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Revolting Against Father-Authority: the Case of Dr. Otto Gross

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ABSTRACT
At the beginning of the 20th century, the psychoanalyst Otto Gross was a notorious figure in the anarchistic, bohemian milieu of Germany and his native Austria. His radical approach to both psychoanalytic therapy, which he took way further than Sigmund Freud himself, and the liberating use of drugs, brought him, together with his utopian ideas of radical ‘de-patriarcalization’ of society, in touch if not on collision course with many of the great personalities of that time – Freud, Carl Jung, Max Weber, Franz Kafka to name but some. His arrest and subsequent commitment to a mental hospital in 1913 led to a scandal in the press, due to the widespread but dubious notion that it happened as a result of a conspiracy, instigated by his detested father, the well-known professor of law, Hans Gross. The pseudo-genius Otto Gross was in a great many things a forerunner of the anti-authoritarian youth rebel of later times, and in a brief phase before World War I he obtained symbolic status in the ongoing culture war between fathers and sons, a war, which not least was nourished by the advent of that new liberation-ideology, psychoanalysis.

Someone must have been slandering Josef K., for one morning without having done anything wrong he was arrested.

Franz Kafka, *The Trial*

On 9 November 1913, the psychiatrist Otto Gross was picked up by the Berlin police and escorted to the Austrian border where psychiatric authorities were waiting to assume responsibility for him.

On his arrival at a private sanatorium in the border-town of Tulln, where by arrangement with his father, professor Hans Gross, he was to be held in custody for the next month or so, he was examined by a Dr. Bonvicini, who for the record described the patient as “neglected in every sense of the word”.

His exterior was deranged, he was uncombed and unshaven, dusty and dirty, his shoes and clothes were soiled, the shirt stuck to his body from sweat and dirt. He had no luggage or clothing, it had all been taken away from him by his “friends” in Berlin. He was depressed, but most of time courteous and polite. When his clothes were searched, eight small boxes were found, each containing up to 5-10 grams of opium, cocaine and anestesine, plus a mixture of the latter substances. He showed a great appetite for cocaine, frequently with the most imploring expression asking for a “pinch”. In order to sleep, he had to take paraldehyde, luminal, diethel barbiturate etc. He preferred to speak with the assistant doctors, rather than the consultant doctor, whom he considered inhibited by his “authority complex”.

In the following days, he continued to demand cocaine in a loud and shrill voice, throwing himself against the door, at a certain point getting into a brawl with an orderly trying to get out. He demanded “decent doses” in order to finish his work. In eight days it should be finished, he said, and then he would end all the drugs.

**FATHER AND SON**

One of the essential themes in the study of modernity is the family. Few institutions have changed so radically since the last century, and it becomes especially relevant to examine the relation between father and son, to get an idea of the loss of moral verticality and erosion of norms that are among the costs of modernization – or gains, depending on your point of view.

In Western culture, father-and-son-relations were always extremely important, in Judaism, as later in Christianity. Abraham and Isaac may be the representative anecdote, even more so than that of the Father and the Son. Historically, father and son have confronted each other representing a culture of duty and a culture of right, respectively. These constitute sort of the two legs of Western culture, and there seems to be a progressive cultural dynamic connected with them.
The culture of duty has its deepest roots in Christianity and the old agrarian world. It is what kept community together for centuries, before the state became powerful enough to do the job. A culture of right, which essentially implies the arrival and cultivation of the individual as the main figure, began its lengthy split from a Christian world view around the time of the Renaissance, growing to become a counterculture with the Enlightenment period, the French Revolution, Romanticism and, not least, with the catastrophes of the 20th Century.

The world before was predominantly a world of fathers, and a world of duty. The world after is a world of right – and of sons, or children. No matter where one digs down into the last centuries of Western cultural history, these two cultures oppose each other, each with its proper agents, values, norms, dogmas, drives and prohibitions.

A world of duty is a world of authority and guilt. For centuries those three – authority, guilt and duty – saw to it that people were efficiently welded together into a society. They were the money of the old world!

In our contemporary world rights are fast becoming the dominating principle for the relationship between individual and society. Duty and guilt are not really there anymore except as repressions.

Anyway, about a century ago, the advent of psychoanalysis provided the relation between fathers and sons with a modern theoretical superstructure whose centrepiece – the Oedipus complex – fittingly refers to our cultural roots. It is actually thought-provoking how Sigmund Freud, who more than anything wanted to demythologize the world, so often himself resorted to the myths and symbols of Antiquity for explanations. Thought-provoking, too, that this particular conceptualization arose, just when the traditional father-authority faced its decisive crisis.

At another end of our culture – in modern literature and film – the relation often surfaces, too. Not much in life is as complex and sensitive and important as the love-and-hate-relation between son and father, judging from contemporary novels, films, television-series and singer-songwriter pop.

From an adolescent boy’s point of view, it seems difficult to find satisfying strategies in a family, and a world increasingly dominated by motherly values, the problem now being to a lesser degree that of the dominant father, than that of the absent father, the abusive father or the weak father.

Historically, the father-and-son-relation was part of a generational conflict that surfaced in the 20th century, especially in the decades around World War I, and then again in the 1960s. German culture of the years between 1907 and 1920 is in focus here.

Back then,

in Vienna, Munich and Berlin, as well as in Prague, the conflict between father and son is a standard-theme, as well as for Jewish as for non-Jewish intellectuals of the expression-
ist generation, and for psychoanalysis, which in that phase was still young. This conflict is central to their fights against the representatives and institutions of societal power. "The protest against the fathers", wrote the author of expressionist manifestos, Rudolf Kaiser, in 1918 [...] “is a protest against the repression of youthful life by state, society and family”. The conflict between fathers and sons only formed the graphic pattern of the individual’s manifold conflict with the authorities and powers of a patriarchal society, a conflict which often reached all the way down into the subconscious. It therefore contained psychic and social, legal and pedagogic, political and religious aspects among each other.

In the years around the World War I, a cultural father-and-son-conflict became acute, leading to a post-war loss of father-authority whose symbolic, expressionist headline was simply Vatermord – patricide. A ferocious anti-authoritarian assault not only targeted the father of the family, the first father, so to speak, but also all the secondary fathers that an individual met growing up, from the schoolteacher to the Kaiser. The psychoanalyst Alexander Mitscherlich talks about a primary and a secondary fatherlessness.

The expressionists were a generation of eternal sons, in eternal opposition to a detested father-world. The conflict showed itself in art, literature, psychology and politics, and it seems to have comprised all – left-wingers like Ernst Toller, Walter Hasenclever and Erich Mühsam, apolitical figures like Franz Kafka, right-wingers like Ernst Jünger and Adolf Hitler.

Revolt became the norm, and the artist, the bohemian, was the central figure. “I remember a night in the old Café des Westens”, poet and anarchist Erich Mühsam recounts in his Unpolitisches Erinnerungen (1931),

where the table of artists was full. Poets, painters, sculptors, actors, musicians, with or without fame, were sitting together. Then Ernst von Wolzogen raised the question whether any of us had found his or her lifestyle as an artist without conflict, in harmony with his family. It turned out that all of us, not a single exception, were deserters from our progenitors, all black sheep.

THE INSTANCE OF OTTO GROSS

Few sheep were as black as the psychoanalyst and anarchist, Otto Gross, the most uncompromising of deserters. His fierce critique of patriarchal society and bourgeois morality, his ideas about the revolutionary potential of psychoanalysis, his gospel of orgies, abreaction and free sex, made him an early catalyst of a great many father-revolts, including that of Mühsam and most of his table of friends at the Café des Westens.

Gross was a prophet of a new age – an age without fathers. And he was an early bird. He formulated a critique of society, and a utopian theory of the world after a revolution, directly from his relation to his father: Hans Gross, a strong and powerful personality with a great career in the legal and academic institutions of the Hapsburg Empire. Ot-
to's solution was to replace father-right with mother-right, where the children would belong to the mother. He saw his own psychoanalytic practice as a necessary and decisive contribution to this revolution – from his perspective a matriarchal revolution.

If one did not know better, one might imagine Gross to be a character invented by some writer or film-director to tie well-known historical figures together in a slightly overwrought, surrealist drama – in this case the giants of the 20th century Western culture like Freud, Jung, Weber, Kafka and Werfel, all of whom he met and influenced – not to forget a whole herd of lesser known *mitteleuropäische* personalities of culture: poets, painters, scientists and bohemians, whom he met in Graz, Munich, Prague and Berlin, and whose life he more or less changed. To mention but a few: Jewish German-writing authors of Prague like Max Brod, German anarchists of Munich-Schwabing like Mühsam, members of the liberal academic jet set of Heidelberg like the sisters Else and Frieda von Richthofen (the latter later known as Frieda Lawrence, from 1912 married to D.H. Lawrence, whom she effectively coached in the erotic gospel of Otto Gross), dadaists like Raoul Haussmann and Franz Jung, and significant figures in German literature like Walter Hasenclever, Leonhard Frank and Johannes R. Becher.

In 1907, Gross undermined Max Weber’s private circle in Heidelberg to such an extent that Weber felt obliged to write an extensive and fierce critique of Gross’ world-view and (lack of) scientific ethics. At about the same time Freud and Jung saw in him a great, new talent for the struggling school of psychoanalysis. On the basis of Gross’ brilliant early theoretical writings, Freud saw him as the only one, apart from Jung, who might be said to have contributed something original and worthwhile to the movement, and saw the two of them together as the possible heirs to the throne of a psychoanalytic world movement. A few years later, Gross was considered a heretic of the movement, his name almost erased from its annals.

C.G. Jung analysed Gross at some point, or they analysed each other, calling him his twin-brother and borrowing from his theoretical property, before diagnosing him with dementia praecox, the label for schizophrenia of the time.

Gross had an enormous impact on the people he met, mainly because of his radical conception and implementation of this new tool of personal liberation, psychoanalysis. Many portrayed him subsequently in novels, short stories, articles, diaries and letters. He was hated and loved. To most he represented a conflict, which they knew so well from their own lives – the conflict with the father.

The accounts of Gross, his lifestyle and writing, draw a complex picture of a man who wanted to take psychoanalysis to the limit, much further, therapeutically, than Freud, whose teachings he combined with a Nietzschean individualism, developing it into a theory of New Man. He took things so far, in psychoanalysis and anarchism, that he became a heretic in both camps, an uncompromising spokesman – theoretically and practically – for sexual, anarchistic, and matriarchal revolution, all in a distinctly per-
sonal draught, decades before, say, Wilhelm Reich, and even more radically than he. He was an obstinate critic of the nuclear family ages before Laing.

He was a Freudian, but critical of Freud. He saw it as his special task in life to unfold the full potential of psychoanalysis for breaking down all the walls and borders of bourgeois society. “The psychology of the unconscious is the philosophy of revolution!” he declared, which was enough to have a cautious Freud slam the door in his face. To boot, Gross did not care about the problem of transference, nor believe in Freud’s ideas of sublimation, a cornerstone of Freud’s theory of culture. Gross believed in full abreaction!

In his heyday, Gross had charismatic authority in Weber’s sense. A sort of rock-star of a hundred years ago, he was a soloist, his chosen instrument was theory. A visionary utopian, like a founder of a protestant sect, his ideas were totalitarian, his personal relation to power completely naïve.

In 1917, Kafka was with Gross on the night train from Vienna to Prague, listening to his meanderings, afterwards claiming that he had not understood a word. Still, he did see something “essential” beyond the ridiculous, as he later stated in a letter to Milena Jesenská. With Werfel and Brod, Kafka actually planned a journal with Gross, _Blätter zur Bekämpfung des Machtwillens_. As with so much else in Gross’ life – and Kafka’s – nothing came of it.

Gross’ charisma was from the chest of mystical psychoanalytic secrets that he appeared to be sitting on. He analyzed everybody he met, an ardent café-analyst, working late in the bohemian cafés of Munich, Berlin and Vienna. Where he laid his hat, was his clinic. He was a vegetarian and never touched alcohol, but was not able to get through a day in his adult life without large quantities of cocaine, morphine and opium. His relations to women and children were far from living up to the ideals and ethical demands of his writings. In this, he did not differ from another figure of early liberation, J.-J. Rousseau, who wrote a great classic of pedagogy, _Émile_, but put his own children out for adoption.

**COMMITTED**

After some weeks of detoxification at the clinic in Tulln, Josef Berze, psychiatric professor and director of the mental hospital of Klosterneuburg arrives on the scene. He is the one who – so to speak on behalf of the father-world – is going to examine Otto Gross, patient and son.

For the record – now Berze’s record – Gross displays a wide repertoire of daftness, although you never know when it is the withdrawal symptoms speaking. Everything is carefully taken down. “I would like to live until my 45th year, and then die, preferably while participating in an anarchistic assassination attempt, killing a public prosecutor or head of a jury who has just convicted my friends in a trial – and then die myself. That would be lovely.”
He offers random phrases from his teachings: “All my life has been an attempt to break down authority, especially the father’s. To me, only mother right, tribal right, has validity. This is why I always get into conflict with the rules of today’s society”. This is what his forthcoming book is about, the new ethic, but he suffers from a writer’s block and cannot seem to finish chapter 3 about himself and his life.

He does not mind analyzing himself for Berze’s record, but rambles on:

My views are well known in Germany and Switzerland, I only consort with anarchists and profess to be one myself. I am a psychoanalyst, and through my experiences I have come to regard the present family order as harmful. The authority of the family is the source of all authority and must be changed [...]. The sexuality of my parents made me terribly afraid [...] gave me the impression of rape. I had only one thought, not to end up like them, not to accept any kind of suggestions. I was already then extremely lonely, asexual until the age of 24, I could not find a woman who understood me [...]. From my earliest childhood I felt the pressure of parental authority, a not-being-able-to-get-out-of-sight-feeling [...], I have suffered from a suppressed productivity since childhood and noted it as a physician, I see it as a racial peculiarity, I take after my race completely, my thoughts are stagnant and incommunicable. I sense something in me that I cannot bring forward [...]. My cranium is somewhat neanderthalish, maybe the lack of mobility of thoughts has to do with that [...].

On 23 December 1913, after an extended examination, Gross is finally declared “mentally insane in the eyes of the law”, incapable of managing his affairs. The table has turned on Gross, who had been dealing with psychiatric patients himself in reputed institutions like Kraepelins clinic in Munich.

According to Dr. Berze a complete triptych of a pathological personality emerged: 1. innate degeneration; 2. symptoms of insanity from puberty (hebefrenia, yet another name for schizophrenia); 3. consequences of chronic dependency on cocaine and opium. He found the patient to be of an extremely infantile nature. Already by his exterior he made the impression, not of an adult, but somebody who stuck in adolescence. When in an animated mood, he became completely foolish, characterized by a childish silliness.

Although at first seeming intelligent above average,

[...] on closer inspection nothing is left of this impression. His trains of thought surprises at first because of the unusual content, but soon appears stereotyped. In the last 4-5 years he has been reproducing the same ideas with little variation [...]. Contrary to the first impression, there is an advanced reduction of his mental horizon. Furthermore, spontaneous remarks of the patient show an serious lack of judgement. Uncritically, he presents allegation after allegation, any thought that comes to him, no matter how hysterical and absurd, to him has great validity, the shorter it presents itself the better. To him, all is about ‘expression’

The patient demonstrates a marked lack of practical sense, is unable to understand the simplest things, reflects on money and property as a small child. Judgement is poor. Crazy individuals with clear intellectual defects he considers brilliant, parasites like his so-called friends in Berlin, Munich and other places, who shamelessly let themselves

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be supported by him at his father’s expense, he considers to be noble people and true aristocrats.

The moral defects of the patient are serious. He is without inhibitions. “Laws, social order, moral concepts, everything called authority, do not apply to him, only his own ideas, inclinations, wishes and drives are normative”.

There is a lack of development of ethical concepts, but there is method in his madness: Stirner’s and Nietzsche’s “antimoral ideas”. He hates his father whom he regards as the incarnation of authority, even though he is always prepared to support him and send him money.

He is suffering from a suppressed productivity, and sums up all that prevents him from working in the word “authority” – this is the most destructive of all conflicts. The most striking evidence of this is that he already at the age of four suffered terribly from the authority of the father and the sexuality of the parents, the man raping the woman in the sexual act, asserting his authority in the most brutal way. It is only people like him who are affected by this, as average people do not have the personality to confront authority. Because “authority” prevents the most beautiful flowering of mankind, it must go in every form; this is why he is an anarchist. “It is self-evident”, Berze summarizes, “that the whole system of thought – as also normally is the case with that kind of morbid systems – is based on his own person. Without a doubt the whole construction turns into megalomania”.

Finally, there were the ups and downs, the mood-swings. When depressive, the patient considered his brain too small because of cranial injuries in childhood. When up, it was the opposite. Suspicion was a central feature, directed at those who in his eyes represent authority – especially the father. With anyone he did not connect with authority, he was completely credulous.

A couple of weeks later – 9 January 1914 – the father, Hans Gross, was appointed formal guardian of his son by the legal authorities of Austria. Otto remained a ward for the rest of his life. He stayed hospitalized until the summer of 1914, first in the private clinic of Tulln, then in the county hospital of Troppau.

A Scandal

The commitment of Otto Gross to a mental institution in Austria created quite a stir in the circles that Gross himself frequented – expressionist, anarchist, new age/bohemian circles. This was a consequence of how the story was presented in an editorial of the expressionist journal, “Die Aktion”. Gross had published a few articles in the journal in 1913. On 22 November the editor, Franz Pfembert, published the following dramatic note:

On Sunday 9 November, the prominent scientist, Dr. Otto Gross, was sought in his Wilmersdorfer-apartment by three strong men, who allegedly legitimimized themselves as police
detectives, and later forcibly arrested. Employees of “Die Aktion”, who were fetching manuscripts on my behalf, were not allowed near the ‘prisoner’. Later that evening, Gross (who was not politically active, but working on a new, scientific book) left the apartment under surveillance [...] and appears now to have been committed to an Austrian mental hospital. The case will be brought before the Reichstag.

That Pfembert’s rendition of the story about Gross’ arrest served a wider purpose than mere truth, that it in other words aimed at creating suspicion around an already strange case, is beyond doubt. Note the formulations “the prominent scientist”, and “three ‘strong’ men”, who “allegedly” legitimized themselves as police, and note also that Pfembert forgets that it was not in Gross’ own apartment that these events took place – he did not have any; since February he had lived in the small flat of the writer Franz Jung and his wife. Note, finally, the hint at use of force in the situation, and that it was not known what had happened to Gross. In every instance these were formulations, details and errors that would surface in other newspapers and journals.

In the initial reports, the father, Hans Gross, did not play a part, but on 20 December Franz Jung appeared in the case with full force, and with a frontal, very ‘expressionistic’ attack on the father. This was in a special edition of the Munich-based anarchistic journal, aptly named “Revolution”.

The real motive behind the arrest of Gross, Jung indicates, is a father’s envy of his son. “Hans Gross is living the tragedy of a father whose genius is reduced to nothing by his son’s, and who becomes unproductive from it”. This man, Jung continues, has the fortune of possessing a bright son. It is this ‘possession’ that becomes his misfortune. The father uses force, and the bright son revolts hatefully against his father.

The son is the mentally stronger of the two. He has learned discipline from the father. He sublimates the new ethics, the idea, the compulsion of the idea, and he detests compromising. He leaves the weapons to the father. He will not submit to normality, he rages against himself, intoxicates himself on cocaine, opium. Ruins himself, as long as the father is alive.

The father ruins himself by using weapons. He buys surveillance – detectives, shopkeepers, ironers, bakers, barbers, washerwomen. He picks up the scent thanks to whores and blackmailers. Throttled by his own brutality, he locks his son up.

Here all the psychiatrists of the world cannot help. It is criminal to operate with certifications and attestations, when two people are fighting about the purity of their experience. It is no good tempting the son with freedom, forcing compromises on him, it is too late to save the father any longer by locking up the son. “Hans Gross is old. His life is fear. One must be fair”.

We, Franz Jung concludes, we who are a considerable part of the intellectual youth, we want to be fair. We will give more time. We vouch for professor Hans Gross. Let us keep
up hope for an understanding between young and old. We will enforce this hope – but we want Otto Gross back.

This was the starting signal for a campaign, a ‘Free Otto Gross’-campaign, mainly orchestrated by Franz Jung. The important word in his last sentence is however not Otto Gross, but “we”: this was a campaign of the sons, what was later to be called a youth rebellion.

Following Jung’s contribution a series of writers send proclamations to a number of journals, among them well-known writers like Guillaume Apollinaire and Arnold Zweig, and the ever-present Mühsam (all contributions are reprinted in Anz and Jung). The contributions seem to divide into two groups: those who try to influence the general liberal and social-democratic public and stress the lack of legality and the question-able precedent created by the arrest and extradition of Gross, and those – from Gross’s bohemian hinterland – who primarily identify with him as a bruised and victimized son and address those similarly disposed.

Jung was not speculating on the sufficient fame of Otto Gross, but on that of Hans Gross. The campaign, however, never experienced the lift-off in the bourgeois press that he had hoped. In January 1914, Franz Pfembert was back, expressionistically fed-up with all this in a new editorial: a frontal attack on the liberal press for not joining in, maybe because the case looked too much like a private tragedy.

Pfembert wants to stress the angle of brutal and forcible commitment of a dissident of the father-society, and he wants the liberal press to climb on the wagon. But he is disillusioned:

In front of me I have a letter from the chief editor of a large Berlin newspaper, which openly says that a ‘confident source’ has informed the editorial office that Dr. Otto Gross at the request of his father has been committed to an Austrian mental hospital in Tulln because of cocaine and morphine addiction. One is well advised to read this slowly, not to get agitated: Gross has been dragged to a mental hospital, not because he is insane, not because he is assumed wrongly to be insane, but [...] because he has been taking morphine? And what does this mean for a liberal editorial office? Do they demand that everybody from the nobility who takes morphine (this is not few) must be committed to a mental hospital? Do the editorial lips tremble from just indignation at the fact that the Prussian police at the wink of a private person lend their hands, fists, so that mentally healthy, intellectually important psychiatrists can be extradited? Oh, how poorly you know our democrats! ‘The tragic destiny of Otto Gross’, the chief editor writes verbatim, ‘is no occasion for a protest movement’. Thus the Gross case becomes a case of the liberal press.

On 27 February the main figure, Otto Gross son, speaks for the first and last time, in a letter, dramatically claimed to have been smuggled out of the hospital in Troppau to the editor of the journal “Die Zukunft”.

Gross informs the public that he has been left under his father’s authority, and that now he is worried what will happen to his children. He expects his father to go for the
guardianship of them too, while he wants them to stay in the care of their mother, if necessary with the help of the public.

It might look as if Gross is trying to arouse pity, referring to a family who otherwise did not mean much to him. As already indicated, he was not exactly known for being close to his children. But it was probably seriously meant. Not only would it be yet another personal blow to him, were the children were placed under the father’s power, it would be an intolerable blow to mother-right.

This is why he pleads his case to the public, at least the expressionist public. He also wants to defend himself against allegations that he is a danger to society.

This has to do with two women, close to him, whose deaths he had been accused of inducing, Lotte Chattemer’s death in 1906, and that of Sophie Benz in 1910. For several years, Gross had been wanted for questioning by the Swiss police.

He admits to having administered the necessary poison to Lotte Chattemer, but only after being convinced that she was determined to take her own life, and then only to make death as easy as possible. Concerning Sophie Benz, she took her life because of a severe psychosis. “They can accuse me of not bringing her to a medical institution”, he wrote. “That I did not is my only comforting thought”.

In Otto Gross’ own view he was the only one who tried to do something for these women, but the harm already inflicted on them by patriarchal society was too deep. Gross himself is a revolutionary; he has broken with society.

This is another thing that can be brought against me: that I am unsatisfied with the existing order of society. Whether this is a proof of mental disturbances must depend on what is the norm for mental health. If adapting to the established order is normal, then dissatisfaction with it is a sign of mental disturbances. But if the widest development of the possibilities that a person is born with, is the norm, and if by intuition and experience one knows that the established order hampers the widest development of individual and humankind, then one must regard satisfaction with the established as undignified.

Gross marks his position, but only just. His letter must have served to cool brotherly support. In his intervention he does not mention any role of his father in the ‘abduction’, he only very objectively indicates that he was send out of Berlin as a “troublesome foreigner” (a police idiom) “because of addiction to morphine”.

His vagueness is maybe to be understood in the light of several statements from him, dated January and February, in which he admits that his commitment was reasonable and that it would have been fatal, had he not been detoxified.

Gross’ letter is also in “Neues Wiener Abendblatt”, but here accompanied by a note in another tone, to secure journalistic balance. The note is based on sources, which according to the paper “are involved in the case”.

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Here it is confirmed that Dr. Otto Gross is suffering from “a severe mental illness (dementia praecox)”, that he has been “treated at four different mental hospitals, all of them giving him the same diagnosis”. It goes on to mention which hospitals and which doctors, among them C.G. Jung and Dr. Berze.

The diagnosis has been especially difficult to make in his case, as he is a psychiatrist himself and cleverly has been able to deceive the doctors. He is an addict of cocaine and morphine, a totally uninhibited person, dangerous to his surroundings. What he mentions in his letter is true: that he is guilty of the death of two persons by having handed them poison. He is also an anarchist of the worst pathological kind. His father, the famous criminologist, Dr. Hans Gross, is stopping at nothing to cure his son of the illness, but due to its severe character so far in vain.

**INTERVENTION OF THE FATHER**

On 2 March 1914, Hans Gross made his one and only public intervention in the case – in order, as he wrote, to dismiss some of the misunderstandings, caused by the interference of “small papers” in a family matter. Nobody suffered more harm from this interference than would his son, should he recover and be set free.

As a child, he states, his son had been well developed, a highly gifted person. Very early, however, peculiarities and abnormalities showed, which developed into deep, painful depressions. To cope, as a student he began to take morphine, and only during his recent stay at the sanatorium in Tulln had this been scaled down. And this could not have happened without the intervention of doctors.

He had studied medicine at several universities and had had a private readership at Graz, a position he had had to resign because of his addiction. He was twice committed to the mental hospital Burghölzi, once he was fetched by the father because of incessant pleading, the second time he ran off. He lived in Graz, Munich, Italy, Switzerland and France, and was separated from his wife some years ago. He passed his time with psychoanalytic treatment of patients who accidentally blew his way. He made no money.

Parallel with this unsteady life his Lebensanschauung – his philosophy of life – developed. It started with an exalted love of animals that became a steadily more determined defence for the poor and suppressed people of the earth, for women’s liberation of the most extreme kind, for free love, for the right of motherhood against father-right, for communism and latterly anarchism.

While all this developed he was living in Switzerland with a mad paintress (Sophie Benz), whom he sought to heal but who ended up taking her own life. This sent him into such a mental state that his friends had to bring him to the mental hospital in Mendricio-Vasnegno, from where his father later had him transferred to the sanatorium in Steinhof in Vienna.

Nine months later the son wanted to be discharged, and he was. He moved to Munich, later Berlin, living under miserable circumstances. Although his father sent him large
sums of money, he would let others take everything away from him. “I still have his clothes from the last time in Berlin – so bad that one could not give them to beggars”.

People urged me to not let my son go to the dogs, but send him a little money. At the same time I was sending him money, even beyond my means. Equally as many were the appeals, from experts as well as laymen, to have him committed to a hospital, that he would not go under completely14.

The father was reproached that he had denied the son his papers. But five times the father had had new papers made (doctor’s diplomas, birth certificates) and mailed to him – but they were lost, borrowed, stolen. Others used them for travelling or for withdrawing money. And, finally, should a man of 36 not be able to see to it himself?

Things became still more untenable in Berlin. Hans Gross had several meeting with psychiatrists about what could be done, when suddenly, on 1 November 1913, he received an official letter from the presidium of police in Berlin-Schöneberg that his son “would be extradited from Prussian jurisdiction, and sent to Görlitz and over the border”.

The father could not just be a bystander, while his son was sent to remote Czernowitz in the Ukraine, a town he formally belonged to in the Empire, because he happened to turn 24 while his father was a professor at the university there in 1901.

For years Hans Gross had corresponded with acquaintances and colleagues, hoping to have his son hospitalized. In 1913 his efforts had been doubled, as he was told that the son intended to publish an article in a psychological journal, allegedly analyzing the functions of an examining magistrate, with a special focus on the sadistic dimensions! The primary material was a magistrate with features that very much recalled those of the father, who had been a magistrate in his earlier years.

Hans Gross had received only positive reactions to his requests for support. Most of established psychiatry was on his side: Dr. Bleuler at Burghölzi, who knew Otto well, sent a note saying: “It is a wonder that the question can even be asked; all his life the patient has presented himself abnormally and not been able to cope on his own [...]. He must be characterized as either a lunatic or an idiot”15.

C.G. Jung was not at Burghölzi anymore, but sent his diagnosis of dementia praecox anyway. Dr. Freud did not answer. The father went to Berlin and dealt with the authorities there, and subsequently with the doctors of Tulln and Steinhof. Everything had been smooth until the alarm bells of “Die Aktion”, “Revolution” and the others journals had sounded. This made the police insist that Otto Gross be transferred to a secure institution, Troppau.

Since 10 January Otto G. was in the custody of his father. Recently, the son had given a statement, admitting that his being committed had been appropriate, even necessary, because of the abuse of narcotics. By now – at the beginning of March – the son considered himself rehabilitated and well and demanded to be set free. “A week ago, I have accepted this”, the father wrote, “and recommended it warmly on therapeutic grounds”16.
THE PROBLEM OF REMEMBERING

Hans Gross not only had establishment on his side, and the right contacts with the press, he was also mostly right. Otto Gross accepted the commitment. He just wanted to have the father’s guardianship tried in court once more.

This made the storm peter out before it had really started. The case of Otto Gross’s commitment remained a bubble, confined to expressionistic circles, it never made it into society.

Arnold Zweig summed things up very matter-of-factly: “For Gross spoke only the weak and powerless voices of a few writers: friends who liked him, opponents who honoured him; without an echo they faded into in the noise of the day”\(^{17}\).

This was hard to take for those who had very actively tried to politicise the case to the utmost, especially Franz Jung. He became a ferocious force in German expressionist literature and bohemia around the World War, a very loud figure in the German dada-movement. A nihilist scandal-maker if ever there was one.

In his autobiography, the painter George Grosz writes about Jung that he was the driving force behind the aggressive, political turn of dada, when the syndrome at the end of the war was transferred from Zürich to Berlin – from the likes of Hugo Ball to the likes of Jung and Grosz himself.

Berlin and Zürich were poles apart, and though the German capital did not discard the aesthetic aspect altogether, it increasingly replaced it with an anarcho-nihilist conception, for which the writer Franz Jung was the chief exponent. Jung was a Rimbaud-like figure, a bold stop-at-nothing adventurer. He joined us, and, tough customer that he was, immediately influenced the whole dada-movement. He drank a great deal and wrote books in a barely intelligible style.

Grosz describes Jung’s partiality to scandals and media-attention.

For a few weeks once, his name was on everybody’s lips: with the help of a sailor, called Knuffgen, he seized a ship in the Baltic, sailed it to Leningrad and presented it to the Russians – and this at a time \([1918-19]\) when communist victory in Germany seemed imminent and all authority had collapsed. Jung rarely acted alone; he was always surrounded by his hangers-on, devoted to him unto death. When he was drunk he would fire his revolver like a cowboy in a western, albeit he earned his living from financial journalism [...]. He was one of the most intelligent men I ever met and one of the unhappiest\(^{18}\).

Jung was responsible for the notable radicalization and brutalization of the tone in Berlin-dada, although Grosz himself was not far behind. Jung was also responsible for channelling the ideas of Otto Gross into the movement, as part of its distinctly anti-authoritarian design.

In hindsight, Jung himself would lend a great deal of importance to ‘the case of Otto Gross’ as a great turning point, although it remains unclear whether it was in the his-
tory of the expressionist, anti-authoritarian, communist movement, or predominantly his own history. Much later, in his autobiography of 1961, aptly called *Der Weg nach unten* [The way down], he allowed himself to magnify the consequences of the media stunt of the Free Otto Gross campaign, and especially his own role.

Seen from the distance the failure becomes a striking success, beginning with Jung placing the story in the ‘big bourgeois press’ because of its conspicuous political perspectives. From there, it moved on to the journals, “[…] where especially the father-and-son relation becomes important, wanting to solve a private conflict with the help of state and police; the reference to psychoanalysis, which had only just become housebroken, was oil on the fire”.

“When the campaign also started to escalate in the Austrian public, and the ‘Wiener Neue Freie Presse’ published an editorial against professor Gross, the old man succumbed”, Jung very self-confidently goes on, with contempt of facts. “It was a misunderstanding, [the father] let the public believe Otto Gross had voluntarily travelled to the hospital to undergo a cure of withdrawal; he could be discharged at any time”.

According to his own very hazy memory, Franz Jung even went to Austria himself to free his old comrade-in-arms.

I was immediately invited to the institution in Troppau. I went and collected Gross. I was received as an inspecting minister of the Vienna government. In the meantime Otto Gross had been promoted from the ranks of the incurable to assistant doctor in the same institution.

Together with Franz Pfembert’s distorted version of Gross’ arrest, Franz Jung’s equally distorted recollection of his liberation were to become the foundation for later generations’ understanding of the Gross case, as it expressed itself in literary and cultural history from the 1970s. The only problem being that there was not much truth in it.

The literary historian Christina Jung has convincingly demonstrated how everybody has accepted Jung’s account uncritically, even though it is very far from holding water.

To begin with, Gross was not discharged immediately after, nor as a result of the press-campaign, which petered out in March. He was not let out until four months later, 8 July, and by then totally without the intervention of Jung or anybody else. The discharge was on condition that Gross continue follow-up treatment by the Freudian Wilhelm Stekel at Bad Ischl. As far as anybody knows, Jung never went to Troppau.

Secondly, Gross never worked as an assistant doctor or anything like that – this is utterly unfounded, but nonetheless later on repeated in almost every shorter biography of Gross.

Christina Jung concludes:

That literary scholars, who ought to know better the fictitious, i.e. constructed, character of the autobiographical genre, followed somebody who was well known for his exaggerations,
Henrik Jensen

indicates that Jung’s edition of the events was not without a certain attraction, due to the wish for a full and doubt-free vindication of Gross [...][21].

Christina Jung is here referring to the enthusiasm with which Gross’s story was revived at the end of the 1970s, in the wake of Martin Green’s book on the von Richthoven-sisters (German translation 1976), and Emanuel Hurwitz’ Gross biography in 1979.

According to Thomas Anz, a reorientation in this phase towards “a new (post-marxist) subjectivity” was decisive, followed by an interest in “stories of illness, ruined relationships, patriarchal family and social relations, women’s liberation and […] a quest for new kinds of relationships”[22].

At the end of the 1970s, Marxism turned into individualization and subjectivity, soft values and victim-mentality, into which Jung’s version of the conflict between Gross the father and Gross the son fitted perfectly. There was a widespread willingness, in the years after the World War I, and again from the 1960s, to take the side of the son against the authoritarian father. Michael Raub stresses the importance of the student rebellion for the reception of Gross in the 1970s. In the late 1960s everything was about sons against fathers and experiments with new forms of sexuality[23].

**ATTENTIVE SONS**

Gross’s blend of Nietzsche and Freud was a gift, primarily to a creative, bohemian segment of male youth, for whom questions of personal liberation and self-realization became identical with sexual and artistic freedom.

Gross’s phrases like “the necessary immorality”, “the fatherly aggression”, “the inner conflict between one’s own and the foreign” and “the relation between sexuality and authority” pop up frequently in the years around the World War I, as themes in literature and art, especially among the expressionists.

One was Walter Hasenclever who through the autumn of 1913 and part of 1914 wrote the play *Der Sohn* [The Son] – one of the classics of German expressionist theatre. This was Hasenclever’s first play. Much later he would find himself on the run from Hitler’s armies, ending up – like Walter Benjamin – with killing himself in France in 1940.

His play renders a radical variant of the father-son-conflict, based on Hasenclever’s own experience. And it is not difficult to identify the Gross themes in the play.

The son is 20 years old and has failed the final exam of the Gymnasium. He longs to be free and get on with his life, but his father keeps him locked up and will not allow him to read books, go to the theatre, cultivate friendships, have fun. The son wants to love and be loved, but instead he learns to hate. It seems to him that fathers and sons everywhere are destined to hate each other.

The father is a doctor, kind and caring to his patients, but cold and demanding to his son, whom he punishes harshly if he does not do his homework. The son has signs of
beatings all over his body. He is beaten every time he goes against his father’s wishes, the father is in full control: “For one more year you are in my power. For at least another year I can project humankind against you. There are institutions for that”.

When the son appeals to the father for better treatment, he is rejected. The father refuses to shake hands with the son, he only shakes hand with people he respects. In his eyes the son is evil and only strictness can save him. On one occasion he has his son arrested by the police and brought home handcuffed.

The effect on the son is devastating, as he loses his self-confidence and wants to commit suicide. After a visit by a friend, however, he finds the strength to go against the father, and towards the end of the play he confronts him: “Life has made me your conqueror!”

The friend is a paradoxical figure who has been interpreted as a wishful projection of the son’s ego. The overall objective of the friend is “to ruin the tyranny of the family, this remnant of medieval blood conjuration, this witch Sabbath, this torture chamber of sulphur! Abolish the law – reinstate freedom, the highest blessing of man”. This will take the destruction of all fathers: “Still today any father is allowed to let his son starve and toil and drudge and prevent him from fulfilling his great objectives. It is the old song against injustice and cruelty. They insist on the privileges of state and nature. Down with both!”

The friend hopes to get the son to kill the father and thereby start a revolution. He believes that patricide will make the son a saviour of humanity.

The son’s final confrontation with the father is however without much hatred. Instead, the son tries to be reconciled with his father. The last scene is the reverse of an earlier: now the father offers him his hand, but the son will not take it. Now it is the son who locks the door and forces the father to listen. He accuses the father: “Under the pretence of educating me, you have committed a crime against me. For that you shall find retaliation”.

The son tries to prevent his father’s death by requesting his own freedom. But when the father discovers that his son has spoken in public against all fathers, he refuses to give him his freedom and insists on his power over him for yet another year. Only when every possibility of compromise seems exhausted, the son pulls out his revolver, finally ready to shoot, but before he can do it, the father falls down, dead from a stroke. The son has triumphed.

Ironically, the play did not have its first performance before the war. After the war – in the patricidal atmosphere resulting from the war – it became extremely popular and was played everywhere. In Prague, too, where the great expressionist actor, Ernst Deutsch, had the title role. Kafka saw it.

According to his young acquaintance, Gustav Janouch, who later published his Gespräche mit Kafka [Conversations with Kafka] – this motivated Kafka to make the following comment, a little surprising to those who know Kafka as the author of the caustic Brief an den Vater [Letter to my Father] of 1919:
“The revolt of the son against the father is an ancient theme in literature, and an even older problem in the world. Dramas and tragedies are written about it, but actually it is comedy-material. The Irishman Synge has understood this quite right. In his drama *Playboy of the Western World*, the son is a youthful fop who brags about killing his father. Then the old man turns up and unmasks the young conqueror of authority”.

“I can see you are very doubtful about the young fighting the old”, I said.

Kafka smiled. “My doubt does not change the fact that the fight is nothing but a charade”.

“What do you mean by charade?”

“After all, the future of the young is old age, where it sooner or later shall end up. So why fight – to get old faster? To vanish faster?”

Kafka knew about Otto Gross years before they accidentally met in the night train from Vienna to Prague in July 1917. On 9 January 1914, the following note could be read in Prague’s German newspaper, the “Prager Tageblatt”:

Not long ago in Berlin, an incident occurred, which for two reasons begins to interest us. First, because of the matter itself, which touches upon one of the sensitive sides of our police authorities, second, because of the persons involved, who have good names in learned circles. In short, the famous criminologist at Graz University, Dr. Hans Gross, has had his son, Dr. Otto Gross, a scientist who in Berlin with much success has occupied himself as a researcher in the limited field of psychoanalysis, arrested. The arrest of Dr. Gross was well prepared and swiftly carried out. One day three strong men entered the young scientist’s apartment in Berlin, legitimizing themselves as police detectives and accompanying Dr. Gross to the railway station, whence he was transported to an Austrian mental hospital.

Apparently, the note stuck in the sensitive mind of Franz Kafka. At least, when in August of that same year he began writing his novel, *Der Prozess* [The Trial], he started with the unforgettable lines, setting the tone for the entire novel: “Someone must have been slandering Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything wrong, he was arrested”. True, only two men arrested Josef K., but they were strong men, “the latter in particular towered over K”.

Apart from the newspaper notice playing directly on Kafka’s father-complex and latent guilt-feelings, and not only his, but also those of the greater part of his generation, there was also the factor that he knew the father, Hans Gross, quite well. In 1902-1905 Hans Gross had taught criminal law and philosophy of law at Prague’s German-speaking Charles University. One of his students was a young law student, Franz K., who for 16 hours weekly, for 3 semesters, had the opportunity of getting a full impression of Gross the elder and his teachings.

**ENDING UP**

His abuse of drugs – which, ironically, only a father’s life-long economic support made possible, and Otto Gross daily needed drugs to an amount equalling the wages of a worker’s family at the time – finally got the best of him. He died of pneumonia in Berlin in 1920,
after being found in a staircase, starving and cold, on the hunt for drugs. He was 42. At that point, his father was dead and could no longer keep him afloat or take care of him.

When Gross died he was forgotten, even though times had changed radically with the end of the World War and a lot of his ideas had been taken up, especially in the dada-movement. Or maybe we should say that it was because the times had changed.

He stayed im Dunkel for half a century, and then had a brief renaissance in the 1970s, partly because of his general role as a catalyst in the years around World War I, when he met and influenced all these famous people, but especially because of the rebellious victim-figure that he carved out, fitting so well to ‘the subjective turn’ of that decade.

That died away, but the interest in him rose again from the end of the 1990s, and now he even has an Otto-Gross-Museum, an Otto-Gross-Association and an Otto-Gross-website to his name. Frequently, Otto-Gross-Conferences are held, often in his native city, Graz. He has become the favourite son for another age.

Perhaps it would be an exaggeration to say that our times are theoretically or ideologically open to his ideas, his special blend of anarchism, sexual liberation, psychoanalysis and matriarchy. On the other hand – notions not far from his on individual liberation and self-realization and the primacy of instincts, are shared by a much larger portion of society today than the narrow elite of Nietzschean bohemians that Gross himself was writing for. Ideas like his found a mass perspective when ‘everyman’ began seeing himself as a bohemian with a bohemian’s superior morality, and when the therapeutic market began adapting to that.

Otto Gross was one of the very early prophets of the individual liberation project and of the consequent therapy culture. He radicalised Freud’s therapeutic teachings that became the dominant religion of the 20th century, and he did so way before anybody else, and gave it not only a social but a revolutionary perspective. On top of that, he was an ardent advocate for the historical ‘return’ of motherhood – matriarchy.

Whether that will happen still remains to be seen.

NOTES

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