

Foreword to „From Psychoanalytic Narrative to Empirical Single Case Research“

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A little more than two decades ago, I had the occasion to write the foreword for the English language version of the first volume in what has become the professional lifetime project of Helmut Thomä and Horst Kächele, aided by a host of collaborators, originally German, but increasingly over time, truly worldwide, a project to develop the theory and the practice of psychoanalysis on a basis “rooted in [empirical] research on the psychoanalytic process and its results” (Thomä and Kächele, 1986 p.x). In my foreword to that first joint volume (pp.v-viii) I cited what I felt were three guiding themes in the contents of that publication, *Psychoanalytic Practice, 1. Principles* (1987).

Centrally, and differing from the conventional assumption that Freud had, uniquely in the world’s intellectual history, fully succeeded in creating a science and a profession in which the theory (the road to knowledge) and the therapy (the road to cure) were inherently joined, and truly the same, Thomä and Kächele pointed oppositely, to a conceptual disjunction, that while the theory is predominantly concerned with the determinants of genesis (i.e. the past), the techniques of therapy are oriented to achieving the necessary and sufficient conditions for change (i.e. the future). That is, a central problematic has always been the dialectic - and the tension - between the evolving theoretical and the evolving clinical therapeutic developments.

A second theme, a consequence of this conceptual disjunction, is the inevitable consideration of the complicated relationship of psychoanalysis qua therapy - in Freud’s hands, the *only* therapy - to the then burgeoning whole panoply of psychoanalytic psychotherapies, varyingly expressive and supportive, that represent applications of the same psychoanalytic theoretical understanding of the organization and functioning of the mind to the differentiated spectrum of psychopathology presented in our consulting rooms, i.e. one theory, but varieties of technical applications addressed to the clinical exigencies of the varieties of mental and emotional disorders. How similar and how different are the ‘pure’ psychoanalysis, innovated by Freud, and all the derived and linked psychoanalytic psychotherapies devised to deal with those varied clinical exigencies in the varieties of patients not amenable to the classical method?

And the third theme presented in that first volume, and linked, but not at all isomorphically, to the other two, was the breakdown of Freud’s intention and lifelong effort,

to maintain a coherent and unitary structure in the psychoanalytic discipline and profession that he had almost single handedly brought into being, with the formation of his secret committee of the seven loyal ringholders, and then the creation of the IPA, all designed to establish the dimensions and the parameters of psychoanalysis against diluting or fracturing pressures from within or without. The failure of this effort started even in Freud's lifetime, with the rise of the Kleinian movement in Great Britain, with its differing metapsychology, and has, of course now evolved worldwide with our consensually acknowledged multiple theoretical diversity, or pluralism as we have come to call it. (Wallerstein 1988, 1990).

Underpinning all of these organizing themes was the clarion call for the necessary turn to empirical research as the only valid way to truly resolve these entangled issues, and to properly enhance the established psychoanalytic knowledge base. In 1992, the same two authors, this time with an enlarged group of collaborators, including some from outside Germany, brought out the companion volume, *Psychoanalytic Practice, 2, Clinical Studies*, the counterpart clinical application of the theoretical principles expounded in volume one.

And in 1988 had come the volume, *Psychoanalytic Process Research Strategies*, edited by Hartvig Dahl and the two German colleagues, Kächele and Thomä, the report of a conference of American and German empirical researchers into psychoanalytic treatment processes, held in Ulm, Germany, in the summer of 1985, just prior to the 34th IPA Congress in Hamburg. This conference, bringing together many of the most prominent researchers into psychoanalytic treatments, each presenting their own work, deploying their individual concepts and instruments with the analytic case material that they individually had available, was a most impressive and successful demonstration of how such empirical studies could make significant progress towards answering the many questions that the two Thomä-Kächele volumes posed for the understanding of psychoanalytic conceptions and practices.

Now some two decades later - and after the intervening years of worldwide burgeoning conceptual advance, methodological sophistication, and empirical demonstration in psychoanalytic therapy research - Kächele and Thomä with, now, a new co-editor partner, Joseph Schachter, have brought forth their capstone volume, bringing together the thinking and the findings of a long, closely shared professional lifetime devoted to the research ideals and research promises of the earlier book for which I had written the foreword - though, given the growing momentum of the Ulm psychoanalytic research enterprise, I fully expect this current volume to be but an interim, rather than a final, marker.

The guiding theme of this current volume is emblazoned in its title, *From Psychoanalytic Narrative to Empirical Single Case Research*, or how one translates case

description and case report into incrementally established research knowledge. In what is arguably the most important paper on dream analysis since Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, Erik Erikson (1954) described a detailed re-examination of Freud's Irma dream, the first dream reported in Freud's dream book, from the point of view - well beyond Freud's intent - of showing that it could be conceived to reveal more than the basic fact of a disguised wish fulfillment derived from infantile sources, that it, in fact, could be seen to carry the historical burden of being dreamed in order to be analyzed, and to thus open the door to dream analysis on what Freud was to call the 'royal road' to the illumination of the unconscious. With this in mind Erikson, in his title, dubbed the elaboration of the Irma dream, *The Dream Specimen of Psychoanalysis*. In this same sense Freud's famous case histories (Dora, Little Hans, the Rat Man, the Wolf Man, Schreber, the homosexual woman), and an array by a range of subsequent psychoanalysts listed in figure 2, pp. 186-189, of "sizable treatment reports of single cases" (p.186) can be taken as *specimen* single case reports upon which this present volume not only builds, but vastly extends, into serving as vital grounding for intensive empirical therapy research. This is what the authors, following thus Freud's tradition, and adding their own developed empirical research studies, call being "idiographic nomotheticists" (p.41), who search out "complex probabilistic explanatory schemas, knowledge of which deepens and enriches our understanding" (p.41). Their aims, like Freud's before them, are thus simultaneously both "idiographic and nomothetic" (p.153), to reconcile our surmount the often seeming "opposition of intuitive understanding and scientific understanding" (p.156), and to build thus what Meissner has called "the science of subjectivity (p.156). This search for what (research) study of what the specific, leading to the generalizable, can yield, as the path (or as a major path) in the development of psych-analysis as a science - a science of the theory building *and* a science of treatment - is what this present volume is all about.

To accomplish this, the three authors and editors, and their contributing collaborators across the three worldwide regions of psychoanalytic activity, have assembled, and, logically ordered, a sequence of sections (some of them previously published, but now updated, articles) from theoretical rationale and framework, through a 100 page long clinical description of the case of Amalia X, treated by Helmut Thomä, and onto what they call a sequence of guided clinical judgments, followed by a further sequence of computer-based studies of the case material.

The patient, Amalia X, came as a single woman, a teacher who suffered with anxiety and depressive symptoms, religious scrupulosity and compulsions, plus central concerns

about her social and sexual identity, linked to a severe bodily hirsutism. Her 531 hour psychoanalysis covered a 5 year span, with 517 the sessions audio recorded and with five of them, out of every 25, transcribed, and all installed in the ULM TEXTBANK data base, and now available for study by qualified investigators. The case description in this volume, occupying a full 100 pages is of two kinds, first a longitudinal overview, spanning the entire analysis, built around changes over time in symptoms, manifest behaviors, object-relationships, and transferences, followed by more detailed cross-sectional accounts along all the same dimensions from each of the 22 sequential five sessions transcription periods. Because this method of presenting loses the two-person interactional quality of the actual clinical sessions - available of course in the transcribed sessions - it can make more difficult the linking of the exchanges around the therapeutic interventions (insight into therapeutic *process*) to the ultimate enduring changes in the described dimensions of functioning (assessment of therapeutic *outcome*).

Nonetheless, the sheer volume of the presented material and the circumstances under which it is provided - in this volume and in the available ULM TEXTBANK - certainly warrants the proud claim of the authors that it takes its place, alongside the much studied patient of Dahl's, Mrs. C., as a specimen case for psychoanalytic therapy research. And in this sense it fulfills a central criterion of the decade long work of the Collaborative Analytic Multisite Program (CAMP) (Bucci and Freedman 2007), that psychotherapy process and outcome research can take the next – quantum - step, when the separate investigators, with differing sociocultural and language contexts, differing conceptual frames, and different devised instruments, can all work together on a shared data base of available transcribed psychoanalytic hours, and can thus contrast and compare their finding and their conclusions based on shared study of the same clinical sessions. In this way their similarities and differences can be spelled out, as well as where the same concepts are employed with different meanings, and where different languages describe the same meaning. In being available as a specimen case in this way, Amalia X truly provides what the authors call a “road map” (p.328) for all the kinds of formalized studies presented in this volume, and also for what the whole diverse world wide cadre of psychoanalytic therapy researchers can devise.

It is just the kinds of studies, already accomplished with the material of Amalia X by researchers from literally around the world, that the entire second half of this volume presents. They are divided into a section, entitled, Guided Clinical Judgments, and then a section entitled, Computer-based Studies. These studies written by clusters of different authors, but in

every instance but one, with at least either Kächele or Thomä included. Under guided clinical judgments they include studies of change in emotional insight, in self-esteem, in attribution of suffering to external forces and/or internally to oneself, in manifest dream portrayal, in reactions to regular breaks in clinical work (weekends, and then longer breaks for illness, trips, vacations) etc. Only in the instance of attribution of suffering is an explicit effort made to link the therapeutic interventions and the exchanges around them to the personality changes achieved, making thus the crucial link of process to outcome, the ultimate goal of therapy research. To me this kind of linking represents a still unrealized potential of the overall therapy research enterprise, at least as portrayed in this volume, though, it can of course, be made the direct object of scrutiny, with a turn to the verbatim transcripts of the Amalia X hours, in the ULM TEXTBANK itself.

This section also includes three studies of the Amalia X material by exponents of other process research concepts and instruments, Lester Luborsky's Core Conflictual Relationship Theme, Joseph Weiss' and Harold Sampson's Unconscious Plan built on their control-mastery conception of the psychoanalysis process, and Enrico Jones' Psychotherapy Process Q-Sort. Here there is a good demonstration of a major opportunity to contrast and compare the findings and conclusions of these different conceptualizations and methods with each other, and of course with the studies of the Thomä-Kächele Ulm group as well. This is actually done in beginning ways in the presentation of the methods of the San Francisco Psychotherapy Research Group (SFPRG), the group led by Weiss and Sampson.

The other section of the second half of the volume, entitled Computer-based Studies, which is built around the technological possibilities available within the ULM TEXTBANK, owes enormously to another Ulm member, Erhard Mergenthaler, who is among the cluster of authors of five of the six separate presentations in this computer-assisted section. We can certainly credit the creation of the ULM TEXTBANK with its many search possibilities for language studies, for a linguistic turn into a varied conversational-analytical methodology as demonstrated in the various studies presented here, as itself, both a signal achievement in the furtherance of the psychoanalytic therapy research enterprise, and, as well, a major gift to the psychoanalytic research community which is welcome to use the TEXTBANK to explore its database, and within their own language orbits, to emulate it.

What does my entire Foreword add up to? The authors put their overall intent as follows at the very end: "We plead decisively for multi dimensionality of empirical ways of access concerning the subject of psychoanalysis; namely to make research on the impact of unconscious processes on conscious experience and behavior. On this research process the

systematic single case study takes its proper place - next to other ways of access" (p. xxx). I would state more. This volume registers a major landmark achievement in the often slow and halting march of empirical research possibilities for the furtherance of psychoanalytic theory and practice. It points a major way for us all, as each reader will discover for him or herself.

References

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