

Karl Andermann

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Karl left Germany in 1933 when he was twenty and spent the rest of his life in four different continents. He wanted to study medicine, and enrolled at the University of Lausanne, then in Montpellier and finally, after one year, in Florence to complete his studies. However, this was but the start of his peregrinations. In 1939, Karl emigrated to India where he lived until 1949. He then spent twelve years in Australia and then moved again, this time to New York, where he worked as a psychiatrist and carried on his own research.

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Student in Italy

Karl was born in Berlin on 14 May 1913. His father, Joachim, was a writer and an editor, and his mother was Eva (Khaca) Pariser. Both his parents were Jewish, but the former was not practising¹.

In April 1930, he attended the Odenwaldschule, a free school created in 1910 by Paul Geheeb and Edith Cassirer Geheeb in Ober-Hambach, a suburb of the town of Heppenheim in Hesse. The school was at the forefront of pedagogical innovations and many of its pupils would later distinguish themselves in their respective fields, like the Noble prize for physics Hans Bethe (1906-2005), and Klaus Mann (1906-1949), Thomas' son, who also became a writer like his father². Both would later emigrate, Bethe because his mother was Jewish and Klaus because he was an anti-Nazi. In March 1933, the SA conducted a «Säuberungsaktion» in the school, burning many books, and one year later, in 1934, Nazis were appointed to the school board. Some professors fled to Switzerland, like Erich Steinitz (chemist), Paul Geheeb, and

¹ ASUFI, AC, SS, f. «Andermann Karl», application form to the Università di Firenze, 21 January 1935.

² On the history of the school, see: Dennis Shirley, *The Politics of Progressive Education. The Odenwaldschule in Nazi Germany*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1992; Martin Näf, *Paul und Edith Geheeb-Cassirer. Gründer der Odenwaldschule und der Ecole d'Humanité. Deutsche, schweizerische und internationale Reformpädagogik 1910-1961*, Weinheim, Beltz, 2006.

his wife Edith, the latter of Jewish origins, who, in 1934, emigrated to Hasliberg, where they founded the Ecole d'Humanité.

Karl enrolled relatively late in the Odenwaldschule, as he was almost seventeen, and graduated on 18 March 1932 with flying colours. In his report, the school's director underlined Karl's predilection for theoretical studies, his constructive attitude to school life, and his ability to easily integrate himself with the other pupils³. Like many other former students, Karl maintained sentimental ties with the Odenwaldschule during his peregrinations. In 1960, he would write an essay on a curated volume for Geheeb's ninetieth birthday, which also included contributions by Martin Buber, Hermann Hesse, Indira Gandhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru⁴.

Karl enrolled at the University of Göttingen on 25 April 1932 to study medicine but abandoned it on 8 March 1933. His first stop was Lausanne, Switzerland, where he studied for one semester before moving to Montpellier. The following year he applied for admission at the University of Florence where he was admitted to the third year, as some exams he passed abroad were validated⁵.

He graduated on 11 July 1938 with a mark of 82/110. His thesis, titled «Malaria-terapia e quadri psichici della paralisi progressiva», was supervised by Mario Zalla, director of the nervous and mental disease clinic and a scholar of neurology, biochemistry, and psychiatry belonging to the organicist school⁶. Karl made his internship at the Santa Maria Nuova hospital and in the University's obstetrical clinic.

³ ASUFI, AC, SS, f. «Andermann Karl», authenticated translation, produced in Genève on 26 September, of his high school diploma, signed by Paul Geheeb and dated 18 March 1932.

⁴ Karl Andermann, *Rückblick nach 30 Jahren*, in *Erziehung zur Humanität. Paul Geheeb zum 90. Geburtstag*, Heidelberg, Lambert Schneider, 1960, pp. 102-103.

⁵ ASUFI, AC, SS, f. «Andermann Karl», statement of prof. Francesco Leoncini, und., it also includes a list of the exams.

⁶ See: Matteo Fiorani in *Aspi - Archivio storico della psicologia italiana* <<https://www.aspi.unimib.it>> (accessed 20 March 2022).

Life in four continents

Karl's parents remained in Germany for the time being but later emigrated to Haifa, Mandatory Palestine, in 1936. His mother died in 1944, and his father in 1946⁷.

Even though Karl's name is not present in the Registers of the General Medical Council, the institution which gave the licenses to medical practitioners in the British empire,⁸ he managed to emigrate to India, where he became a medical officer in Deoli, Rajasthan. In June 1945 he wrote a letter to the British biologist and geneticist John Burdon Sanderson Haldane, to send him an article, titled «Theory of Mental Mechanism», which Karl had published in the journal of the University of Bombay⁹. The article was not scientifically relevant, as it was the product of an isolated line of thought. Despite considering the psychological dimension, its approach was essentially neurophysiologic in nature, and it incorporated also ideas coming from the recent innovative studies on artificial intelligence. This might suggest that Karl was familiar with the studies of scholars like Clark Hull (1884-1952) and Donald Hebb (1904-1985), or Warren Sturgis McCulloch (1898-1969), neurophysiologist and cybernetic pioneer¹⁰.

In 1949, he asked to emigrate to Australia, declaring to be a «medical student» and providing as a reference a friend, Hans Julius Friedlander, manager at Highgate Hill, a suburb of Brisbane¹¹. In 1955, Karl was affiliated

⁷ See: «Amtliches Fernsprechbuch für Berlin und Umgegend», 1936, *ad nomen*, available on <<https://www.ancestry.com>> (accessed on registration 20 March 2022). A letter sent from Haifa in May 1938 from Joachim to the anti-Nazi and Zionist journalist Manfred George in Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, *Nachlass Manfred George, Handschriftensammlung* <<https://www.dla-marbach.de>>; as for the death date, see: *ad nomen* on <<https://www.findagrave.com>> (accessed 20 March 2022).

⁸ See: *UK Medical Registers, 1859-1959*, database available *ad nomen* on <<https://www.ancestry.com>> (accessed on registration 20 March 2022).

⁹ Karl Andermann, *Theory of Mental Mechanism*, «Journal of the University of Bombay», 13, 5, 1945, pp. 16-34. The letter is available in: Wellcome Collection, *Haldane Papers, 5 Scientific Correspondence, 2/1/14* <<https://wellcomecollection.org>> (accessed 20 March 2022).

¹⁰ On this topic, see: Roberto Cordeschi, *The Discovery of the Artificial. Some Protocybernetic Developments 1930-1940*, «Artificial Intelligence and Society», 5, 1991, p. 218-238.

¹¹ National Archives of Australia (NAA), J25, *Case Files, 1949/11314*.

with the Lakeside Mental Hospital, Ballarat, Victoria¹².

He later moved, probably in 1960, to New York, 139th Street, and became a senior psychiatrist and electroencephalographer at the Creedmoor State Hospital Children Unit, an important psychiatric structure in Queens, which would face downsizing in the following years as a result of the deinstitutionalisation process¹³. During this period, Karl was the author of a series of articles on children's neuropsychiatry and on the effects of new generation medications, like chlorpromazine, based on his clinical experience and his specialisation in electroencephalograms. In 1965 he took part in the twentieth annual congress of the Society of Biological Psychiatry, where he presented a paper on EEG readings interpretation on «mentally disturbed children»¹⁴.

In September 1963, he wrote to the aforementioned McCulloch, who since 1952 had been a researcher at the MIT Research Laboratory of Electronics with Norbert Wiener, to present his studies:

Apart for a clinical psychiatric work, I am doing presently research on the correlation of visual integration and orientation in space with parieto-occipital EEG abnormalities. [...] Many years ago, I took interest in Cybernetics and developed some ideas of my own which were published soon after the war. However, in Australia, and prior to that in India, I had no one to discuss Cybernetic ideas generally and my own concepts particularly. I am now settled in the States, and I intend to take up old interests again¹⁵.

¹² «Commonwealth of Australia Gazette», Part 3, 1955, p. 3008.

¹³ American Philosophical Society Digital Library, Mss.B.M139, *Warren Sturgis McCulloch Papers, Cybernetics Material*, f. «Karl Andermann - Correspondence», 1963-1966, K. Andermann to W.S. McCulloch, 8 September 1963 <<https://diglib.amphilsoc.org>> (accessed 20 March 2022).

¹⁴ Karl Andermann, *Interpretation of Sharp Waves and Bursts of Slow Waves in the Electroencephalograms of Mentally Disturbed Children*, in Joseph Wortis (ed.), *Recent Advances in Biological Psychiatry. The Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Convention and Scientific Program of the Society of Biological Psychiatry, New York City, April 30 - May 2, 1965*, New York, Springer Science+Business Media, 1966, pp. 257-267.

¹⁵ American Philosophical Society Digital Library, Mss.B.M139, *Warren Sturgis McCulloch Papers, Cybernetics Material*, f. «Karl Andermann - Correspondence», 1963-1966, K. Andermann to W.S. McCulloch, cit.; Andermann wrote again to McCulloch on 22 September 1964 and on 26 July 1966. Lotti Loeb, McCulloch's associate, sent him some publications and the addresses of Donald MacCrimmon MacKay (1922-1987), professor at the Department of Communication and Neuroscience of the Keele University (UK), and of Gordon Pask (1928-1996), pioneer of cybernetic popularisation. See: L. Loeb to K. Andermann, 21 October 1963, and the rest of the

McCulloch invited Karl to his farm in Connecticut and gave him some advice on the most recent literature on this topic. Despite remaining an outsider in the field, Karl kept a sharp interest in cognitive processes, fuelled by his neurological approach and by his enthusiasm towards cybernetics, which, in the afterwar years, enjoyed growing popularity with the general public as well.

He died in New York in July 1969, when he was 57¹⁶.

Principal publications

- *Theory of Mental Mechanism*, «Journal of the University of Bombay», 13, 5, 1945, pp. 16-34.
- With J.S. Lindsay, *Chlorpromazine*, «The Medical Journal of Australia», 42, 2-3, 1955, pp. 80-82.
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correspondence: <<https://diglib.amphilsoc.org>> (accessed 20 March 2022). On McCulloch, see: Tara H. Abraham, *Modelling the Mind: the Case of Warren S. McCulloch*, «Canadian Medical Association Journal», 188, 13, 2016, pp. 974-975 <[doi:10.1503/cmaj.160158](https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.160158)>.

¹⁶ US, *Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007*, database available *ad nomen* on <<https://www.ancestry.com>> (accessed on registration 20 March 2022).

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- *The High Incidence of Mental Disturbances in the Family of Schizophrenic Children with Excess of Immature Slow Waves in the EEG*, «*Electroencephalography and Clinical Neurophysiology*», 23, 5, 1967, p. 494.
- *The High Incidence of Psychiatric Morbidity in Parents and Siblings of Schizophrenic Children with Immature EEG Patterns*, in D.V. Siva Sankar (ed.), *Schizophrenia. Current Concepts and Research*, Hicksville (NY), PJD Publications, 1969, pp. 352-367.

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