

philharmonia orchestra

Michael Molnar:

It is said it couldn't have happened anywhere else, psychoanalysis, and there probably is reason for that belief. It's not medicine, it's not psychiatry, it's not an interview, and yet it's part of all of these things. And the Austro-Hungarian Empire was a place of transgression, of crossing cultures: it was at the time the most cosmopolitan city in Europe. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was an amazing cultural hotchpotch and everything focused on Vienna. But on the other hand there was a very orthodox establishment in the scientific and medical world. So Freud, at a certain moment when he began to think outside the frame as it were, he found himself being cold-shouldered, he was becoming even more of an outsider than he was naturally. And in a sense all Jews felt themselves to be outsiders in Hapsburg Vienna, there was rabid anti-semitism. The anti-semitism in Freud's Vienna was at first low-key and accepted.

Julian Johnson:

Is there a simple way of explaining why he is such a key modern figure?

Michael Molnar:

I think the only way to say that would be to say that he redefined what it is to be human, what it is to be a person, that there's a radical shift in perspective. He uses the example of Copernicus, that the sun was no longer the centre of the universe; in the same way from Freud onwards our consciousness is no longer the centre of being human. The ego is no longer master in its own house. Until that time everybody had assumed that their will, their consciousness, conscious life, is the central fact of being human, of experience, and suddenly consciousness is sidelined, shifted, and the whole area of the unconscious becomes central, is essential.

His writing on art and creation often appears simplistic, but on the other hand he is limiting himself to certain pathologies in art and he's careful to say that this does not exhaust the subject. For instance in his study of Dostoyevsky and parricide, where there is a rich study for psychopathology obviously, he does say that none of this explains the genius of the actual creative aspect. The same with Leonardo – he's very careful to say that he's not being reductive, but he is insisting on some pathology which does contribute to art, and which may lead either to art or to neurosis, in fact, if the art fails.

Julian Johnson:

I suppose going back to my question, why Vienna, the extent to which the art of a time and the place might also be a kind of, what's the word I want, cathexis I think

is the right word isn't it, some sort of release for what otherwise would turn into some kind of sickness?

Michael Molnar:

Yes, although some would say that the sickness was there and this was the expression of it.