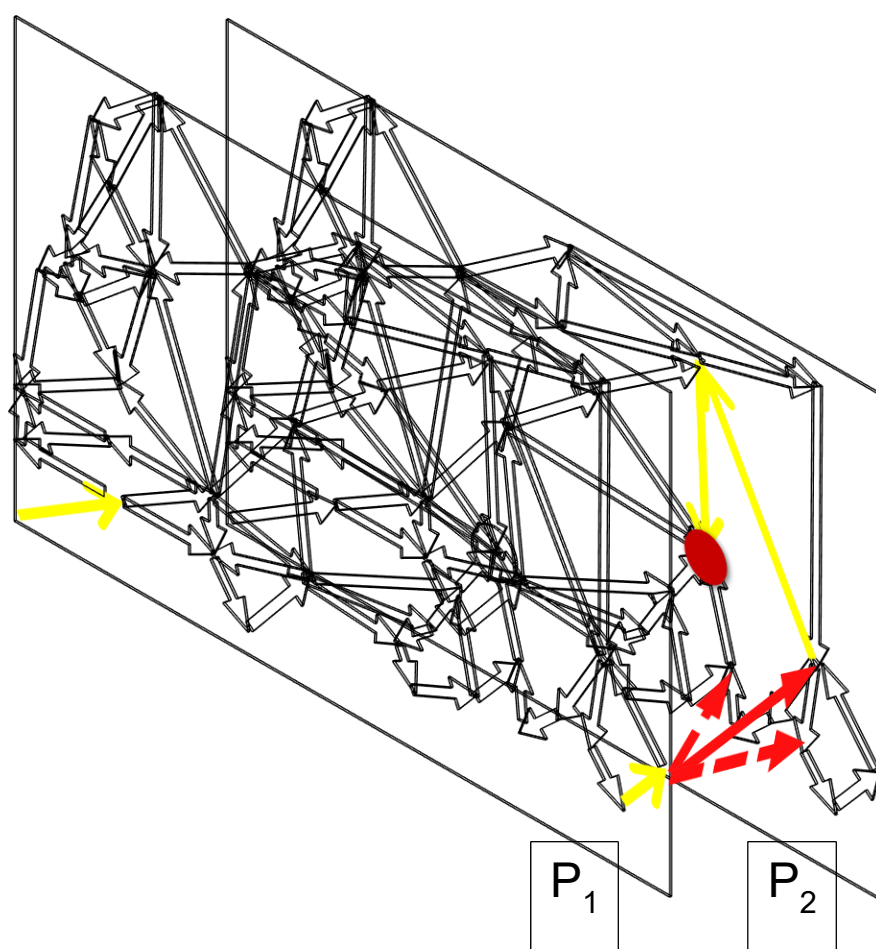
### Connecting statements: the construction of collective defence

So far, there cannot be found any effort in psychoanalytic literature describing defence mechanisms from an interactive perspective of mutual relationship between individuals focusing on development of a meta-theoretic level. Proclaiming a theoretic perspective of interaction, *figure 12* should help visualizing the possibility of intra-personal defences that also have an active operating inter-personal dimension. Whereas the interest within interpreting inner-personal defence strategies gets neglected in this *figure*, the accessing point of interaction between P1 and P2 becomes central: At what point does the inner-personal defence connect with the other person and become at the same time inter-personal? The dashed red arrows should simulate paths of possible interaction whereas at the same time the continuous arrow stipulates the chosen path P1 has taken.



*Figure 12:* The split of one “mechanism” operated by two individuals

The context of defensive behavior as an outcome of personality development cannot be seen solely from a single perspective of the individual as mechanisms might have inter-personal components that need to be evaluated. For that case, *figure 13* uses yellow arrows to show the starting and end points of inner-personal defence strategies within a person (in that exemplary case P1 or P2). The red arrows mark the parts of interpersonal interaction (dashed arrows indicate possible paths of interaction; continuous red arrow shows chosen path). In this way *figure 13* demonstrates an example for a complete defensive process.



*Figure 13:* Constructed example of possible defence interaction between two individuals

In the above-mentioned, case P1 makes partly use of defensive structures of P2 assuming that both individuals have the same goal (red circle) of development in common. The *figure* only shows the example of P1 making use of P2 which should not mislead to the

conclusion that there might not be simultaneous interactions of defensive structures operated from P2 onto P1.

Only the multidimensional illustration offers the ability in observing the situation from various angles, making the interaction between inner-personal and inter-personal visible.

## **Future Prospect**

The current article has shown the limitations of current state of the art theoretic defence models and their interpretations by abstracting them in graphic schemes. Furthermore, it showed how necessary a further understanding of psychoanalytical defence theory would be for providing insight into (culturally mediated) personal development. Theoretical considerations of defensive structures seem to be central to understanding the processes of individual development that are not yet completely understood from a holistic and integrative perspective. The paper offers a first graphical definitions and descriptions that need to be further elaborated and discussed by the psychoanalytic community.

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## Article 4: Dialectics of Influence: How Agency Works

Mihalits, D. S., & Valsiner, J. (in review). Dialectics of Influence: How Agency Works. *Human Arenas*.

### Abstract

Dialectical perspectives have had an ambiguous history in European thought in the past two centuries. Having become established in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century by J. G. Fichte and G. W. Hegel as a philosophical system, the dialectical perspective episodically entered into other sciences (psychology, sociology) while being “politically kidnapped” in the Soviet Union in the 1920s-1980s. The result has been uneven development of basic ideas of change and development that would be crucial for biological, social, and human sciences. In this article, we outline the relevance of dialectical ideas for a new synthesis of developmental psychology and psychoanalysis and chart out specific ways how the notion of ego-defence mechanisms that have been developed in psychoanalysis can be re-conceptualized as self-construction mechanisms for developmental psychology.

**Keywords:** dialectics, dialogue, border, ego-defence mechanisms, double negation, synthesis, units of analysis

The social sciences of the recent century have learned little from the rest of basic sciences. Instead of carefully developing their theoretical core that would fit a science, they have entered into the never-ending race for obtaining ever new data—often losing sight of what these data might reveal (Toomela and Valsiner, 2010). Psychology has lost its soul in the avalanche of empirical data. Fortunately, its parallel discipline—psychoanalysis—has retained both the sophistication of looking deeply into phenomena and maintained the systemic theoretical orientation (Salvatore and Zittoun, 2011).

Our goal in this paper is to highlight the fundamental issues of the dialectical perspective and its promising fit into developmental psychology and psychotherapy. In the latter, we concentrate on the concept of *ego defence mechanisms*—theoretical organizational structures with which psychoanalysts have operated over the last century. Developmental psychology has had no matching conceptual mechanism to offer—in the usual accounts of the development of the Self proceeds naturally and incrementally, without any efforts from outside or inside of the Self to restrict its own progression. Thus, in developmental psychology, the Self develops non-defended—yet it is not clear how such development (other than positing of some inborn or sociogenetic general progression rule) can be possible. In psychoanalysis, the corresponding Ego is strictly defended (and defending itself) from intrusions that could lead to its restructuring (including development). The question of how influencing takes place in the human sciences becomes central for both fields (Salvatore and Valsiner, 2014).

We believe that an analysis of the dialectical perspective in the history of our sciences and its fitting onto the phenomena—in our case, those of psychotherapy—is a promising step in furthering the theoretical discourse in clinically focused psychology. The axiomatic framework of the dialectical perspective needs to be clarified first to make it clear how it maps onto the complexity of our phenomena in the therapy clinic and real life.

## From philosophy to psychology: dialectics as a way of thinking

Dialectics—with its focus on contradictions between opposites within the same whole, and its overcoming—is a general axiomatic world view. It is inherently systemic—the notion of the opposites that are in contradiction with each other are assumed to belong to the same whole. Only parts of a whole, rather than elements belonging to different wholes, can be dialectically in relation. The notion of contradiction does not mean mutual exclusion but rather the opposite—the mutually contradicting parts are in tension with each other, which makes it possible to address issues of transformation of the mutually included parts into a new relationship. The latter makes the dialectical perspective necessary for all developmental *foci* in any science—psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, and even astrophysics (e.g., tensions at the birth of supernovas). Within psychology, two areas—developmental psychology and psychotherapy—need explicit buildup on the foundations of dialectical thought. As we show in this paper that buildup has been notoriously slow in both fields.

The dialectical scheme was introduced to Occidental thought by re-inventing the Ancient Greek ideas of Heraclitus—by Salomon Maimon in 1790 (Maimon, 2010) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte in 1794. Fichte's interest in the unity of Self (*Ich*) and non-Self (*nicht-Ich*) led to the positioning of the latter as the antithesis to the former (Fichte, 1794, part 1). The essential new feature that was brought in by Fichte was the focus on the relationship between the opposites. Antithesis made it possible to reflect upon the thesis—to understand the Self; one needs to distance oneself taking imaginatively an outer position (non-Self) so that the look at the Self can gain some viewing distance. Such reflexivity upon a contrast of parts of a system (A and non-A) takes multiple forms—including a tension (contradiction) between the opposing-yet-united parts of the system.

### The double negation—key to understanding dialectics

Synthesis comes as the result of the tension between thesis and antithesis—through abstraction (Fichte, 1794, p. 35). It is the result of a sequence of negations—the notion of *double* negation—the negation of the (first) negation leads to the “jump” beyond the initial opposition (A versus non-A).

FIRST NEGATION: A is not non-A (and non-A is not A) = central for classical logic

SECOND NEGATION: It is irrelevant (=we negate) that A is not non-A

The second negation abstracts from the obvious contrast (A versus non-A) and sets the stage for generalization that includes both opposites in the same whole. In a therapeutic relation, this entails going beyond the first classification of the obvious (“I am the therapist here, and you are the client”) to the systemic unity (“Even as it is clear that I am the therapist and you the client—it does not matter since we are united in a therapeutic relationship”).

The centrality of the second negation is the birthplace of dialectical logic—the logic of synthesis. Classifications (involved in the first negation) only set the stage of looking at systemic tensions (A <in tension with> non-A) and charting out all the possible outcomes of that tension (its maintenance, its elimination, its escalation, its explosion, and the emergence of a new relation).

The second negation has some fundamentally relevant implications for psychology:

1. It raises the analytic discourse to the level of systems, instead of elements. Elements are relevant only as parts of the system.
2. It makes the developmental focus—that of the emergence of novel forms (based on dialectical synthesis) the central focus of a scientific investigation. Correspondingly it

is the desired location of any kind of intervention (therapeutic, educational, social)—as such interventions operate upon systems rather than their parts.

3. It makes the qualitative methodological orientation central and subsumes the quantitative methodology as one version of qualitative (but not vice versa)

## **Development of dialectical ideas by G. W. F. Hegel**

Although Fichte was the actual inventor of the dialectical perspective in European philosophy, it is usually Hegel who has been more popularly viewed as guilty of such complication of philosophical thought. Georg Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) clearly came after Fichte and took the dialectical ideas further to make them widely accessible in early 19th century German thought. The dialectic system that Hegel created- even if informed by Fichte's philosophy-- took its start from a different object. His dissertation on planetary orbits (1801—Hegel, 1998) charted out the inevitability of movement of heavenly bodies in ways that avoid collapsing into each other. His look at astronomy was followed by his efforts to develop a theory of history, spirit, and logic.

Hegel's main intellectual interlocutor was Immanuel Kant. Relating to the fixed categories of Kant, he turned Kant's ontological "what is" and "what is not" antinomies into a duality of "what is" and "what is *not yet*":

Anything which appears to be static when we look for its defining characteristics, begins to teem with life, like a drop of water, when we examine it as if under a microscope. In the same way, the categorical assertion that something is thus and not otherwise, becomes dynamic when we give a minute description of its logical structure. To examine "is," which discursive logic accepts at its face value, is to see that being is becoming in a disguise, in the

sense which “being” and “becoming” have initially in dialectical logic.

(Adorno, 1961, p. 40, added emphasis)

The crucial notion in dialectical perspectives is the notion of contradiction. It entails tension that, under some conditions, leads to a breakthrough point (“dialectical leap”) that innovates the whole in which the tensional contradictory agents were parts. This has an impact upon our notion of categories—instead of being static, fixed generalized fossils, they are alive and changing organizing frames. Hegel’s re-formulation of categories leaves behind the classical Aristotelian logic and leads to a new – dialectical logic—of qualitative transformations:

[A **or** non-A] →

[A **and** (tension-filled relation with) non-A] →...

**...HERE IS THE “dialectical leap”...**

... →results in B (and non-B as opposite)

The new logic overcame dualism in favor of inter-relatedness within—and (by way of synthesis) beyond—duality. The tension within the dual structure leads to overcoming the previous quality and the emergence of a new one. Perfection could emerge from imperfection—under conditions of reflexivity.

**Quality and quantity.** Hegel’s thinking about the relations between quality and quantity is a crucial feature in the development of the sciences in their European contexts since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Quality for Hegel becomes determined through its opposite—“something is” becomes now in contrast to its opposite (something is not). The something-that-is thus makes up a quality—in contrast to its opposite (which, relating to the former, may make up another quality—the opposite quality). Yet the something-that-is-not [this] need not



automatically be of determinate nature ([that]), it can be an undifferentiated field of The Other.

For Hegel,

If I say “I have being for myself,” I mean that I do not depend on any other human being. I negate this being out there that would negate me.

The finite is being for an other, the infinite is being for itself. That is the sphere of quality (Hegel, 2008, p. 86)<sup>2</sup>

This example illustrates the unity of the self and the other in the negation of such unity—on both sides. It is precisely through such negation of the relationship that the reality of such relation is confirmed. Quality becomes determined by setting up a border (limit, *Grenze*) between itself and the other. Within this limit, the opposition to the other is endless (to maintain the quality of itself-- *fürsichselbstsein*), while the act of negation is finite. Maintaining the meaning of “our national identity” as a constructed quality as long as it can be maintained requires a recurrent flow of finite contrasts with others—neighbors, enemies on battlefields or spies and witches next door, or germs invading through the ports of entry. Different qualities can be linked with the same quantity— **quantity is a subservient partner in the unity with quality**<sup>3</sup>. This idea was explained by one of Hegel’s followers—Karl Rosenkranz—looking at the relations between a point and a line:

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<sup>2</sup>In the original:

*“Wenn ich sage: Ich bin für mich, so liegt darin, ich bin nicht abhängig von [einem] Anderen, ich negierte diesen negative Dasein, das Endliche ist Sein für ein Anderes. Das Unendliche is Fürsichselbstsein. Das ist [die] Sphäre der Qualität”* (Hegel, 2001, pp. 95-96)

<sup>3</sup>It is precisely here where psychology—reversing this relation (into quantity dominating over quality)—went wrong in its construction of empirical research methods. Any quantity is of some quality, while quality stands on its own (does not need quantity to specify itself).

The idea of a point, e.g., is always the same; but in so far as the point moves it begets another, the other of itself, in which it sublates itself as the true. The line again, by moving in different ways, produces the difference of straight and crooked. The point makes itself analytically a line, but synthetically it remains contained in it; the line makes itself analytically a straight or a crooked line, but synthetically it is posited as a line in the one as well as in the other. (Rosenkranz, 1872, p. 114)

The quantity—the point moving and by that making a line—is a quantitative extension that can take different qualitative forms. On these forms, it is possible to create divisions—borders.

### **Dialectical perspectives in 20<sup>th</sup>-century psychology**

Dialectic thinking has had only episodic entrances into psychology since Hegel's death in 1831. It was a casualty in the intra-German conflicts of the *Naturwissenschaften* with *Naturphilosophie* from the 1840s onwards and became eradicated from the new natural sciences. It was maintained in the political ideology of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, whose role in the development of the communist social movements at the turn of the 20th century. With the political power capture in Russia in 1917-20, the Marxist general philosophy was imported to Russia as an ideological doctrine rather than a philosophy. As the new Russian state attempted to re-build the society on new grounds, the importation of dialectics into psychology was part of a societal re-education effort (Valsiner, 1988). As a by-product it gave some inputs into psychology—with Lev Vygotsky's pedology (van der Veer, 2020) as the most systematic elaboration. Pedology in Vygotsky's formulation is the general systemic study of human development—similar to developmental science as it emerged and developed further in the 1990s.

It is only in the 1920s and through the political re-vitalization campaigns of Russian society that dialectical philosophy entered into psychology. Importantly this happened not in its birth

land of Germany but as an import into post-revolutionary Russia. The whole “new Soviet psychology” of the 1920s was feverishly involved in trying to attach dialectical and materialist ideas to ordinary social life. Most of these efforts were of no consequence.

Except for one – It was Lev Vygotsky—a literary scholar turned into a psychologist – who elaborated how the use of dialectical analysis could change the basic ways in which psychology as a science deals with its phenomena. The key fundamental issue was — what kinds of units of analysis should psychology use for being scientific? The traditional ways of delineating such units since the 1880s in psychology laboratories were elementaristic — with just noticeable differences between sensations serving as an example. These elementaristic units could be counted and accumulated — but each of them lacked internal structure and were treated as freed from their immediate contexts.

In contrast, Vygotsky suggested using minimal Gestalts as units. These would be structures that are the minimal wholes that preserve the qualities of the whole. Psychology has used analogues to think of holistic units. Since the 1870s, the leading metaphor used to explain the need to consider different qualities at different analytic levels — the need to make sense of Gestalts – has been the contrast between water (H<sub>2</sub>O) and its components (oxygen and hydrogen). It is clear that water is a substance that cannot be obtained by simply mixing two gases—hydrogen and oxygen.

The notion of “minimal Gestalt” as an analytic unit was then—and continues to be now, a century later—a constructive idea not put to practice. Psychology’s social conventions of methodology have continued along the lines of accumulation of elementary units and their statistical analysis. The uselessness of the latter becomes clear if we try to map the water molecule analogy upon the regular terminology of psychology. In terms of our present-day psychologists’ usual thinking in ANOVA-terminology (see Gigerenzer, et al, 1989)—dividing all

components of variance to summable quantities--water is not an “interaction effect” of hydrogen and oxygen, but a synthesis of a new compound the quality of which differs from its components taken separately.

Water as a minimal Gestalt is an excellent analogy to emphasize the systemic nature of psychological phenomena—but it is not sufficient to elaborating the dialectical process in the processes of the emergence of new qualities. A chemical synthesis of compounds from elementary constituents indicates the structured nature of the phenomena—but remains myopic to any developmental transformation. Vygotsky went further—suggesting **wholistic structures with inherent dialectical tensions** as the minimal units of analysis:

Psychology, as it desires to study complex wholes... needs to change the methods of analysis into elements by the analytic method that reveals the parts of the unit [literally: breaks the whole into linked units—metod... analiza,...**razchleniyushego** na edinitsey]. It has to find the further undividable, surviving features that are characteristic of the given whole as a unity—**units within which in mutually opposing ways these features are represented** [Russian: edinitsey, v kotorykh **v protivopolozhnom vide** predstavleny eti svoistva]<sup>4</sup> (Vygotsky, 1982, p. 16)

The unit for analysis for Vygotsky was thus a whole with internal structure (A and B) and a specific oppositional relationship between them ( $A \rightarrow \leftarrow B$ ) between them. The oppositional

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<sup>4</sup>It is important to note that the intricate link with the dialectical dynamics of the units—which is present in the Russian original-- is lost in English translation, which briefly stated the main point: “*Psychology, which aims at a study of complex holistic systems, must replace the method of analysis into elements with the method of analysis into units*” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 5). The notion of tension as the most important feature of these units has not survived in the English translation—with the subsequent misunderstanding of Vygotsky’s originally fully dialectical starting point. A technical translation flaw has for decades eliminated the possibility of further advancement of a central theoretical idea.

tension within the system becomes the focus of discovery of the new forms that emerge on the border ( $A \rightarrow ? \leftarrow B$ ). The crucial key point of the unit is precisely the border zone as depicted by the “?”—it is here where both the maintenance of the previous tensions and their overcoming through a dialectical “leap” would happen.

What precise kinds of new forms these could be is not predictable—which we know to be the basic characteristic of open systems. The dialectical synthesis involves generalization from—rather than replacement of—the previous form. Vygotsky himself put that principle into practice by analyzing the ways in which we read the very last sentence of a short story (Valsiner, 2015) or recite poetry. Abstraction involves a move towards the infinity of human feelings.

**The inevitable nature of infinity and its implications for the *psyche*.** The question of infinity emerges only when a philosophical scheme frees itself from a set of static ontological axioms and starts to treat the variability (“flux”) of the world—ranging from the physical processes of the universe to the subjective desires of the mind. Hegel’s dialectical turning away from Kant re-vitalized ancient Heracleitan ways of thinking in 19<sup>th</sup>-century science, paving the way to a systematic process orientation in the sciences, and to bring the notion of development to the core of sciences. As we know in our 21<sup>st</sup> century, development is everywhere: viruses, babies, and galaxies all develop, albeit in different time frames and different forms. Yet that “everywhere” is located in some specific locations—“somewhere”. And that “somewhere” is on the border—in the space between A and B, and in the time from T to T+1.

### **The border: where the dialectical leap occurs**

Therapeutic approaches, in special psychodynamic ones, intentionally also work with the space between A and B. Psychotherapeutic treatment profits from structuring sessions in a way that

patient-therapist interaction enforces patients' personality development by opening up the possibility for re-elaborating A to B relationships. Relationships we would take for granted in everyday life. Examplewise, therapy sessions in psychodrama can, in principle, be divided into parts of Warm-up, Action, Sharing, and the subsequent processing (Karp, Holmes, and Brandhaw Tauvon, 1998). Already the beginning, the phase of warm-up "serves to produce an atmosphere of creative possibility" (p. 13, Holmes, Farrall, and Kirk. (2014) and encourages the development of a relationship between the so-called "director" (therapist) and the patient, progressing dynamics between A and B. The active presence of the director might help in gaining security through social gathering and increases the potential of creativity. Nevertheless, at the same time, in case socializing does not efficiently take place, the risk of a transference neurosis could emerge (Ameln, Gerstmann, and Kramer, 2009, p.25).

S. Freud (1911) describes the occurrence of transference neurosis as a positive element in treatment<sup>5</sup>, allowing to look at all symptoms of the neurosis, being at the same time in a sort of artificial state, permitting progress and intervention. Furthermore, Rado (1925) states about development that in the ideal model of therapy, the clinical neurosis transforms into a transference neurosis. Once the transference neurosis clears up, the detection of the infantile neurosis might begin and start the progress in healing. All in all, it becomes clear that offering the possibility for re-evaluation in relationships, is one of the first steps offering development in therapy, but why?

One of the core elements of psychoanalytic treatment can be seen in defence mechanisms. Psychoanalysis is a theory of primary conflict. Human beings which are not able to solve a conflict at first, use defence mechanisms choosing a different path of strategy, in so-

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<sup>5</sup> "Der neue Zustand hat alle Charaktere der Krankheit übernommen, aber er stellt eine artefizielle Krankheit dar, die überall unseren Eingriffen zugänglich ist." G.W.X. p. 135 (S.E. XII, 154 e.ed.)

called neurosis. Therefore, defence mechanisms, besides being very powerful in serving the maintenance of the *psyche* of humans, also play a central role in personal development. It is in the context of our new field of cultural psychology where the developmental psychological theories become re-united with the most productive sides of the psychoanalytic heritage (Rosenbaum, 2015, Salvatore, 2016, Salvatore and Zittoun, 2011)

Cultural psychology's interest in defence mechanisms can be seen in their function of a dynamic description of new meaning-making (Lehmann, 2016, 2019, Zittoun, 2015). Looking at defence mechanisms does not solely give an answer to the descriptive explanation of what was at point  $t_0$  and later on at  $t_1$  but also helps in gaining insight in what happens “in-between,” the dynamic process in development. Hence, defence mechanisms are not dynamic *per se* or *definitionem* as we furthermore claim, neither psychodynamic approaches, at least from a theoretical point of view, can attribute themselves as being “dynamic.” No descriptive element, also not defence mechanisms, can ever answer a question of the dynamic course of development of a whole system. It is the correspondence between dialectics of the person's emerging meanings and the established defence mechanisms that together synthesize the new whole in development Mascolo (2017) has demonstrated that in the transformation of a young man of White Suprematist ideological belief system into the husband of an inter-racial married couple. There are many examples of everyday life where new psychological and societal innovations take place, and old defences of the Ego or the social caste are left behind.

### **The importance of the Gestalt principle: Systems are not reducible to their elements**

Let us add an “alchemical” example to the H<sub>2</sub>O example of before: if I mix yellow and blue colored powder, it becomes green; in case I would take the time under the microscope and use a forceps, I could undo (but undo is also wrong) – I could add a new process which tends to look like redoing the process: In that way, the powder of green color has the

possibility/potential to be blue and yellow at the same time; nevertheless, it is also a question of analysis: if I measure the quantity (e.g., weight) – I could never have the same amount of green powder compared to blue and yellow, as green is the sum of blue and yellow. As a result, I can describe the material as green, even though the truth is that the green particles always only can be seen as a sum of blue and yellow.

Coming back to the tension of development, the outcome cannot be detected in advance in the same way as the sum is not necessarily the result of the outcome. Quantity can be a state of quality-- but not the other way round. The massive production of self-reflexive statements by the client, supported by the accepting attitude of the therapist, does not automatically lead to qualitative change. It can maintain the client in the production of ego-defensive material without entering onto the ego-constructive pathway.

Using the format of theatre, our techniques can open up a gap for the protagonist to be able to distance from the own person, including own defence strategies without raising the level of anxiety within its personality. The imagination task is used in psychodynamic approaches for imagination. The task is simple-- to imagine that you sit down on a park bench and somebody walks by. Who is he or she? What is this person like? What does this person do? How does this person behave?

Efforts to explain this imagined situation lead to immediate meaning construction that specifies instantly the move from {A versus non A} to {I am X versus I am not X} in identification with the person or not. Consider the following possible scenario:

“The person I imagined passing by was a policeman,” and the construct could be immediate voices that enter into the dialogue with this stated image:

- (1) “I am not a criminal.”
- (2) “I feel good seeing law and order so well kept up.”



- (3) “as a child, I wanted to have a nice uniform as he has.”

What kinds of defence are being brought into this simple situation? Following Fichte, the *Be-grenzung* becomes accessed as “being recognized” by the person. Here the element between the thesis and the antithesis is the border setting within A-non A that the person constructs (“this was a policeman” but “I am not policeman”), leading to immediate dialogue with the invented Social Other. The border zone here is filled in with instantly self-relevant dialogical constructions of implicit complements:

- (1) “I am not a criminal” [but I could be... I am glad he did not notice me]
- (2) “I feel good seeing law and order so well kept up” [but these guys can be brutal]
- (3) “as a child, I wanted to have a nice uniform like he has” [I am nostalgic still about my childhood]

These complements—being transitory and giving a “flash” of access to the unconscious-- are imaginary (as is the whole park bench setting), but they indicate the *instant dialogicality* in our emerging imagination processes. The perspective of Dialogical Self Theory of Hubert Hermans captures the very essence of human meaning construction. In our imaginative minds we

... can imaginatively *move to a future point in time and then speak to myself about the sense of what I am doing now in my present situation*. This position, at some point in the future, may be very helpful to help me to evaluate my present activities from a long-term perspective. The result may be that I disagree with my present self as blinding itself from more essential things  
(Hermans, 1996, p. 33, added italics)

Situations in psychotherapy are characterized by the fixation of the client in the present state—the current state of affairs is being blocked by the system of self defence mechanisms. The

therapist's art is to re-direct the client from defending the self to developing it. In ordinary human development, this happens as a natural part of development, but in therapy contexts, extra effort is needed to reverse the self-fixating ethos into that of openness to innovation.

To accomplish that the therapeutic process needs to move beyond a dialogue of the therapist and client to the doorstep of dialectical synthesis. As Greenberg and Pascual-Leone have expressed it precisely:

The new structure captures within itself the pattern of coactivation of the previously opposing schemes, as well as newly formulated material, *thus forming a higher level structural totality*. Internal contradictions (often of a multidimensional nature) are resolved by the tacit or explicit dialectical synthesis of opposing activating schemes, and *this synthesis is a source of novel structures*. (Greenberg and Pascual-Leone, 1995, p. 180, added emphases)

Yet reaching the constructive moment of dialectical synthesis is an excruciatingly slow movement through the outpouring flow of the client's emotional releases. Emotional productions enter into dialogue with other similar ones (Greenberg and Pascual-Leone, 2001), resulting in a vast field of affective contradictions within the client and with the therapist. Dialogue between psychotherapist and client is not enough to produce expected change (Cunha, Goncalves and Valsiner, 2011). What is the explicit or implicit "non-I" becomes the central point of investigation—the therapist's *Gegenstand* that is made complicated by the client's resistances. Resistance is the vehicle of granting relative conservatism in any development (Chaudhary, Hviid, Marsico, and Villadsen, 2017). Development needs to be relatively conservative—yet allowing for novelty—to protect the life-course stability of the person despite various ruptures (Salvatore and Zittoun, 2011, Zittoun, 2015)

The work in psychotherapy brings forth aspects of interpersonal relatedness that are absent in psychoanalysis, Verhofstadt-Deneve (2007) building on the six dimensions personality model is it could be translated into psychoanalysis (Table 1). As we can observe that translation is far from perfect—as it highlights psychoanalysis’ underdeveloped focus on the feed-forward messages that originate from the others. Here again, our contemporary cultural and developmental psychology can provide synthetic solutions (Salvatore, 2016).

Table 1. Translating concepts between Dialogical Self and Psychoanalysis

Example question	Verhofstadt-Deneve (2007) used these terms	Psychoanalytic translation
1. Who am I?	Self-Image	Ego
2. Who would I like to be and become?	Ideal-Self	Super-Ego
3. What are the others like?	Alter-Image	Ego
4. What should the oth- ers be like?	Ideal-Alter	<b>Super-Ego*</b>
5. How do the others perceive me?	Meta-Self	<b>Ego*</b>
6. How should the oth- ers perceive me?	Ideal-Meta-Self	<b>Super-Ego*</b>

\*closest equivalent possible translations that are not existent in psychoanalytic theory

Table 1 reveals – the open secret of psychoanalytic theory – it is not conceptualizing the reverse reflexivity (Others → Self) which is necessary for all culturally normative systems and personal constructs in therapy. The cultural-psychological perspective (Salvatore, 2016) corrects that oversight. The Ego can develop only within the World—where different social suggestions take the perspective on the Ego, guiding it in some (rather than other) directions. Yet it remains to the person to handle all these guidance efforts—and here again, the sophistication of a psychoanalyst's look is a clear benefit for developmental psychology.

## Conclusions: The hard road of psychotherapy to dialectics

We have outlined the basic problem in making psychotherapy dialectical—its assumed goal of *restoration* of the psychologically “healthy” state of being is, in principle, contradictory with that very state of being. The latter is constantly changing, and some of these dynamic changes lead further into development that happens in irreversible time. Hence it is not possible to “restore” the previous preferred state—but to move on to a new state of being that transcends the problematic self-fixations of the person. Psychotherapy is thus the battlefield for development under the conditions of entrenched efforts to maintain the psychological status quo.

Psychotherapy entails massive dialogicality—it is a “discussion cure”. Yet it is very inefficient—given the efforts of the persons involved (both the client and the therapist) to use their established ego-defence mechanisms to preserve the problematic state—even if they honestly express their desires to change it. Of conclusion in this article is simple-- **if therapy can work, it needs to find ways to dialectic synthesis in the middle of the massive dialogues that go in the client-therapist relations.** Our main focus as not in showing different wording between dialogical and dialectical in correspondence of psychoanalytic understanding but in the synthesis, this special theoretical reasoning can offer us. Psychotherapy is developmental in its core—but its means to promote development are hidden behind the ontological assumptions that govern most of the clinical work.

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## General Discussion

In the first paper and from a view on symptoms, this thesis departed from addressing how we are able to reconstruct the ways our defence mechanisms have chosen to “help” us in managing our conflict leading to the everyday presence of symptoms. The variety of symptoms and its ways of being psychologically processed by humans, seems, without exaggeration, limitless and highly dependent on various personal factors. To make this variety approachable, I argued that we need to consider that there is a shared reality between the person having the symptom and the corresponding interpreters of it, like an overlap. Therefore, in this first step, to keep ideas focused and clear, Mihalits (2017) discussed the process of defence within one of the smallest interactive units, namely within the “couple” of therapeutic alliance. The therapeutic setting seemed useful in this context, as it is precisely described in literature and somehow comparable over multiple cases, if needed. This was important as, at the beginning of the thesis, there was the intention to develop a better understanding in what embeds this sort of “shared reality” between the analyst and analysand (therapist and patient). I argued that these shared realities appear like a by-product. Its potential and its *Gestalt sui generis* has not yet been analyzed in detail by contemporary research. Therefore, I suggested that this reality can be further accessed by finding it in the analysis of defence mechanisms.

Following this argument, the second paper (Mihalits & Codenotti, 2020) clarified that the understanding of defence being a mechanism is a rather unproductive and unclear one when used for understanding developmental processes due to following reasons: The current state of the art knowledge on defence mechanisms is identified to be in need of a further theoretical clarification. Additionally, theories of defence need a clearer determination of their field of application. The explanans and explananda of defence mechanisms is not kept consistently apart and

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especially in reference to the debate about conscious and unconscious entities, there is no benefit in interpreting isolated tested variables mismatching the understanding of developmental tasks.

In a next step, the third paper (Mihalits, in review) explored the missing dimensions for a theoretical model showing the productive usage of the construct of defence mechanism for developmental tasks. It found that the relationship between the subject and object are of central interest for developmental processes as well as their dimension of interpretation from an intra- and interindividual as well as collective level. Already in 1940, Frenkel-Brunswik, indeed, while discussing the success of development, acknowledged that psychoanalysis was first in emphasizing the fact “that external success itself is not the basic datum from which to start, but rather the meaning which the idea of success has acquired for the subject, that is, the relationship between the objective and the subjective” (p. 195). Nevertheless, her claim for a theoretical synthesis was not satisfied until the current try of explanation.

In a last step, paper four (Mihalits & Valsiner, in review) re-conceptualizes ego-defence mechanisms as self-construction mechanisms for developmental psychology using a dialectical approach. In that way, it was tried to conclude not only in a theoretic model but also show its practical application by using dialectics. We concluded that therapeutic procedures need to overcome the goal of restoration and find ways in dialectic synthesis.

### **A final example provoking further discussions**

To reach a conclusion within this PhD project and to integrate its findings summarized above to a broader scientific discourse, this final chapter will now further consider future points of contact worth thinking about. Secondly, this chapter will solidify the understanding of the theoretical findings of the thesis by using a practical example. Indeed, some previous considerations

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within the presented four papers do have practical indications but none of them results in an overall synthesis as was proposed in the introduction of this thesis. Therefore, these final considerations shall now conclude in a synthesizing manner by practical case. The chosen case is part of the rich example collection of George Devereux's book *From anxiety to method in the behavioral sciences* first published in 1967 and gives profound insight into psychoanalytic thinking as well as its defensive structures. I will now further elaborate on "Case 315", as Devereux refers to it, because of its dialogical assumption of polarized values and its opposing counterforces:




Our society<sup>1</sup> is officially caninophile and friendship is a nuclear component of our value system. Arab society is, by contrast, officially *caninophobe*; it considers the dog ritually and objectively unclean. These contrasting facts should – but seldom do – make us look for officially disapproved, but strong *caninophobe* traits in *our* culture and conversely, for strong *caninophile* traits in Arab culture. Once the problem is formulated in this manner, confirmatory evidence is not hard to find: Dog phobias are common in the Occident, 'dirty dog' and 'bitch' are opprobrious epithets, and dogs – 'mans's best friends' – are more commonly brutalized [...] than are economically valuable but emotionally unresponsive sheep. Conversely, the Arab makes an exception for the *sloughi*. He does not consider him unclean and sometimes even records his pedigree in his family Koran, side by side with his own and that of his culturally valued horse. (p. 211)

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<sup>1</sup> Devereux refers to our society as Western society or Occident (annotation of the author); emphasizes of the quote are taken from the author's original

The benefit of using Devereux's case can be seen in its richness of content: At first, the conscious vs. unconscious notion becomes evident. Described on a behavioral level and addressing the level of consciousness, the notion of a society "being in favor" of a dog gets at the same time answered by phobic traits and vice versa. Above that, the quote shows an entanglement between the collective perspective of societies, referred to by Devereux as "cultures", and the individual who acts in favor of one of the controversial traits "-phobic" or "-phile". Nevertheless, it is clear that for being able to discuss the case of "cultures", it is mainly the single behavioral pattern of an individual which is used as the empiric evidence in Devereux's example.

The following schematic process visualization of the *figures* 1 to 4 shall help in exploring Devereux's case story step by step. All four *figures* refer to the same captions:

A, B	...	name of point, with explicit descriptive meaning
t	...	time dimension
P	...	progress dimension
	...	conflict
	...	starting points/end points
	...	taken decision
I	...	possible path 1
II	...	possible path 2
III	...	possible path 3

In contrast of Devereux's example, we depart from an individual's dog phobia. Furthermore, we pre-define that this phobia is caused due to a traumatic event in childhood, following classic psychoanalytic understanding. In *figure* 1, we can now follow the track of this person of his\*her behavioral actions (arrows), caused by the traumatic event marked as conflict (ring symbol) in the scheme. There are drawn three possible ways of choice within our created example (I, II, III).

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Whereas path I simulates a non-traumatic solution, e.g. by using a coping strategy to solve the conflict, path II and III show the non-direct solving strategy of defensive structures. The x-axis shows the ongoing progress within conscious and unconscious decision-making with time as component on the y-axis. In our case A would be the starting point of action, B is the symbolized goal reached by directly solving the conflict. B' stands for the imagined point of believing in reaching B. Path II shows the successful use of defensive structure by successfully accomplishing the goal. In that case it might happen that no defensive action will be detected in therapeutic work, as the goal of B' appears as look-alike of B. Path III shows the unsuccessful use of defensive structures. In that case defensive structures do become visible and symptomatic resulting in B''.

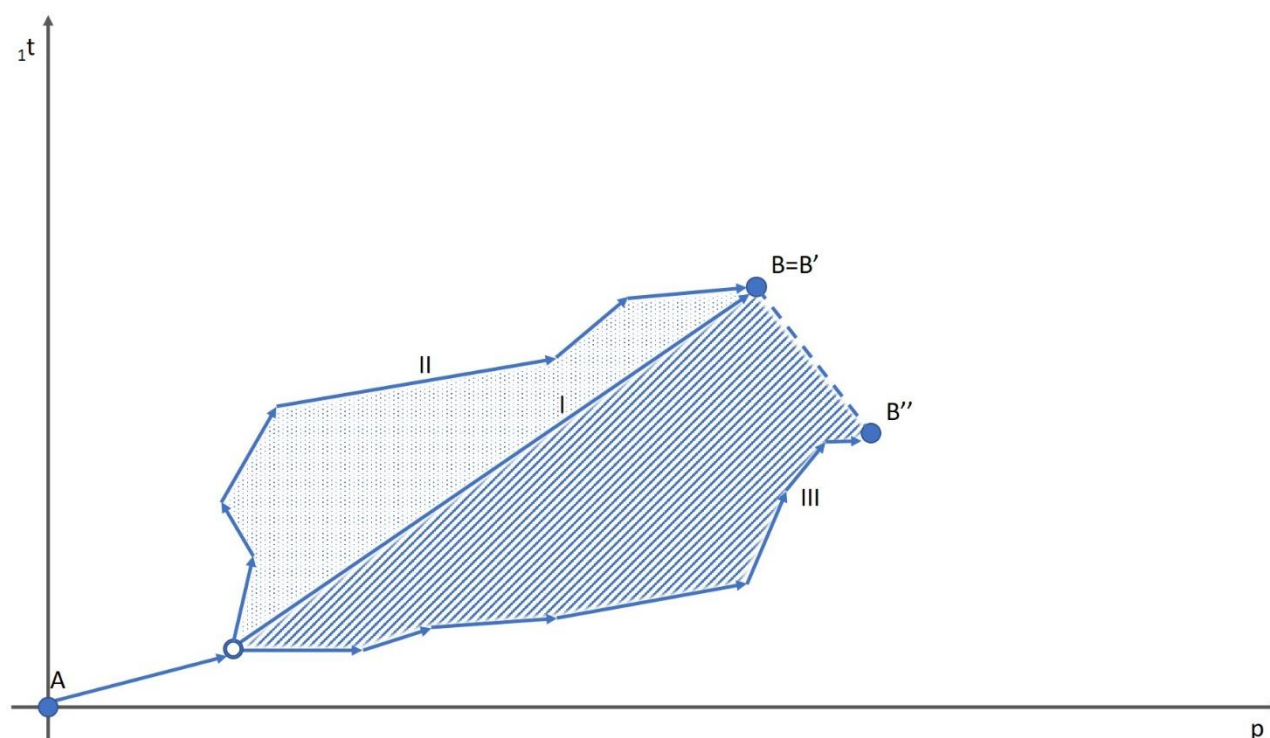
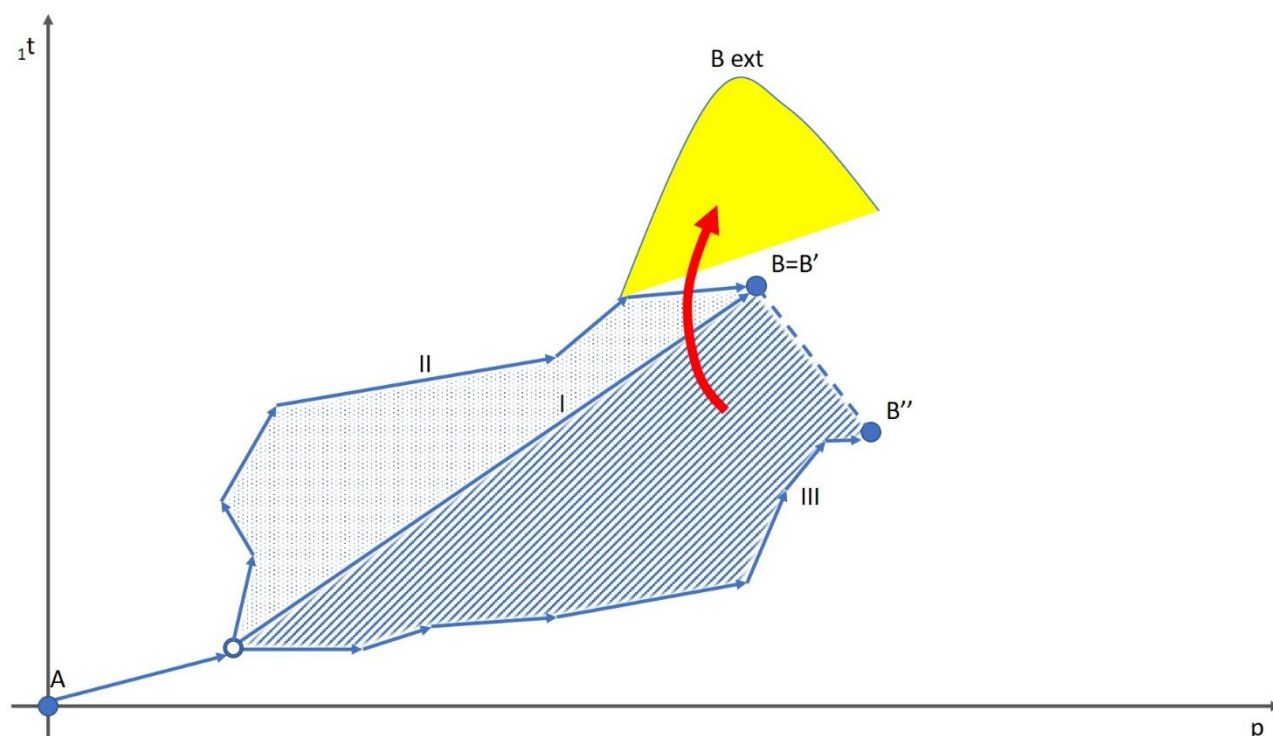


Figure 1: Scheme A) individual perspective at current moment (intra-individual)

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Interestingly, all three paths become most meaningful by understanding developmental processes when these paths are contrasted with each other. *Figure 2* can be seen as addition to the first figure, as another perspective gets added to the intra-individual level: The yellow indication highlights the interaction with an external object (e.g. therapist) in our example. Therefore, *figures 1* and *2* are merged under scheme A. In *figure 2*, we leave the solely intra-individual level and add an external component of interaction also marked by the red arrow that points at the yellow area outside of the individual in central focus.



*Figure 2*: scheme A/II individual perspective at current moment (sharing with object)

Leaving the intra-individual perspective could for instance happen by entering a therapeutic alliance. There is no equilibrium in personal development possible from scheme A II (*figure 2*) onwards, as interaction happens with an outside object. In the example of a possible therapeutic intervention, the dialogic interaction with the therapist is integrated in the patient's own

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interpretation and defence. It is therefore evident that the concept of restoration of a patient – the desire to go back in time as discussed in Mihalits (2017), paper one of this dissertation - is illusional and already made impossible when personal development is (re)considered when dialogicality comes into play.

*Figure 3* implements an additional perspective introducing z-axis. Whereas *figures 1* and *2* do not differ in the dimension time – or in other words –time simply follows the law of “tempus fugit” as a physical entity, *figure 3* adds a second dimension of time, namely by the re-evaluation of the traumatic event itself. More precisely,  ${}_1t$  describes the time as it was experienced as a physical entity during the traumatic event, whereas  ${}_2t$  introduces the ongoing re-evaluation of the situation due to the use of defensive structures. E.g.  ${}_2t_0, {}_2t_1, \dots {}_2t_x$  could in our case stand for therapeutic sessions that force to re-evaluate the traumatic situation that is (objectively) following the originally lived through experience during time of  ${}_1t$ . Any kind of re-evaluation always deals at the current time of  ${}_2t$  elaborating in retrospection to primal event  ${}_1t$ . Furthermore, the way the scheme in *figure 3* is drawn, it shows the ongoing re-evaluation without any change in outcome, as path III in being finalized in B'' does not get changed in any way but stays the same.

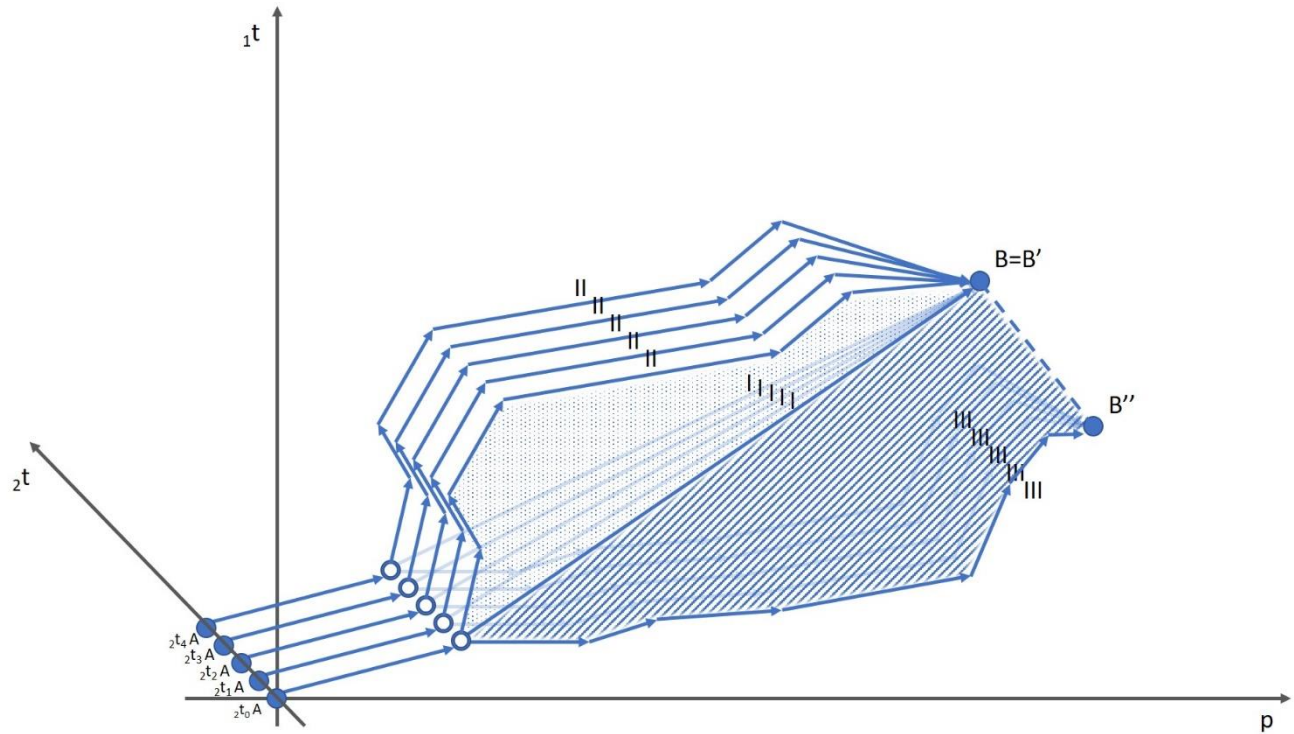


Figure 3: scheme B) individual perspective on-going re-interpretation

Further exploration of the example finally leads to *figure 4*. The level of observation changes, as we have multiple points of A and B in parallel here. The scheme elaborates on the possibility of multiple people employing the same defence structures. More precisely, we enter the example of Devereux in its original way of presentation. The addition of multiple cases leads to the assumption of collective traits that are shared in a society, e.g. a society being canino -phobic or -phile.

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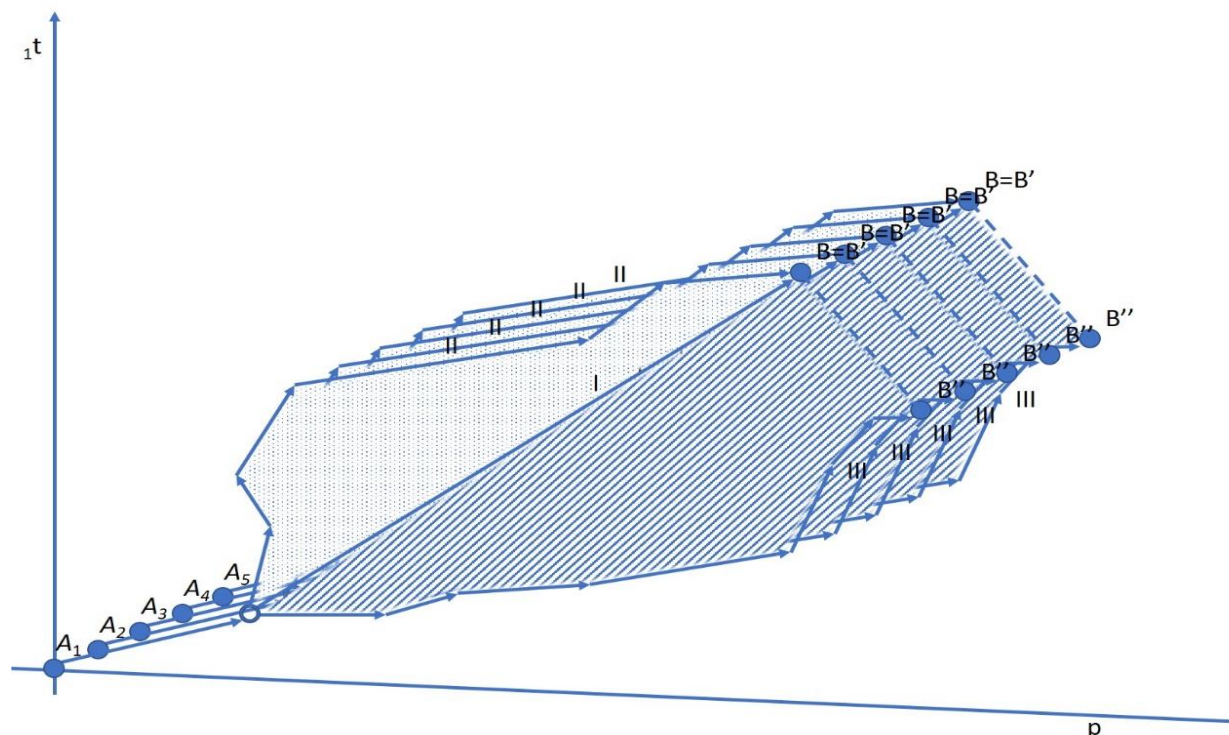


Figure 4: scheme C) collective/parallel perspective at current moment

Each of the presented cases (each A refers to an own person/case) follows of course all previous mentioned explanations of *figures 1 to 3*. Therefore, *figure 4* includes all structural actions of *figures* inherent in 1 to 3 and adds the quality of collectivity. As already described in Mihalits (in review), this also leads to the acknowledgment of possible interaction between the different cases on both, conscious and unconscious level between the different individuals. Therefore, the chosen path III in case A<sub>1</sub> can possibly interfere or influence path III of e.g. A<sub>2</sub>. In more practical language of our example, defensive phobic structures of our previous case A do interact with the case of another A, being caninophile, and that again can be complexly entangled with a broader cultural system of society being caninophile.

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In that way it was possible to clarify the claim of Salvatore, Lauro-Grotto, Gennaro, and Gelo (2009, p. 176 ) pointing out that there is a clear “need to develop the use of the dynamic system theory in psychology, rather than to propose specific technical guidelines for empirical research”.

Leaving the practical example, I now present my major conclusions by referring to Mitchell (1997) who questions the big Dogma of Freud in psychoanalysis. Under nowadays conditions, Mitchell aims at making visible that patients cannot be treated the same way as in Freudian times. The previous detailed explanation of Devereux’s case example shows that Mitchell is right with his claims, when considering the following (primary developmental tasks):

- Excluding the therapist of the therapeutic process: It was possible to give a clear example in what way therapists, and (more general) objects, are involved in developmental processes, leading to a new *Gestalt* sui generis in personal development,
- The hope that science is sufficiently “elaborated”: It was shown that contemporary scientific approaches are not able to successfully understand developmental processes as cultural psychological concepts of dialogicality introduce,
- Interpretations leading to understanding: Dialectical understanding signals a pathway to synthesis that can offer a dialogical understanding, leaving mechanistic ego defence and leading to ego construction.

I conclude that psychoanalysis needs to overcome the dogmatic understanding of being in search of equilibria that have to be re-established after traumatic interference. Rather development is an expanding non-linear process that needs to be seen from intra-individual, inter-individual as well as collective perspectives.

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## Future Prospects

Social power relations likewise defence strategies are asymmetric. It can be doubted that there are any equal power relationships to be found in human relationships and minds other than being temporary states of affair. Psychoanalysis has tried to detect and uncover asymmetric power relations, with mixed success. We can see how a person can handle inner conflicts as we analyze these participating forces within the self in our inner life also from the angle of relationships between these forces, which are dialogical in their basic nature. Psychoanalysis is able to *detect* asymmetric power relations (at both conscious and un-conscious levels) on an individual's level but is *unable to further develop or understand/grasp these relations as entangled with wider cultural, inter-individual and collective relationships*, as asymmetry is understood at a descriptive level. I argue that this does not take into account efforts to understand change and development at the intersection of intra- und inter-individual as well as collective levels. The reason might be found in the ambivalence about development in theories of psychoanalysis as well as in the scientific environment and society in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Vienna. The imperative of "objectivity" that gained prominence over the 20<sup>th</sup> century opened doors to use primarily biological concepts also in social sciences. As in the case of psychoanalysis, it became focused on the assumption of equilibrium of forces and homeostasis which concluded in the Psychodynamic model. Questioning this modality of equilibrium and homeostasis could bring effort in developing a further understanding of psychoanalytic theory of defence. More precisely, the model of autopoiesis might be a solution in overcoming the old paradigm of equilibration: Whereas the current thesis was able to elaborate and detect precisely the many facets of the problem, overcoming this theoretical gap needs further research.

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