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Angela Graf-Nold

75 years ago, at May 2nd 1933, C.G. Jung wrote a quite informal letter to the president of the ETH, the construction analyst and bridge builder Prof. Arthur Rohn: He wrote that a friend had suggested that he should resume his public lectures, which he had given up in 1913. He now would like to speak about the general subject of modern psychology, so this could not be within the medical faculty, (where he had previously lectured) so he was applying to the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule to grant him the “venia legendi”, - i.e. to acknowledge his status as lecturer, a qualification which he had achieved in 1904 at the Zurich university.¹

Prof. Rohn immediately forwarded Jung’s application to the “General Departement for optional courses”(Allg. Abteilung für Freifächer) for appraisal and proposal. In the minutes of the next general meeting of the ETH school-council (ETH-Schulrat) at June 24th Jung’s application makes up a short point at the end of the meeting: a two persons commitee of the General Department, Fritz Medicus, professor for pedagogy and Eugen Böhler, professor for economy, finances and statistics, and pioneer in Swiss economics, recommended Jung’s application. So it was decided to send Jung a letter that his application to lecture about the field of psychology within the General department of the ETH had been accepted, - that his academic qualification at the university (Privatdozent) had been approved for the ETH, - that he should start his lectures in the next semester, beginning at October 20th 1933, and finally that he had to give a inaugural lecture (Antrittsvorlesung) in order to introduce himself to his colleagues and students.²

At the first glance Jung’s affiliation at a technical university makes an impression of a rather accidental and inconvenient decision; but in fact – it was a choice which brought him to the right place at the right time. From than on the ETH lectures and the debates with

¹ C.G: Jung, letter to Prof. A. Rohn, May 2ns 1933, provided by courtesy of U.Hoerni
² ETH-Bibliothek, Archiv, SR2, Schulratsprotokoll (1933), Nr. 4, June 24th, (1933)
students and colleagues should make up the center of his intellectual development which led to the elaboration of his later, most significant work.

The ETH Zurich had been founded in 1855 as “Federal Polytechnicum”, a school for “higher studies of the technical and human sciences”. It was one of the first projects of the Swiss government after its constitution as a federal state (Bundesstaat) in 1848 in context with the industrial revolution, the ambitions to develop from a rural country into a pioneer in modern technology. The restriction to multiple technical disciplines was the concession to the political resistance of catholic regions (“cantons”) of Switzerland which fought against the intellectual predominance of the urban protestantic regions like the cantons Berne and Zürich, which still had Cantonal Universities.

The nevertheless high ambitions of the project of the new federal government were reflected by the highly representative monumental structure of the Polytechnicum in Zurich, designed by prominent and influential architect Gottfried Semper: suited at a prominent and central place, a terrace just upon the old city of Zurich, with dimensions which surmounted all dimensions of all public buildings of Zurich, nearly equal to the new governmental building, the “Bundehaus”, in the capital Berne): A central quadrangle with four symmetric wings and an axial transverse between the old city and upper side of the city. The northern façade shows portraits of men of science and art from Aristoteles over Michelangelo to James Watt, made in scrafitto technic with the slogan: “It would not be worth to have been born without sciences and arts” (Non fuerat nasci nisi has scientiam et artem), a slogan which had raised some critizism at Semper’s time, but which clearly was due to his aim to avoid on a mere technical education but to educate on a the broad base of classical culture.

In the beginnings the students of the “Polytechnicum” and the Cantonal University of Zurich, founded in 1833, shared some rooms, institutes and collections. In 1908 a public vote of the city and the Canton Zurich led to the decision for a bigger new building of the University, at a place, just beneath the Polytechnicum. This gave reason to the Polytechnicum to constitute finally as a “Technical University” which meant to formalise the curricula with the possibilities for acquiring doctoral titels. So, in 1913 a new name had to mark this change: Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule”, (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) a rapprochement to the technical “Hochschulen” (institutes/universities) in the other European countries, especially in Germany. (But until today the friendly name “Poly” for the institution is still common in Switzerland). The new status of the ETH was marked by big extensions and reconstructions; the final point was a gigantic cupola as a new landmark which now
marked the main entrance which was turned to the upper side of the building, side by side to the new university.

The legal constitution however stayed different from that of the old University Zurich and the most European universities: the School council (Schulrat) and the ETH president, at that time, Prof. Rohn, had much more rights to make decisions about appointments and budgets and so led the institution with a structure quite similar to a business company.

Jung had made his application at the ETH in a quite specific historical political moment: Just in January 1933 Adolph Hitler had achieved the chancellorship in Germany; the rise of Nazism in Germany challenged the Swiss federation. In the same meeting of the ETH school council, when Jung’s application was accepted, the main discussion was about the new restrictions of the Zurich aliens’ police against students from other countries, i.e. especially from Germany: They should not be allowed to spent the time between the semesters in Zurich, but return immediately to their home country! Because the Swiss federal governmental outlines were not in accordance with this restriction there was some stuff for discussion; in any case the president of the ETH protested against the restriction but nevertheless announced it at the notice board for the students.

Rohn obviously felt not sure enough to relay on the support of the Swiss government in this question and so did not risk the defiance against the Zurich alien’s police. This pragmatic attitude which also characterised some later decisions concerning the employment of German refugees, raised some criticism of several historians of today.

But doubtless Rohn who led the ETH from 1926 until 1948, was a main representative of the political and cultural movement of the “spiritual defence of the nation (“geistige Landesverteidigung”/”défense spirituelle), a movement from several sources which began after World War I, based on the deeper insight that democratic achievements could not be preserved only by military force but needed a conscious consideration and strengthening of cultural values of the nation in times of peace. As late as December 1938 the Swiss government openly gave a public “cultural declaration” of these values: The affiliation of the Swiss confederation to three European cultural spaces, the acknowledgment of cultural diversities, the federal character of democracy and the awe for dignity and freedom of every men. This values should be defended by each single citizen, not only by the state.

ETH-Bibliothek, archives, SR2: Schularatsprotokolle (1933) Nr.4, June 24th 1933,
Rohn undoubtedly contributed to these values by his ceaseless activities to strengthen the “cultural education” for the ETH students and to establish international and inter-institutional collaborations for several departments; he also tried to establish a National fund for basic research in all disciplines which was realised some years after his retirement.

The Swiss National Exposition in 1939 (“Landesaustellung”) in Zurich was planned to set a remarkable sign of this mental attitude of the “Spiritual defence of the nation”. And in fact the combination of traditional patriotic values with visionary technical revolutions, together with a demonstration of a new modern style of simplicity and flexibility became very popular and had a big long lasting impact for Swiss identity. The ETH played a predominant role in the realisation of the exhibition: Mostly all departments contributed outstanding achievements, the geological department e.g. installed a relief of Switzerland with a mythic mystical highway through the whole country, the ETH physicist Paul Scherrer set up the technical sensation of the first European tensator particle accelerator, the department for electrotechnics contributed an vanguard first “television-apparatus”, and the department for machine construction showed an ultra high speed railway.

Form the beginning C.G. Jung was by no means an outsider at the ETH, but in any case a highly esteemed and well integrated member of the academic staff, where he had many personal friends. – The friend from whose side Jung had been encouraged to apply for the ETH was Hand Eduard Fierz, Prof. for chemistry at the ETH. He was the husband of Linda Fierz-David, at first patient of Jung, than close friend and active member of the “Psychological Club”. Jung had traveled with Fierz through the Middle East in the late 20ies. Another special connection Jung had to Artur Rohn, the ETH president: Rohn’s daughter was Liliane Frey-Rohn, as well a former patient, pupil and scientifically active member of the “Psychological Club”. A personal friend, patient and colleague still before Jung’s affiliation to the ETH, was Wolfgang Pauli, the Nobel price winning theoretical physicist; with him Jung had the high personal and scientific and critical debate about the nature of the psyche which later led to the formulation of the principle of synchronicity as an essential psychophysical fact. But remarkably it was Eugen Böhler, the professor for economics, (who had recommended Jung at the beginning), about whom Jung himself made the “sweeping statement” (engl. originally) that he would be the first one in Switzerland “who

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And: www.ethistory.ethz.ch
actually engaged himself seriously in my psychology.“. Böhler stayed in personal contact with Jung until his death. As a speaker in the name of the ETH at Jung’s funeral in June 1961 he honoured Jung as a eminent humanist and natural scientist, who lived against the Zeitgeist and contributed highly to both disciplines with his investigations in the human soul and consciousness as a primary reality.

When Jung began to lecture at October 20th 1933, the unusual crowd of over 500 people were present. There are no named records of the audience; presumably there were as much interested citizens from Zurich who registered as auditors as well patients and pupils from the “Psychological Club” as ‘normal’ students and colleagues of the ETH (which had at that time about 2000 students). His official “First Lecture gave Jung not before a year later at May 4th 1934. In January 1935 he obtained the title “professor”; the application was made by some of his colleagues,

In his first lecture in October 1933 Jung emphasized the supra-national, intercultural and general character of his approach to psychology: He refers to his former lectures at the university: he stopped lecturing, he explicates, when he realised the boundedness of his psychological knowledge.

“I first had to travel around the world because within our own sphere there is simply missing the Archimedian point.

” And he declares:

“I do not intend to immerse into specific doctrines, but I want to make a picture that is based on immediate experiences and show you the development of the modern psychological ideas.”

In his inaugural lecture in May1934 Jung specifies: at the end of the lectures at the university (1912) he realised that the psychiatric medical approach to neuropsychology would only offer a limited insight into the essence of the sick psyche.

“It seemed to me as if it would be necessary to go back deeply into the history of consciousness for to get a common idea of the essence of the psyche, and also as if it would be necessary to go into the broadness of human experience for to correct the boundedness of the own standpoint.”

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6 ETH_Archiv Hs 1068/1, p. 1
7 C.G. Jung Allgemeines zur Komplextheorie, Antrittsvorlesung Aarau: Sauerländ er 1934 (CW )
The significance and relevance of this radical empirical approach to psychology as a base for science and culture which Jung displayed at the ETH in 13 courses from 1933 until 1941 remains still to be fully discovered.

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