Helmut Thomä, Horst Kächele
Psychoanalytic Therapy
Vol. 2: Practice

Bibliothek der Psychoanalyse
(Library of Psychoanalysis)
Edited by Hans-Jürgen Wirth

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Principles and Practice

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Psychosozial-Verlag

Bibliographic information of The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (The German Library)
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data are available in the internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de.

Revised Second Edition

E-Mail: info@psychosozial-verlag.de
www.psychosozial-verlag.de

1st edition Springer-Verlag
Berlin Heidelberg New York Paris London Tokyo 1991
Softcover reprint 1992

Titel of the original German edition:
Lehrbuch der psychoanalytischen Therapie. Band 2: Praxis.

Cover art: Paul Klee, *Clouds*, 1926
ISBN 978-3-8379-2952-2 (Print)
ISBN 978-3-8379-7649-6 (E-Book-PDF)

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Foreword

I had great pleasure in recommending the first volume of this classical book. I had described it as one of my favourite psychoanalytic texts. This is because both volumes are written with clarity and simplicity, and eschewing of ambiguity that is almost unknown for psychoanalytic texts.

The authors of the Ulm Textbook were pioneers in modernising the narrative of the psychoanalytic dialogue. This allowed it become compatible with the language of science. Volume two made further inroads in this ground breaking work and presents the reality of modern psychoanalysis which reflects the uniqueness of the psychoanalytic process at the same time as making it accessible and bringing it into close proximity with all our realities. This is no easy feat which is why it has defeated so many others. Preserving the subtlety of the most intimate of conversations which two people can have, always at the edge of the permissible and the tolerable, whilst also conveying the ordinary humanity of the process where one individual extends their mind to incorporate as comprehensively as may be possible the understanding of another.

This book is to be read and savoured and perhaps many parts re-read. It is a shining example of how the psychoanalytic process can be truthfully and plainly presented without it losing any of its magic. Ultimately, it is the personality of the authors, as open and honest about themselves and their work as we can reasonably ask any professional to be, which shines through the pages again and again. Our deep gratitude and admiration should go out to them.

Prof. Peter Fonagy
Professor of Contemporary Psychoanalysis

1 Case Histories and Treatment Reports

1.0 Introduction

The crisis of psychoanalytic theory, which was the central topic of Chap. 1 of the companion volume on the principles of psychoanalytic therapy, has inevitably had some effects on psychoanalytic technique. In the last decades it has also become apparent that the perspectives of psychoanalytic therapy rooted in interpersonal theories have caused many concepts relevant to psychoanalytic practice to be reevaluated. It is now essential to distinguish between, on the one hand, the theory of the genesis or the explanation of psychic and psychosomatic illnesses and, on the other, the theory of therapeutic change and how it is brought about. Of course, all assumptions about structural changes depend on the observation of variations and alterations of symptoms.

This chapter's title, "Case Histories and Treatment Reports," reflects the discord in Freud's work between the theory of genesis and that of change. Our reconsideration leads us in the first section of this chapter to reject the notion that he gave adequate scientific consideration to both poles of this discord in his case histories. It is necessary to reformulate his famous assertion about the existence of an inseparable bond between curing and research. A promising new source for regrounding psychoanalytic therapy is for us to take the fact seriously that the theory of repeated traumatization has significance for the structuring of the therapeutic situation (Dimitrijević et al. 2018).

If we attempt to apply scientific criteria to the preparation of case histories and treatment reports, it is necessary for us to experiment with different schemes for reporting our work. For about three decades we, together with many other analysts, have striven toward the goal of reproducing the psychoanalytic dialogue as precisely as possible. In Sects. 1.2 and 1.3 we refer to important stages in the development of reporting, which we elaborate on in later chapters by providing appropriate examples. We have now reached a new stage. The use of audio recordings enables us to make the verbal exchanges between patient and analyst accessible to third parties in a reliable form. Because of the significance of this technical aid for advanced training and research, in Sect. 1.4 we make the reader familiar with a controversy that has been dragging on for a long time and that the examples we give in Sect. 7.8 should help resolve.

1.1 Back to Freud and the Path to the Future

Freud's case histories frequently fulfill the function of an introduction to his work. Jones (1954) emphasizes that the Dora case—the first of Freud's exemplary case histories following his *Studies on Hysteria*—

> for years served as a model for students of psycho-analysis, and although our knowledge has greatly progressed since then, it makes today as interesting reading as ever. It was the first of Freud's post-neurological writings I had come across, at the time of its publication, and I well remember the deep impression the intuition and the close attention to detail displayed in it made on me. Here was a man who not only listened closely to every word his patient spoke, but regarded each such utterance as every whit as definite and as in need of correlation as the phenomena of the physical world (p. 288).

This makes it all the more remarkable that it was precisely on this case that Erikson (1962) demonstrated substantial weaknesses in Freud's understanding of etiology and therapy (see Vol. 1, Sect. 8.6). The paper he pre-

sented to the American Psychoanalytic Association marked the increasing criticism both of Freud's explanations of etiology in his *case histories* and of his technique as described in his *treatment reports*. In view of the growing flood of publications containing such criticism, Arlow (1982, p. 14) has expressed his concern about their ties to objects belonging to the past. He recommended that we should simply say goodbye to these "childhood friends" who served us so well, put them to rest, and get back to work.

That and how Anna O., little Hans, Dora, President Schreber, the Rat Man, and the Wolf Man became our childhood friends is definitely very important, as is knowing the conditions under which each friendship developed. Training institutes mediate these friendships, in this way familiarizing the candidates with Freud's work as a therapist, scientist, and author.

While writing this textbook we have returned to our own childhood friends and have studied several of Freud's large case histories in detail. Even though new elements can be discovered by rereading them, we have hermeneutic reservations about supporting Lacan's (2007) call for a "return to Freud" (p. 337).

> Only, it's a bit misleading to describe the return in this way, since the force of Lacan's corrective to his contemporaries was not "go back, do your homework, get Freud right"—but rather an exhortation to feel out "a return" in language, to become sensitized to language's routes, turns, detours, circuits, and dead-ends. Go back, return, retrace, repeat the movement in language (Kornbluh 2018, p. 41).

We "prefer to speak of *going back over* Freud, as it is impossible to return to Freud without working on him, without making him the object of work."

In our reconsideration we do not meet these old friends in the same form as during our initial encounter with and enthusiasm for Katharina or little Hans. We have always viewed Freud's case histories in a somewhat different light and, unfortunately, have frequently shown too little concern for how Freud himself understood his texts. We were not, after all, introduced to the love for psychoanalysis through Freud alone, but also by spiritual parents who solicited support for their own views. In whom could we then place our trust and confidence in going back to Freud in order to ensure that ideas can be revitalized and point to the future that Arlow & Brenner (1988) and Michels (1988) as well Kernberg (2000) envisaged in their suggestions for reforming psychoanalytic training.

In view of the immensity of our task in determining which items belong to the past, it is impossible to rely on a single individual, not even someone of the stature of Rapaport, who ventured (in 1960) to estimate the probable longevity of important psychoanalytic concepts. Which mediator should we turn to in attempting to master this hermeneutic task? Hermes' name did not provide the etymological source for the concept of hermeneutics, but as messenger and translator between the gods and the mortals he was also a participant in the doings and dealings of the world who always acted according to his own interests. The same is true of those interpreters who try to do justice to Freud's work without losing sight of their own interests. Practicing psychoanalysts are not the only ones who live from Freud's legacy; this is also true of the many authors for whom Freud's legacy is a playground for their criticism.

Critique on Strachey's Translation

Can the analyst's acquisition of his own approach be considered a special form of trans-

lation? Uncertainty has spread since Brandt (1977) applied the play on the Italian words "traduttore-traditore" to the *Standard Edition* and thus made Strachey the translator into the traitor, and since Bettelheim's (1982) provocative book appeared. Following the criticism of Strachey's translation by Bettelheim (1982), Brandt (1961, 1972, 1977), Brull (1975), Ornston (1985a, b), Mahony (1987) and Pines (1985), nothing could illuminate the difficult situation of Anglo-American psychoanalysts who have relied on the *Standard Edition* better than the ironic title of Wilson's (1987) article, "Did Strachey Invent Freud?" The answer is obvious.

The unjustified and very exaggerated criticism of Strachey's admirable achievement has in the last few years led the discussion onto a side track and distracted attention from the real reasons for the crisis of psychoanalysis. It is consequently more than naive to want to resolve this crisis allegedly caused by the *Standard Edition* with the aid of a new translation. Beyond demonstrating that Strachey made mistakes and distorted passages, which have been correctly pointed out by many authors, the criticism of the *Standard Edition* concerns the hermeneutic question of whether Strachey's translation distorted the work itself. To demonstrate mistakes in translation that distort meaning is a relatively simple matter.

Equation with the Author

Yet we confront difficulties of a more principle nature—and not limited to Freud's works—because hermeneutics, i. e., the theory of the interpretation of texts, does not provide us with rules we can use as a mountain climber would a safety line while climbing a difficult mountain trail. We follow the philosopher Schleiermacher (1838, cit. 1977, p. 94) in assuming that it is possible after all for a reader to equate himself with an author both objectively and subjectively. Equating oneself with the author is one of the preconditions for being able to interpret a text and ultimately to understand the object better than the author himself (see Hirsch 1976, pp. 37ff.). According to Schleiermacher this task can be expressed as follows: "To understand the statement at first as well and later better than the author." Every reading enriches our basic store of knowledge and puts us in a better position to have a better understanding; thus Schleiermacher continues, "It is only with insignificant things that we are satisfied with what we immediately understand" (p. 95).

Our Own Experiences

When we read Freud's treatment reports we naturally take our own experience as a basis for comparison, and in time we become more confident that we understand the subject better than the founder of psychoanalysis did. The growth of knowledge on our subject—in our context, the analytic technique—is fed by several sources. One factor is that the critical discussion of Freud's treatment reports has created a distance to them, so that we today view these childhood friends differently than when we had our initial experiences with them. Another factor helping us to make our own experience is the fact that creative psychoanalysts have discovered other and new aspects of the subject that have brought about changes in therapy and theory.

Freud's Inseparable Bond

With a view to the many psychoanalysts and other Freud interpreters to whom we ourselves owe a debt of gratitude from our studies of Freud, we request that the reader identify with our interpretation on

a trial basis. In this two-volume textbook we believe we have brought our long grappling for the foundations of psychoanalytic theory and its effectiveness as therapy to a preliminary conclusion in that we are able to ground a firm point of view. There is a lot at stake in our attempt to grasp the current crisis of psychoanalysis on the basis of Freud's works and their reception in the psychoanalytic movement and in intellectual history as a whole. We hesitated for a long time to compress our ideas into a limited number of sentences because we are aware that this is a problem with far-reaching implications.

It was Freud's grand idea to link, in an *inseparable bond*, the interpretative method he discovered for treating patients with causal explanations, i. e., with the study of the genesis of psychic and psychosomatic illnesses. Yet if proof of the causal relationship requires that the data be independent of suggestion by the therapist, then therapy destroys the science. If the analyst, on the other hand, believes that it is possible to refrain from making any suggestion whatsoever, in order to obtain uncontaminated data by means of pure interpretations, then he ruins the therapy without coming closer to a theoretical explanation if *independence* from the researcher is required. It is obvious that the analyst offering interpretations influences the patient even if he apparently only directs his interpretations to the unconscious and without any further-reaching aims, which is a self-deception as it is impossible. Instead of eliminating manipulations it opens the door to hidden manipulations.

Methodological Position of Psychoanalysis

Freud's inseparable bond thus contains a dilemma that has gone largely unrecognized because it suggested that following the rules served therapy and research equally. For decades the magic of this concept exerted a settling influence and appeared to solve the therapeutic and scientific problems of psychoanalysis with a single stroke. For decades now it has become obvious how many methodological problems have to be solved to realize Freud's credo (Thomä & Kächele 1975). It implies that therapeutic efficacy, i. e., symptomatic and structural change, as well as the truth of explanatory hypotheses are the two sides of the same coin: the gold of the pure psychoanalytic method without *direct* suggestion. Of course, the scientific and therapeutic problems are the inevitable and necessary indirect influence exerted by the analyst on the patient.

By contrasting the *case history* and the *treatment report* it is possible to demonstrate that the scientific reconstruction of the genesis of psychic and psychosomatic illnesses in the case history follows criteria that differ from those for treatment; the function of these criteria is to ground the theory of therapy and specify the conditions for cure. In Sect. 10.5 of Vol. 1, we have described the individual consequences of loosening the inseparable bond and freeing the analyst from the excessive demands it places on him. To quote the concluding sentence from our first volume,

> Freud's theory of technique requires that the analyst distinguish between the following components: *curing*, *gaining* new hypotheses, *testing* hypotheses, the *truth* of explanations, and the *utility* of knowledge (Thomä & Kächele, 2020, sec. ed. vol 1, p. 481).

With regard to therapeutic theory and its testing, we completely agree with the opinion of the German influential psychoanalyst Lorenzer (1986) that