Science and psychoanalysis

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While psychoanalysts claim that psychoanalysis is a science, many external critics denounce it as an unscientific system of untested (and in a Popperian view: untestable) beliefs. In part, this may be the effect of what Freud called the “resistance against psychoanalysis” (which cannot be cured simply with arguments). Beside that, however, the discussion of the epistemological status of psychoanalysis is strained by misunderstandings and misconceptions on both sides. The author hopes to improve this situation by placing psychoanalysis among those theories which deal with objects that are heterogeneous, i.e., always different, changing and developing. The shape of psychoanalytic theories is a result mainly of the functions they have to fulfil, and to do so, they must produce specific capacities which also involve certain risks. For instance: they easily divide into a plurality of models, they operate with open concepts and they tend to retain the form of “work in progress”.

Key words: epistemology — autopoietic reality — connotative theory — relation between theory and practice — institutionalization of theory

The scientific status of psychoanalysis has always been — and still is — controversial. It seems as though this debate has not made much progress. Naturally, psychoanalysts claim and explain — in different ways — that psychoanalysis is a science. By contrast, most external critics tend to believe — to varying degrees — that psychoanalysis is an unscientific system of more-or-less strange beliefs. This assessment has different roots. At least part of it results from the well-known reservations that Freud had already referred to as “resistance against psychoanalysis”. The reasons that Freud held responsible for this resistance (Freud, 1925) are apparently still alive. Therefore, they will not be eliminated only by arguments. However, the discussion of the status of psychoanalysis is additionally strained by a number of misunderstandings and misconceptions. External critics often use the wrong tools for the evaluation, and by doing so, they miss the point of psychoanalytic understanding. On the other hand, psychoanalytic methods of justification sometimes fail to find the right clues to build a consistent foundation or to refrain from further attempts to gain the acceptance of the guardians of science. It seems as if the two attitudes are mutually reinforcing.

I think it is necessary — and possible — to find a way out of this predicament. To this end, I will attempt to present a new description of some well-known problems. First, I will take a brief look at how Freud handled the epistemic questions and entailing developments. The next section is dedicated to the reformulation of the relation between object logic (in the sense of: order of things) and theory (in the sense of: order of thinking). Finally, this article will show that the main features of psychoanalytic theory are not the result of faults or foibles, but rather the normal consequences of coping with a specific task.

PSYCHOANALYSIS — THEN AND NOW

Since its early days, psychoanalysis has been attacked from many sides. As Freud already remarked, not every
critique was rational and some were just a pretext to get rid of the threatening thoughts, themes, and methods of psychoanalysis. This tradition is still alive. A look at the history of the “Freud wars” and “Freud bashing” leaves no doubt that some of the warriors are still fighting, driven by hate and bitterness. It is not surprising that they draw a picture in which psychoanalysis is painted as a nightmare for science. Of course, this stance makes it easy to eliminate the irritations and provocations caused by psychoanalysis.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that every critique is wrong. As regards methods and theory, psychoanalysis brought together quite a number of problems and the way they were treated was often fuelled by external critique (cf. Popper, 1966). Certainly, some of the most disturbing problems stem from epistemic questions that arise in connection with psychoanalytic methods and concepts. Freud himself did not spend much time dealing with these questions. He started his academic life in the world of physiological research. In this part of the academic world, the predominant conception of science was one of a hard-line positivistic, materialistic and mechanistic approach, including the conviction that only the natural sciences were the true sciences. Although Freud was closely identified with this point of view, he was no fellow traveller. In crucial situations, he interpreted the definitions of the rôle model of a natural scientist generously. Therefore, in his own opinion, he later on only changed the object of his research, but not the scientific approach. In “Studien über Hysterie”, Freud (1985) remarked that he was a bit astonished that he had to write a sort of a novel instead of measuring and counting physiological data. However, he considered all of this a necessity of his work and not a result of his own choice. Addressing his colleagues, he added that they could safely have trust in what he was doing. The underlying philosophy of Freud was “I act as a scientist; I do what is necessary even if what I have to do is unusual.

This was quite true insofar as Freud worked meticulously. Moreover, it was a very pragmatic and useful strategy. However, by thinking that he was only developing a new means for the classic program of scientific research, he overplayed the real differences. In doing so, he was able to walk the thin line between falling back on conventional models and drifting into obscurantism. The counterfactual overestimation of the normality of his doing prevented him from having too many doubts in a situation in which it was inevitable for him to transgress many borders. Thus, claiming that psychoanalysis was a “natural science of the mind” guaranteed in his opinion his membership in the scientific community of his choice. In 1927, Hartmann wrote his influential “Grundlagen der Psychoanalyse” which dogmatized Freud’s view. The claim of being a “natural science of the mind” remained the semi-official position of psychoanalysis for a long time.

As is well-known, Habermas (1968) interpreted Freud’s claim as a “scientific misunderstanding” of psychoanalysis. This is correct – psychoanalysis is not a “natural science”. On the other hand, Freud would never have found an epistemic model to fit his needs among those on offer in his time.

Others had different points of view of the scientific status of psychoanalysis. Most external critics were not able to follow Freud’s request to believe in what he was doing and saying. Since the very beginnings of psychoanalysis, many blamed Freud for making rather uncanny claims without furnishing proof (for example, Eysenck, 1957). Popper finally gave this judgment an epistemic form. Popper, as is well-known, declared that at the core of every science is a special kind of empirical test. He concluded that psychoanalysis was not a science at all, but just speculation and belief because it did not provide testable hypotheses (Popper, 1966). Another chapter of this history was written by Grünbaum (1983). It is true that Grünbaum disputed Popper’s verdict. However, he thrust psychoanalysis out of the fying pan into the fire by claiming that it had to get rid of almost all of its achievements in order to become a real science. Confronted with such fundamental attacks, psychoanalysis tended to retreat into itself and stick to the self-sufficient conviction that psychoanalysis was a scientific enterprise. Thus, little was done to substantiate or defend this assumption.

Today, the situation has changed and developed in many directions. First of all and most importantly, psychoanalytic theory has changed enormously since its early days. Modern psychoanalytic theory cannot be compared or identified any longer with those first steps taken by Freud. Like all pioneers, he had only limited and rough means to conquer new realms. Even though it is still interesting and stimulating to read Freud, rarely is one able to use any of his concepts in exactly the same way he did. Especially the paradigmatic shift from resistance to transference, the reflection of self/object-relations, modern theories of affect and drive, and the closer look at early stages of development, have changed the way of thinking (see, for instance, Fine, 1990; Eagle, 1984). Psychoanalysis has made much progress towards a modern theory of psychodynamics. Offering an outline of the functioning of the mind on different levels (ranging from psychotic to normal patterns), psychoanalysis is well equipped for productive cooperation with other theories.

In addition, psychoanalysis has given up despising empirical research. Meanwhile, clinical practice has been examined in many studies and the statement that psychoanalysis does not stand up to empirical testing is no lon-
ger true. In other aspects, psychoanalysis has also ended the politics of (more or less splendid) isolation. Today, there is a vital discourse between psychoanalysis and the neuro-sciences. Prolific researchers such as Kandel (2005) and Roth (1994) meanwhile certify that psychoanalytic interpretations are consistent with the modern picture of the brain. Unfortunately, most modern critics tend to ignore these developments. They still focus on what Freud wrote one hundred years ago instead of reading modern psychoanalytic writings. This is like criticising modern experimental psychology by arguing against Pavlov or Watson or by believing that the writings of Max Weber and Durkheim are the state-of-the-art of modern sociology. It would be quite easy to avoid many misunderstandings about psychoanalysis if one were to take into account what has happened since Freud (and one might very well ask why this does not happen).

THEORIES AND THEIR OBJECTS

Likewise, it is time to re-evaluate the logic of psychoanalytic theory and methods. This discussion started in the sixties of the last century with many important contributions from the inside of psychoanalysis, for instance by Rapaport (1960), Strenger (1991), Edelson (1984) or Lorenzer (1974) – to name but a few. In addition, philosophers made remarkable attempts to explain the nature of psychoanalytic theory. These discussions revealed many interesting aspects such as the way interpretations operate (Ricoeur, 1965) or the connection between interpretation and change (Habermas, 1968). Still, some of the central features of psychoanalysis remained unexplained. A crucial point, for instance, is that psychoanalysis does not appear as one. What can be observed is that many different psychoanalytic theories coexist and compete – orthodox Freudians, Kleinians, object-relation theorists, attachment theorists, Lacanians and others. All of these schools and variations present themselves as compound and complicated groupings including sub-schools and sub-variants. The same may be said about psychoanalytic method. There is no generally accepted model of method, evaluation, and confirmation. Even though there is no doubt that there is something like a specific psychoanalytic method, there is no definite and undisputed general methodology.

In a conventional scientific view, it is held that this disqualifies a theory completely. At best, it is accepted as a childhood disease of sciences. A “mature” science must have a fixed common body of knowledge, a completed repertoire of methods, and a closed theory consisting of laws and definitive results. Popper (1936) went on to claim that even if truth can never be proved it is possible to eliminate untrue arguments by falsification. Construc-

tivist critics, on the other hand, would argue that theory and method never provide truth, but are viable ways of thinking (see v. Glasersfeld, 1995). This is an important point of view, but it is often misunderstood which then leads to some kind of “epistemic pleasure principle” ending up as the eclipse of any epistemic justification.

I think it is possible to avoid both the empiristic verdict and the risk of indifference by a closer examination. In order to do this I would like to look at some well-known problems of psychoanalysis by putting them into a broader context. Most of the symptoms mentioned are not a privilege of psychoanalysis. It is easy to find other sciences that are divided into groups, schools and even sects without being “juvenile” at all. For example, sociology, history, ethnology, psychology, and economics show similar symptoms. The same can be said about their methods and methodology. On the other hand, there are sciences that do not really suffer from these problems. Of course, there are discussions among physicists as well. Nevertheless, there are undisputed areas where consensus exists and this can be justified. In addition, differences are restricted to yet unsolved problems within a logically organized body of knowledge. While physicists are able to refer to closed common body of knowledge based on fixed rules of thinking and argumentation, psychoanalysts (as well as sociologists, historians and others) do not share the comfort of a common theory and a unanimously accepted body of knowledge. If this is not the result of ignorance, there must be a systemic point; a substantial difference influencing the shape of sciences. Modifying the famous classification of personality by Kluckhohn & Murray (1953), we can say that a science (or a theory) is

- like every other science,
- like some other science and
- like no other science.

Following this distinction there are general, particular, and singular aspects of science. This means that the “unified science concept” underlying Popper’s critical rationalism is only appropriate at a general level. Surely, every science strives for objective knowledge to overcome beliefs and meanings. However, this point of view does not yet deal with levels two and three of the Kluckhohn/Murray formula. For a better understanding of psychoanalysis (level three), I will first try to explain the problems of the group of theories it belongs to (level two).

Understanding the way science works, then, means to take into account not only the general demands of any science, but also the differences between types of sciences. Such a “different concept of science” is not at all new. In the history of epistemic theory, it has re-occurred
ever since the early days. However, it has often failed to be really convincing, especially when dependent on a “two-world” notion as, for instance, Dilthey’s foundation of “humanities”. Dilthey confronted “Naturwissenschaften” (natural sciences) explaining the logic of nature and “Geisteswissenschaften” (humanities) understanding the meaning of human actions and products. Such a binary choice is no problem when the topic is clearly divided into two separate and distinct parts. If not, it is difficult to place objects across borders. In addition, the difference must be well chosen. This is certainly not true for contrapos ing “nature” and “Geist” (as Dilthey did). It is easy to see that the semantic horizon of both is neither homogenous nor complementary. “Nature” includes many different sorts of reality and “Geist” – meant as a product of human activity – is rather an expression of 19th century perceptions than a clear-cut category. Dilthey confounded level two and level three and offers an unjustified distinction. This must lead to unsolvable confusions. Notably, psychoanalysis – treating the mind as based on physically-rooted drives – was not able to find a proper place in the field divided in this way. Even worse is a distinction based on existing forms of science (as Rickert (1929) proposed). “Naturwissenschaft” and “Geisteswissenschaft” (“science” and “humanities”, cf. Dilthey (1974)) are results of historical developments. As such, they entail contingencies and arbitrariness. Confronted with such a choice, Freud did very well by choosing the first as point of reference – but it was a problematic one because the choice itself is not useful.

Thus, this kind of “two-world” conception is not suitable for characterizing the level two of theory demands and features. Neither the notion of reality as an all-the same unity nor a semantic contraposition of two empirical entities is adequate. Nonetheless, Dilthey’s attempt points in the right direction: differences on level two cannot be explained by the concept of theory itself (level one). Therefore, special features of theory can only be understood from their special tasks. This leads to the realm of objects they are treating. The differences on level two must be linked to a conception of the world of objects. In the light of the warnings of hermeneutics and constructivism, it would not be useful to come up with a new semantic distinction. Instead, it seems to be more appropriate to look at the differences of the object world more abstractly to find out what theories on this level have to do by trying to cope with these differences. It is possible, then, to think about logical traits without fixing any semantic binarity. Empirical reality, then, can be thought of as composed of different logical types. Therefore, level two should refer to structural properties which – empirically combined – cover every variation.

A possible criterion of logical differentiation is the way reality operates. The point of difference, then, could be the contrast of constancy and change. Thus, a distinction can be made between two fundamental logical types, which are complementary and not reducible.

Type 1 is something which (within a certain context of time, space, or logic) is given in a distinct and definite way which means that there is no change and no irregular variation. It refers to consistent entities following fixed rules. Every single case follows the general logic and is like all others and each case completely contains this logic. This type could be named “nomologic” according to traditional terms. Nomological reality shows no surprise, but follows inherent exclusive (and thus mono-logical) rules. Thus, nomology means objectivity in the sense of a final product that is given. Hence, reflection of this kind of reality can lead to understanding and utilization, but it does not influence or change it. Theory and its topic remain separated.

Type 2, in contrast, stands for difference and change. It is based on the interplay of different entities, events, and modes, which build up a dynamic process. As a result, this kind of reality is always composed and multi-logical. It is thus not “given” but permanently generates itself (in interaction with the circumstances). Since this does not imply copies, but rather recreation in which no single case is like another, every case changes and thereby develops its own dynamic. This type may be designated as “autopoietic”, a term coined by Varela, Maturana, and Uribe (1974); widely used today, it serves to identify a capacity for self-organization. Autopoietic reality presents itself not as simply regular, but always special, as a sample of singularities, possibly surprising and emergent. It produces permanent variations and new dynamics, including conflicts and contradictions. This kind of reality shows features of subjectivity in the sense of self-reliance and self-reference. Due to the possibility of differences, reflection opens a space for interventions and influence.

This is a logical scheme. Pure types only exist in textbooks. Empirical reality always appears as a combination of these types. As a result, empirically, we find a wide range of combinations from strictly nomological (for example, gravitation) to mostly autopoietic (for example, social interaction). It is one world, but a world of differences. As regards these differences, there is evidence that the human mind is a hybrid kind of reality with highly autopoietic characteristics. This concerns every science involved. Therefore, psychoanalysis is at level two a special case among special cases. However, it is confronted with additional epistemic consequences (level three), because the aim is to understand psychodynamics including unconscious and latent programs.
DENOTATIVE VERSUS CONNOTATIVE THEORIES

In order to understand this special situation, it is necessary to discuss a general question: What qualities must theories (and their methods) have in order to cope with autopoietic reality? Here, too, we find typical differences. Reality consisting of unchangeable entities can be treated with any analytic method without losing information (even intrusive items). Every method offers the chance of obtaining deeper insights without altering the object. Whatever you do – this kind of reality will consistently offer regularities, which can be treated as rules. In addition, these insights can be transformed into “data” (datum: what is given) which are computable quantities. Data can be separated from circumstances without any loss of information. Thus, nomological reality can be algorithmically reduced to a formula without risks. The results can be formulated in a denotative theory. Denotative theories are artificial languages. They consist of clear signs with unambiguous meanings and a restricting grammar. Signs denote firm entities and features; a restricting grammar allows only a few statements that are unmistakable. Therefore, there is a clear difference between proper and improper use as well as between right and wrong results. Another important aspect is the universalism of this kind of theory: everyone taking part in the premises of a denotative theory understands them the same way and comes to the same results when applying the theory. Thus, a French and a Chinese physicist can easily communicate professionally.

Denotative theories can be instruments independent of circumstances and persons that feature clear-cut methods of control. They are the ideal of an empirical epistemology – finding out independent laws of a definite truth. However, this kind of methodology and theory does not fit when autopoietic reality comes into play. When research has a varying, changing, moving target interacting with its context and thus bringing up surprising novelties, the modes of analytic and algorithmic reduction lead to a fatal loss of information in the end. Likewise, thinking in terms of unchanging and linear causality will lead to a reduced and undue picture, which tends to show only a skeleton instead of the vitality of real life. Here, the costs of abstraction are striking.

Therefore, the more distinct the autopoietic character of reality is, the greater the need for methods and theories that are able to cope with motion, difference, dynamics, contradictions. While denotative theories have to focus on pre-given objects and hold on to them in order to understand autopoietic reality, additional requirements are

- to identify and stabilize entities and relations
- to develop a typical logic and
- to work out the emergence of an individual case.

This three-fold task implies different activities and skills of theories:

- they should actively organize their material in a logical way
- instead of reducing it, they have to keep complexity alive and
- they should be able to follow movements and changes.

This can be achieved by using a connotative symbol system. The main feature of such a theory is the use of concepts (instead of signs) and an open grammar. Signs are exclusive representations of a fixed “thing” while concepts are semantically open to a certain range of empirical and logical variations. By this virtue, concepts can become associated with different appearances of the same: concepts build identities out of differences, but still preserve the differences. This calls for a grammar that allows different forms and combinations of theoretical sentences. Connotative theories are not arbitrary, but they allow thinking in various directions. This enables them to cope with a reality that differs, changes, and moves, as well as to stay in contact with a systematic pattern and with the peculiarities of a singularity.

To understand and use, for example, the concept of “defence” it is necessary to stay in contact with the complete system of understanding as well as with the psychic process both on a typical level and on the level of a particular case. Since “defence” stands for different forms, functions, and outputs, this concept cannot be fixed to only one phenomenon or to only one way of operating. On the other hand, every attempt to fix the concept of “defence” to an exclusive pattern reduces its achievements. In order to create a symbolic space for variations and dynamics, theory has to stand by and preserve the divide between differences instead of eliminating them. The main task of theory, then, is to prepare and guide interpretations. Therefore, such theories do not offer ready-made solutions or formulae. Connotative theories operate as recipes; they are a background service of thinking – and not the thinking itself.

These necessary features of connotative theories have far-reaching consequences. To sort out entities out of an unmarked space, to construct types out of variations and to reconstruct the fate of individual configurations is – and remains – a risky activity. None of these can produce a final result and any attempt remains incomplete due to a double problem. First, one has the scope of the possibilities. There is no one psychodynamic, but rather a multitude of forms and changes. Defence, for instance,
may be part of this or of another context and may take this or another form. Therefore, in these cases, theory does not only create its topic, it has to survive the gap in each and every case, and has to be open for novelties and irregularities.

Second, the other problem results from the limitations of theories. Inevitably, theories can never consider every relevant aspect or the real importance. If they capture one dimension, they cannot capture the others at the same time; if they stand for any possibility, they cannot apply to every single one – every theory has to reduce reality to a logic order. However, every fixed theory develops its virtues, and it is precisely this capacity that reduces its view for others. Concepts suited for analyzing primitive defence are not useful for understanding, for instance, phallic narcissism. However, it is possible to view the same action from both points of view. As a result of these features, there is a systematic possibility of having different theories for the same topic with different performances and limitations. Each of the theories highlights some traits and aspects, but remains vague concerning others. Accordingly, they are not able to substitute each other. This applies to models of a certain cause as well as to systematic theories. Therefore, different models of reality can be developed without excluding each other. The multiple structure of autopoeitic reality leads to plurality, a multi-paradigmatic field of theories.

Therefore, it is no surprise to see the field of connotative theories being segregated into groups, schools, and sects centred on paradigms or traditions. However, a closer look shows that even using a common paradigm does not necessarily lead to identical results. It is, for example, easy to find many different understandings of “object-relation” or “self” in psychoanalysis (Bacal & Newman, 1990). This is because paradigms are not univocal. On the other hand, it is sometimes not easy to understand the differences between different theories relating to the same. Sometimes the same is said in different words, sometimes the same appears as something completely different. Often we find a combination of differences and resemblance. This, too, points out the ambiguity of these theories: Connotative theories present themselves as corridors of thinking with fuzzy rules and edges. This implies another important matter: connotative theories depend highly on the way they are used. The theory chosen is not yet a criterion for the results: even a good theory can be brought down by using it in an uninspired manner, and a frugal concept can be brilliant if used intelligently. Only when applied to theories, is their potential – and their deficits – revealed. However, the way theories are used is deeply influenced by circumstances. Thus, habits and convictions have an important impact – for better or for worse.

**SOME CONSEQUENCES CONCERNING INTERNAL DISCUSSIONS, PRACTICE AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION**

What can be derived from all of these features is that connotative theories are never final. This is because some topics are continuously changing and developing, but also because of the problems of finding an internal balance – thus, they remain works in progress. Of course, this situation leads to extreme complications in the understanding, discussion and justification of theories. Connotative theories are not only different, but consequently do not share the same meta-theory (e.g., notions on the adequate methods and right form of theory). Therefore, there is no undisputable common ground or reference system for strategies of justification. Instead of an examination based on consensus, there is frequently an endless debate over substantial as well as epistemic questions (while denotative theories quickly reach a pragmatic consensus). Thus, discussions sometimes sound like Babylonian confusion. These disputes do not end, but rather each theory remains as winner – at least in the opinion of its followers.

At first glance, this struggle – instead of cooperation – is not very comfortable. However, from a more distant point of view, the presence of different paradigms offers the possibility to master and preserve much more complexity – many points of view offer a more complete picture of autopoeitic reality than one single view can. Hence, the emergence of different sociological, psychological or historical theories is not necessarily a sign of immaturity. Instead this indicates maturity if it shows a capacity for coexistence (which always is a strain on institutions). Viewed in this way, paradigmatic monopoly – as far as connotative theories are concerned – can be a sign of underdevelopment, since it demonstrates unfitness to bear differences.

Another difference refers to forms of practice resulting from theory. Denotative theories provide instrumental forms of practice, which everyone can use in the same way if instructed correctly. Each of us can technically use a telephone by following instructions. By contrast, connotative theories can only hint at possible ways of intervening in complexity. The dynamics of autopoeitic reality prevent them from knowing the results. This is why therapy, education, and politics cannot be shaped in a final definite manner. Theories of practice remain to a certain degree ambiguous. In order to be usable they must be transformed into some kind of personal knowledge based on experience and preferences. Practice, then, stimulates a new autopoeitic process, which may lead to unexpected developments. Everyone has to develop their own way of using the propositions of the model and of legitimizing the choice.
Last but not least, there is a self-reflecting crossover in psychological, sociological, economic theory. It is well-known that these theories pose not only their questions, but to a certain degree their instruments from the world they reflect. Therefore, not only the application of theories, but also the theories themselves are impregnated by some features of their target. Ideology, power structures or Zeitgeist may influence thought. Nonetheless, findings – right or wrong – re-enter reality and become part of the current system’s dynamics. Of course, this interaction affects the development and fate of theories: it is their fate to take part in the dynamics of the world they reflect. Still, their outcome influences the development of the same world they reflect. This is especially true of psychoanalysis. Waelder points out that mere knowledge of hysterical symptoms has made several forms of hysteria disappear (Waelder, 1962). Moreover, Freud’s insights about repression, sublimation, psychopathology of everyday reality have, of course, changed our life. The same could be said about the study of prejudice, the theory of deficit spending or monetarism, and much more. All of these results gain political relevance and by this provoke political reactions. While no one would deny the formula of a chemical reaction, a psychoanalytic (or sociological) interpretation will always find a critical echo not only from inside academia, but also from outside. Every affected or interested party will dispute or (mis)use the theories for his or her own purposes.

Another aspect is the institutional logic of theories. Theories are systems of symbols, but they depend on some kind of social organization. Here too, we find far-reaching differences between denotative and connotative theories. Denotative theories can be easily stabilized because they are unambiguous and valid without reference to their context. Therefore, they are not affected in their logic by their social context — the truth of a mathematical formula does not depend on the personal relations between the members of the institution. In addition, they can use technical devices and any form of organization and division of labour without altering their topics. Thus, denotative theories can be socially formatted without any effect on its results. Consequently, denotative theories can easily establish some kind of normal business and institutional normality. It is not the same with connotative theories. They are unstable and interact with their social context — pupils tend to identify with the positions of their teachers (or rebel against them by taking confronting positions), the acceptance of propositions depend, at least partly, on networking, marketing, power, and fashion trends. These problems deeply influence institutional dynamics. Instead of building up routines and zones of undisputed practice, they remain burdened by the insecurity of their practice and the involvement in external and internal dynamics.

Thus, the institutional process only can offer a kind of fragile “phantom normalcy” (Goffman, 1961).

All of this is a heavy strain and it is not surprising that such theories are in need of protection. Different strategies are used to reduce complexity and it seems as if sometimes the means of keeping the institutions operational are as delicate as the problem itself. One way to ease the strain between theory and practice is to avoid contact and avoid overestimating one’s own possibilities (and ignore those of others) in order to secure a fragile identity. Other ways are to concentrate on only one dimension of a heterogeneous complexity, or to cling to those aspects which can be treated with denotative means or even to treat autopoietic reality as if it were nomologic (a method to reduce complexity widely used by behaviourists). Even though this is possible and useful to a certain degree — if the function of remaining on the safe side prevails, the specific autopoietic aspects of reality become commonplace or are completely lost.

PSYCHOANALYSIS AS NORMAL CONNOTATIVE THEORY

In consideration of the above, we must speak of a double nexus of problems relating to connotative theories (for a more detailed explanation see: Schülein, 1999):

- On the one hand, they suffer from being fuzzy systems of symbols lacking external stabilization;
- On the other hand, some of them are involved in their topic.

The two aspects can amplify each other: A theory with fuzzy concepts is more at risk of being misunderstood and misused. Especially less-developed forms of thought are at risk of expressing a problem instead of understanding. For instance, pre-psychoanalytic theories of dreams or unconsciousness contained some important understandings mixed up with a lot of superstition and ideology. Freud’s writings marked a giant step forward but, as has been shown by many scholars, remained deeply rooted in the convictions of his time. To a certain extent, this mix-up can be overcome by the advancement of theory. However, the structural relation remains — what is now “modern” psychoanalysis will be looked upon as out-of-date in the future. Nonetheless, the entanglement remains and develops. The advancement of theory is not just a question of eliminating “false” premises or errors. Old ways of being involved in the world are recognized, criticized, and replaced by new ways. Still, this is not only a restriction of theory. Only through this entanglement can connotative theory achieve its goals. Sometimes, the achievements are
even a function of this entanglement. Freud was deeply entrenched in the patriarchal society of his time (and its crisis). This experience drove him and sustained him on his way to a new understanding.

Connotative theories not only are influenced by their circumstances; sometimes they gain their qualities from being entangled. It is quite normal, then, that discoveries emerge as mixtures of ideas and ideology. However, it seems as if this kind of mixture persists. Every new attempt shares the restrictions and distortions of its time. Considering these aspects, it becomes easy to understand that some contributions to the development of a theory inevitably get lost in the risks of imagination or fall into esoteric inaccessibility. This sometimes forces an unpleasant choice between research, which can be controlled but remains limited or idle, and the risks of speculation.

Psychodynamics are the emergent effect of psychic complexity and as such autopoietic in nature. Trying to understand psychodynamics, then, leads to the problems described of method and theory. This aim becomes even more complex if unconscious processes come into play. Unconsciousness implies a double-access barrier. Just like every psychic event, it cannot be grasped directly. In addition, one is confronted with what Freud ascertained: resistance to clarification. Everyone knows what it means to be driven by compulsions, anxiety, or irrational programs (through self-experience and by watching others); everyone acts upon tentative feelings and fantasies about what is going on. This combination of only indirect access and resistance hinders an evaluation.

Since traditional empirism relies on undisputable clearness, the “tacit dimensions” of reality (Polanyi, 1967) have been classified as unintelligible. Thus, empirism reduces the concept of experience and excludes the possibilities of understanding the tacit functions. Psychoanalysis has expanded the concept of experience into spontaneous and subliminal realms, and has developed special arrangements to establish contact with the logic of psychodynamics and its unconscious aspects. This was an ingenious idea, which widely expanded the horizon of reflection, but its practical realization is not easy to control. Methodologically, countertransference is the common base of most modern psychoanalytic theories (see Gabbard, 1995). Hereby, the inner response to external events is the starting point for further procedure. Even though psychoanalysis has created elaborated training methods, they remain a kind of “personal knowledge” (Polanyi, 1964) which is impregnated with subjectivity and methodologically instable. Without doubt, psychoanalytic methods are fallible and lack instrumental support. Errors are not avoidable.

In addition, even if reliable understanding of psychodynamics can be achieved, it is not easy to put the results into an adequate form. What Freud called the “primary process” is in form and content quite different from the “secondary process” in which we express the rational logic of experiences and thoughts. This forces psychoanalysis to use concepts and terms with distinct pictorial qualities (such as: “defence” or “transference”). By this theory, it tries to symbolize those aspects that resist symbolization. This, too, is risky and open to attack, since such analogous concepts can never attain the preciseness of signs.

Taking into account what has been said about the systematic profile of connotative theories, these features of psychoanalysis are not at all a symptom of being unscientific or underdeveloped. Psychoanalysis tries to understand special forms of psychodynamics and must be measured by its ability to master the task—a task that implies many risks and is thereby in reality torturous for theory and method. Psychoanalysis suffers the pains of a connotative theory dealing with extremely difficult topics. The seemingly chaotic struggle for unity and clearness is indeed an expression and the management of the resulting problems of psychoanalysis.

Moreover, the coexistence of not only one but a multitude of theories applied and interpreted in different ways, the fact that nearly everything is permanently disputed and insecure, and the constant attempts to formulate and reformulate theory, are also the logical consequence of its goal. Additional problems stem from the effects of self-reflection. Dealing with phenomenon like transference and defence inevitably collides and interferes with everyday philosophy and calls for some kind of personal competence, which is no matter of course—even (or especially) in science. This is quite a challenging—and sometimes an overwhelming—task that weighs heavily on the institutional as well as on the personal balance.

This has given rise to demand for mechanisms of coping (see above). As an institution, psychoanalysis has tended towards isolation and the avoidance of contact with the outside world. As a theory, psychoanalysis has for a long time tried to become established by clinging strictly to Freud’s writings. This self-contentment has brought stability, but at high cost. It is true that the more-or-less exclusive reliance on Freud prevented psychoanalysis from falling to pieces for a long time. However, Freud’s views were a beginning, and much of what he thought was preliminary. By overestimating their maturity, psychoanalysis hindered its further development. The reduced contact with the outside world made life immediately easier because it avoided difficult lines of argument (which psychoanalysis was not able to withstand at the time). However, it also avoided the development of abilities that are needed to maintain a position, to convince and draw the right attention in a world where attention is fought over and scarce. For a long time, psychoanalysis has tended
to neglect these indispensable necessities. This has also contributed to much misuse and misunderstanding that has accompanied its history. The current situation of psychoanalysis is at least in part a result of these deficits.

CONCLUSION

Considering the relationship between psychoanalysis and other forms of theory, one may state that psychoanalytic theory shares some features with other connotative theories (level two of Kluckhohn & Murray (1953)), while some features are very peculiar (level tree). Therefore, it is pointless to expect psychoanalysis to meet the criteria of a denotative theory (which is another type of theory on level two). Only from this false perspective does psychoanalysis appear as an ugly duckling (as Waelder (1962) stated). Of course, this does not mean that it is not necessary for it to fulfill any criteria. Exactly the opposite is true. It is precisely in the case of connotative theories that extraordinary care — which means permanent discussion and systematic development — is needed. I hope that psychoanalysis will manage to make up for these past omissions and present itself as a modern science in theory and practice with publicly visible achievements in the near future. There are some encouraging signs.

REFERENCES


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