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Does psychoanalysis go online without body? Methodical considerations on intercorporeity in analytical encounter.

Because I expect communication difficulties in the reception of my paper, I will orient my remarks to these.

A first difficulty is that it is unclear what is meant by method. In order to understand this, a systematic distinction must be made between techniques of psychoanalysis and the psychoanalytic method (Hardt 2013), a difference that is rarely made in the international literature. In most cases, the technique of the “rite”¹ analysis is equated with the method; which has a certain justification, but discussing it here would take us too far from my subject.

Method is the path of research, and in this sense it also includes a theory of technique. The systematic difference makes it possible to compare and verify different variants of psychoanalysis. It thus follows on from Eissler (1953/58), who correlated deviations from the idealised technique in order to assess which are necessary, what they do or do not do. Systematic difference forgoes the reference to an ideal technique and situates “classical analysis” in the arsenal of procedures, though without denying its particular value.

Method results from previous insights, and in this respect it is an instruction manual corresponding to the theory. This makes it impossible to determine the method unambiguously, because every overall theory is an uncompleted programme. Completed, it would be dead, could only be filed away. To determine the method, however, it is necessary to give an outline of the project. In the case of psychoanalysis, this is a complete psychology of unconscious psychic life that uses the fractures and gaps of conscious phenomena to “guess” psychic connections (Freud 1905), to connect unconscious content with “word-presentations” (Freud 1923), and to reconstruct psychic histories. Translation plays a decisive role in this, because a variety of translations are required between languages, language levels and media. Listening to all the secondary meanings plays an essential role here; the psychoanalytic method is an art of specific listening and speaking.

The techniques of psychoanalysis, on the other hand, are theory-neutral. They often come from other theoretical contexts and only become techniques of psychoanalysis when they are transformed. An example is the reclining position on the couch, which was adopted from hypnosis therapy but gained new significance in the psychoanalytical context. The same applies to remote therapy, which originally originated in cognitive behavioural therapy, where it has its validity because it is compatible with that therapy’s theoretical concepts.

¹ In the sense of standard, ordinary, or classical analysis according to an idealized technique

In the project of psychoanalysis as a research program, its method consists in the “translation” of unconscious mental processes into conscious, i.e. imaginative, expressive, discussable and conceivable word-presentations that can be introduced into the broad modern cultural process. All techniques used in psychoanalysis are committed to this goal.

If remote therapy without body is to find recognition as a technical variation, it must meet this demand. This requires further preliminary considerations which outline the psychoanalytical translation work in more detail. Translation is indispensable because of the multilingualism of the psychical: it is necessary to translate the language of the child into that of the adults without blurring the differences, otherwise “language confusion” (Ferenczi 1933) arises. But there are other levels and forms of language.

Every living conversation is accompanied by a body language that is culturally specific; thus, in communicating “turning towards” and “turning away”, accompanying hand movements, changes in posture, combined with the involuntary reactions to these, play an essential role in the interpersonal exchange². The fact that this constant co-movement is exposed in the couch situation compels communication which is close to the body but verbal in form. The language of the body must be expressed in words in order to be heard. But if “the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego” (Freud 1923, 253), having its foundation in the primary language acquisition that accompanies physical care (Loch 1971), then one can expect that early, structuring experiences can only be articulated in primary language. This also applies to the language of symptoms that patients do not understand. Analytical language must follow this non-understanding in order to make understandable what so far there have been no words for. Often words are only found in the silent being together, where language has so far failed.

I consider talk of a language of the unconscious to be inappropriate: the unconscious has no language, if one follows the original conception. The difference between the unconscious and the preconscious lies precisely in the fact that the latter is connected with word-presentations; the work of interpretation is to link unconscious contents with words: “The psychical, whatever its nature may be, is in itself unconscious and probably similar in kind to all the other natural processes of which we have obtained knowledge” (Freud 1939, p. 283). By associating unconscious content with words, interpretation is the translation from a psycho-somatic medium into language.

My paper poses the question: “Does psychoanalysis go online without body?”³ The title is the variation of a book title: “Does psychotherapy go online“ (Geht die Psychotherapie ins Netz?“ (Krieger et al. 2015)). This emphasised the ambivalence of a technically mediated remote therapy, pointed out the risks associated with it, and at the same time warned against going online unthinkingly. Will therapy on the Internet have a protected space or will it be exploited?

² Gestural and mimend dialogue.

³ The first translation in the congress preview read: “Does psychoanalysis step into the world wide web without body?”

This book contains one of my works: "Psychotherapy under the Rule of Man II" (Hardt 2015). The thesis is that because of the fundamentally unsecured confidentiality of digital media, only a psychotherapy which figures the public person, the "One", is ethically acceptable. This still applies even if all security precautions are taken, because these only correspond to currently valid norms. One is nobody and everybody; the ego belongs to the One and is distinct from it.

In German, to "go online" is to "go into the net" and the publishers have played with the ambiguity of this. Traditionally, going into the net means being caught in the hunt, carried off, becoming prey through cunning. Being trapped in the net also has a symbolic meaning of being helpless, like Agamemnon when Clytemnestra threw a net over him to deliver him to his murderers.

In the English translation of the title of my paper this ambiguity disappears. Neutral, and without any suggestion of other meanings, it runs: "Does psychoanalysis go online without body?" When asked like this, one can only shrug and say, "A technical variation of psychoanalysis: Why not, if there are advantages to it?" As if a new medium is being introduced as no more than a parameter. A medium that is trusted and used in everyday life. What could be bad about that?

Internet can be referred to as *World Wide Web* but also as *net*. Instead of "stepping into" the *World Wide Web* one could go *into the net*. *Net* as a web that connects, and at the same time the web a spider uses to catch its prey. To express this, we would have to translate: *Is psychoanalysis without body going to be caught in the net?*

The German title could also be translated as: *Does a bodiless psychoanalysis go online? Bodiless* has a double meaning, namely in the sense of incorporeal, but also in the sense of unsubstantial. That would be a judgment: *Psychoanalysis loses its substance without a body.*

Back to the title and the concept of intercorporeity⁴, which is unusual in psychoanalysis and comes from the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty 1994). It is impossible to give an exhaustive account of its philosophical content here, since this would require us to trace Merleau-Ponty's critical position vis-à-vis the prevailing basic assumptions of modern philosophy. What is important for our purpose is that Merleau-Ponty's concept of corporeity attempts to bridge the division of the world inherited from Descartes: a *res cogitans*, which is directly accessible to us in thinking, and a *res extensa*, which stands over against thinking as something alien and which only becomes accessible through deduction. As living bodies we have always been related to the world. Intercorporeity also exists before thinking, in the bodily relation to other people as living bodies. To carry these conceptions over into a psychoanalytic reflection is justified on the one hand by Merleau-Ponty's closeness to psychoanalysis, and on the other by the conceptions' correspondence to the findings of psychoanalytic development theory.

Before the child develops an ego, it lives in physical interaction with the mother, from whom it detaches itself, in particular with the help of language acquisition (Hole

⁴ Sometimes: intercorporeality

1971). During nursing, the surface of the body becomes the boundary of the body, the preform and basis of the ego. Although these experiences are later transformed, because with the differentiation of language relatively autonomous structures are formed, they are never lost as a basis. The emotional language (Herder 1964 / 1772) remains bound to early intercorporeal experiences. The acquisition of language for unconsciously effective and unnameable psycho-somatic states also presupposes the intercorporeal relationship with an empathic other.

When the analytical relationship is decided at the “point of urgency” (Strachey 1935), it is never only the “experience of difference” between the malignant inner objects and a benevolent outer object that is meant. The mutative interpretation, the lending of words, in the shared situation of maximum distress, creates a space of experience and thought between the partners in the analytical process.

It is therefore to be expected that a remote analysis without body cannot have a mutative effect. At the same time, it becomes understandable why this technique finds so much resonance in analytical circles. The development to a point of urgency brings the analytical partner into distress, which has to be interpreted out because there is no other way out. Strachey referred to “the constant temptation” to “do something else instead” (Strachey 1934, p. 159). Instead, analysts often ask questions, reassure, or give advice and theoretical explanations to avoid the "danger" (ibid.) which consists in the fact that “at the moment of interpretation the analyst is in fact deliberately evoking a quantity of the patient’s id-energy while it is alive and actual and unambiguous and aimed directly at himself" (ibid.).

Translation does not only take place between languages: every transition from one medium to another means a translation and thus a retention of meaning and a loss of meaning. Even the transitions from the private language to the triangular and finally to official and written language are not to be only lexically managed, but the autonomy of each medium must be taken into account. Socrates had already noticed that writing changes thinking. In his major study “Orality and Literacy”, Walter Ong referred to the gains and losses of the transition from one medium to another (Ong 1982).

The electronic media used in remote therapy without body recede into the background. When they emit a signal intrusively, an eerie feeling occurs, as Dettbarn (2013) called it. The medium then emerges from its concealment and becomes a third object (Martin 2006). But when everything is working, a deceptive appearance of immediacy arises, leaving only a small gap (Baecker 2018) in which, however, more transformation and technical effort is hidden than ever before.

Case vignettes

At the beginning of my psychoanalytic activity, when I was in charge of a ward for the treatment of psychotic patients on the psychotherapeutic model, a student was sent to me by an experienced psychiatrist. She said that he was suffering from hebephrenia and hoped that his ordeal before the final stage would be brief; but one could certainly try everything. The young man was often disoriented, suffered from almost incomprehensible body sensations, unpredictable mood changes, complete despair.

I treated this patient on the couch for many years, because I was able to transfer him to my practice after leaving the clinic. From the beginning, he was often silent and demanded that I guess what was going on in him; he could not find words. He lay like a lifeless object on the couch, complaining repeatedly that everything was boring, which in turn began to bore me.

The silence increased, became more oppressive. I became aware of a strange technique in myself for enduring the seemingly endless hours: I began to play with time, divided the hour into fractions, the passing of which could be experienced: minutes, seconds. A depressing situation, completely without connection and meaning. I did not understand what was happening to me until the patient told me that in his desperate agitation he often withdrew into the cellar and sat motionless in front of a large clock to see how the minute hand, finally the hour hand, moved. He did not know how he came upon this.

Later, a connection was established when he reported that his mother had told him that shortly after his birth, because unlike other children he never screamed to remind her he was there, she carried a loudly ticking alarm clock in her apron. That was his salvation; otherwise, in her severe depression she would have simply forgotten him.

The second case concerns a depressive doctor who worked in a pathology department. She could not bear to be looked at; if it could not be avoided, she fantasised she was in a corner of a room, looking at the situation from the outside. Again and again she fell into an abyss of silence that seemed to me, for no reason, to be defiant. I liked her less and less, which was unpleasant for me because I felt that she was attached to me. Without me noticing, she wept motionlessly, something I only noticed on the smeared pillow when she got up from the couch. The pillow, wet with tears, nauseated me and made me angry; I had the fantasy of justifiably blaming her for it, even of beating her. I felt completely helpless, could only endure.

Finally, I made a strange observation. My hand seemed foreign to me, as if cut off, and my leg also no longer seemed to belong to me, I had to move it in order to take possession of it again. The situation became increasingly weird, hardly bearable. The little she said seemed insignificant. Then the patient confessed, with great shame and with violent feelings of guilt, that during the silences she imagined laying me on the table, dissecting me into pieces, opening my skull to explore what was going on inside me.

The two vignettes are intended to show the extremely dense psychosomatic entwining that can occur in analytical processes if the analysing partner is prepared to engage with it. The body metaphors of containing, container, containment, as well as the associated dreamy exchange between an inside and an outside, become tangible and have to be raised into a shared language in order to become thinkable.

There is a great and constant temptation for the analyst to do anything else to avoid situations that seem unbearable. If in the analysis it remains a more or less intellectual exchange about the unconscious dynamic, its dramatic experience does not take place. Even if such peaks could be reached in remote therapies without body, the remote arrangement without body seems to me an almost irresistible temptation to escape the danger.

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