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Making a Space for the Interchange among Psychoanalytic Movements

Rainer Funk

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Speaking¹ as a representative of the International Erich Fromm Society I have the privilege particularly to refer to Erich Fromm and his ongoing contribution to psychoanalysis. Moreover, Fromm was one of the founders of the IFPS in 1962 and therefore I may introduce the topic by some historical remarks.

1. The central question of psychoanalysis

In 1962 the need for an interchange among psychoanalysts stimulated Schwidder, Fromm and Caruso to establish – besides the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) – another platform for exchange: The International Forum of Psychoanalytic Societies (IFPS). What the founders had particularly in mind were "personal encounters, that in the first line shall enable a *free* discussion of psychoanalytic theory and therapy"². In those years the dogmatically oriented and authoritarian IPA did not allow psychoanalysts to present and discuss their ideas if they rejected libido theory. Thus the main motive for a new platform for interchange was a "free" discussion. Furthermore they planned joint publications and forms of communication to exchange the respective experiences in regard

1 The paper was presented at a "Round Table" on the XIVth International Forum of Psychoanalysis of the "International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies" (IFPS) on the topic: "Psychoanalysis in Transition – The Interplay of Internal and External World". The Forum took place in May 2006 in Rome.

2 From the constitutional document signed in Amsterdam on July 30, 1962, by Werner Schwidder and Franz Heigl (representing the Deutsche Psychoanalytische Gesellschaft), Erich Fromm and Jorge Silva (representing the Mexican Psychoanalytic Society) and Igor Caruso and Raoul Schindler (representing the Wiener Arbeitskreis für Tiefenpsychologie). ["Dabei denken diese Gesellschaften besonders an persönliche Begegnungen, die vor allem der freien Diskussion der psychoanalytischen Theorie und Praxis dienen sollen; fernerhin an gemeinschaftliche Publikationen und Mitteilungen von Erfahrung in Ausbildungsfragen."]



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to psychoanalytic training.

The main motive to establish IFPS was the restriction of free discussion in the IPA in those years. One has to admit that this point has changed in the meantime through new policies of the IPA. There is much more tolerance for other approaches to psychoanalysis and others are invited to join the mainstream in the IPA and are not a priori excluded or offended.

Another point should also be stressed: From the very beginning of the IFPS there was never an opposition against Freud – on the contrary. To quote Fromm³: "Freud laid the foundation for psychoanalytic theory and therapy, and all forthcoming of our science is a further development of Freud's ideas and not constructions of theories *against* Freud." There is no doubt that quite a lot of Freud's assumptions were revised, particularly where these assumptions are connected with his instinctual understanding of sexuality and pregenital sexuality. Fromm himself never grew tired of focusing the interest on what is common to more or less all psychoanalytic societies and movements and thus can be called the core elements or basic positions of psychoanalysis. Most generally speaking there are two basic positions: first, psychoanalysis is a theory to discover what is unconscious, and second, psychoanalysis is a therapy that uses affective insight into the unconscious to cure.⁴ The main issue of psychoanalysis is always to get in contact with what is unconscious, either because it never came to consciousness or it has to be repressed again.

For Freud and his followers the main accesses to what is unconscious were dreams and other symbolic expressions of the unconscious (as myths, fairy tales and so on); moreover, free associations, characterological and symptomatic formations, parapractical behavior, transference and counter-transference phenomena and finally defense and resistance reactions. Doubtless there are many more accesses to what is unconscious and doubtless there should be an interchange with other psychological approaches as for instance hypnotherapeutic techniques or concepts of bodily language. Furthermore, today we have fascinating possibilities of observing behavior and affections by analyzing videos or by the neuro-imaging techniques of neurobiology. Of course there should be

3 Quoted from an abstract of the paper Fromm presented at the 1961 Düsseldorf Conference of the Deutsche Psychoanalytische Gesellschaft. The abstract was distributed to all participants in this conference. ["Freud legte die Grundlagen zur psychoanalytischen Theorie und Therapie, und alle Entwicklung unserer Wissenschaft ist eine Weiterentwicklung der Freudschen Erkenntnisse und nicht die Konstruktion neuer Erkenntnisse *gegen* Freud."]

4 Cf. the abstract of the mentioned Düsseldorf paper that starts as follows: "Die Grundposition der Psychoanalyse ist als Theorie die Erforschung des Unbewussten und als Therapie die Verwendung der Einsicht in das Unbewusste zur Heilung."



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an intense interchange with findings in the field of early infant observation or neurology. Nevertheless our main interest as psychoanalysts should be and still is the revelation of what is unconscious and what determines our neurotic or quotidian behavior.

Today there are so many most interesting findings in adjacent fields to follow that we are in danger of forgetting our main profession of being psychoanalysts: to get in contact with what is unconscious. And if this round table discusses the creation of a space for the interchange between psychoanalytic movements, then we all should remind us of the fact that the main issue of psychoanalysis is to discover what is unconscious and to get in contact with what is unconscious. This should be the guideline for all policies of the IFPS and for all attempts of making a space for interchange.

In the following I would also like to apply this guideline to the subject of this round table. The title insinuates that today there is too little space for interchange between psychoanalytic movements and that, contrary to all the wonderful techniques we have today to communicate by internet and e-mail and to visit conferences all over the world, there is more and more of a distance between the psychoanalytic groups and societies and a sort of indifference in regard to a *real* interchange and a *mutual* interest.

It looks like a growing narcissistic development. The psychoanalytic groups feel threatened by the mainstream of the humanities and the empirical sciences that ignore any unconscious dimension. Fixated on their own survival as psychoanalytic institutions they compensate these feelings of being devalued by projecting them to other psychoanalytic groups. Now these groups are devalued through a lack of interest in them and through a fact-related devaluation of them and at the same time by idealizing the own approach to psychoanalysis. Such an unconscious narcissistic dynamic may be in some cases a plausible explanation for what is going on between psychoanalytic groups (and maybe in some respects also between IPA and IFPS). Then, indeed, there is no place for interchange because the others have to be kept on distance or serve only to mirror the own position.

I would like to add another possible psychodynamic to psychoanalytically understand the possible obstacles for making a space for the interchange between local, national and international psychoanalytic groups. For this I shall use Erich Fromm's social characterological approach to the unconscious. (By the way, according to my knowledge this approach is the most interesting psychoanalytic attempt to understand the interplay of internal and external world.)



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2. What needs to be unconscious today?

According to Fromm, most of what is unconscious has to be unconscious because it conflicts with the economic and social requirements of a given society. Fromm's approach to what is socially unconscious implies that what a society needs to stabilize itself is usually not identical with what human beings need to develop their psychic, spiritual, and bodily potentialities and to grow as human beings. Thus it is most fruitful to ask what in our society must remain unconscious.

Of course there is no society as such but only social classes, milieus, groups and subgroups. Therefore I focus my interest in what is unconscious to those social groups that participate in the so-called postmodern way of life that becomes more and more significant in public life. I have described the social character orientation of people who participate in this postmodern way of life as the I-am-me orientation, since in their conscious behavior they show a distinct performance of their Ego. They create their own life-style and worlds of experiences or they want to be connected with and to participate in those created and enacted worlds. Both versions, the active Ego-performer and the passive We-searcher, are showing a specific way to experience their Ego that cannot be explained with a purely egoistic or narcissistic experience of Ego. In my understanding it is a new collective way to create oneself and of having a sense of identity by creating one's Ego anew and in contrast to all what may be expected.

Let me sketch a little bit more the conscious self-presentation of the I-am-me-character type, also in order to get an idea of what they have to veil and to repress. The I-am-me-oriented person strives passionately to determine himself or herself freely, spontaneously, and autonomously, unconstrained by provisions or conditions, driven by a desire for a fabricated or artificially produced reality. The decisive motivation is a *desire for a self-determined, I-am-me-oriented fabrication of reality*, more specifically, of the surrounding reality that is self-created as well as the reality that one is through self-creation—according to the motto "If you don't make something of yourself, you are nothing!"

The conviction informing the person with an I-am-me orientation is: "Don't let anyone tell you who you are. You are who *you* are." Everything is arbitrary. Everyone and everything can and should be taken lightly, be handled playfully. There is nothing that there isn't, so anything goes. And if anything goes, everything is okay. Nothing exists that isn't in a state of flux. No one has the right to prescribe what is good or evil, right or wrong, healthy or unhealthy, authentic or false, reality or illusion. The only thing that counts is the I-am-me-oriented fabri-



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cation of reality, according to the motto: "I am myself."

Similar to Fromm's distinction between an active (sadistic) and a passive (masochistic) aspect in the authoritarian character orientation, I differentiate between an active postmodern personality type, the man or woman of action, who conceives and stages lifestyles and realities as events, and a passive personality type, the person who passionately participates in staged realities and mass entertainment and spectacles, as a form of association or togetherness with others.

There is not only a new way of saying and experiencing "me," but also a new way of experiencing "we," a new form of sociality and public spirit which expresses itself through a new sense of "we-ness." Due to the limitation of time I am not able to present the typical traits of this new social character orientation, but can only mention that they are actionist and like to participate in all sorts of events and life-style-happenings; they show a new form of creativity by knowing how to apply techniques, are fascinated by blurring all boundaries and like to exercise control and to manage whatever can be managed; they produce and enact feelings and are animated by produced feelings in a totally sentimental way; they are practicing a new form of sociability where being emotionally related is replaced by having contacts and by participating in happenings.

Besides these character traits, there are a number of striking observations I have made in dealing with persons having this new character orientation.

- Initially, the overemphasis on the spontaneous, totally independent, and self-determined production of reality is noticeable, the most precious commodity of the I-am-me-oriented person. The at times almost manic rejection of provisions, conditions, restrictions, and dependencies belongs to the creed of the I-am-me orientation and contrasts starkly with the real but unconscious dependency on the instruments of animation.
- Also prominent is the fact that all feelings of personal weakness and limitation—that is, feelings of helplessness, passiveness, powerlessness, and isolation—are avoided and denied by the person with an I-am-me orientation. My personal observation is that the unawareness of such negative feelings toward oneself corresponds with the prevalence of dreams dealing with these denied feelings—for example, unbearable helplessness, passiveness, weakness, isolation, and powerlessness—in the form of nightmares.
- I-am-me-characters have a problem of commitment, which is accompanied by an increasing loss of individual feelings of love, longing, faithfulness, closeness, affection, etc., and is compensated by an increased need for contact, on the one hand, and by "fabricated" feelings, on the other hand.



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- The problem of commitment corresponds to a clearly recognizable problem with separation. Conflicts as well as critical and aggressive feelings arising from conflicts are to a great degree intentionally overlooked and eliminated but not resolved through misrepresentation, positive thinking (respectively feeling), or "painless" separation (with compensation).
- Equally striking is the decrease in important ego functions and abilities such as the ability to control impulses, to test reality, to tolerate frustration, to perceive ambivalences, often leading to the escape into illusionary realities—according to the motto: choose another project and enter a new reality.
- Another unique feature of the I-am-me orientation is the generally counterphobic reaction to the structural affects fear, guilt, and shame. Instead of being afraid, the postmodern person seeks thrills; instead of admitting weaknesses, he or she displays excessive self-confidence; instead of being ashamed, he or she takes delight in staring at the object of his or her shamelessness.
- Since these affects are not available for superego and ego ideal formation, central functions of the superego and the ego ideal are weakened. This is why persons with an I-am-me orientation feel threatened when they have to stand up for predetermined norms and obligations. The dependency of many I-am-me-oriented persons on internalized norms and ideals is not only evident in their proverbial cynicism but in a compensation through increased dependency on groups and institutions proffering ideals and norms as "fabricated" ability (for example, in the form of ethics boards or political correctness).

How one can explain these very different impacts of the postmodern I-am-me-character orientation? What is conscious and what is the unconscious reality? And what must not become conscious?

Consciously the I-am-me-person feels omnipotent, without any restriction and limitation. All is possible, and also the impossible is possible – with the help of techniques, management programs or other "fabricated" abilities and illusions or – if you are born again – with the help of Jesus. This possibility of reliance on fabrications has increased infinitely through digital technology and the electronic media. Today the human being is capable of achieving much more if he or she does not rely on his or her individual human abilities but on the abilities of his or her products, that is, the capabilities of technology and techniques, operational



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devices and measures, manuals, and programs.⁵

Using "fabricated" ability instead of practicing "human" ability and strengthening the own human powers risks increasingly alienating oneself from one's own *human* powers. The psychically relevant changes occur above all in areas which up to now were exclusively or almost exclusively regulated through the implementation of *human* abilities: in the area of the individual personality and in the area of social existence. Digital technology and the electronic media have also made totally new developments in *psychotechniques and sociotechniques* possible. Following the widespread collapse of traditional systems of order these offer, so to speak, the urgently required "operating systems" and "software" for personality development and the organization of social life.⁶

The more we rely on the "fabricated" abilities of our products, the more we are inclined to disregard our human abilities that are ours only inasmuch as we are practicing them. In order to demonstrate this consequential change in subject in the postmodern construction of reality, I will not only speak of "technical" as opposed to "human" ability but also of "fabricated" or "made" ability. What I mean is an ability that actively arises from the product. The double meaning of both fabricated and made is intended and welcome: whoever relies on fabricated or made ability corresponds to the postmodern I-am-me-oriented person displaying an extreme preoccupation with "doing," "making," or "acting," yet his or her modes of expression additionally have the semblance of the "fabricated" or the "made," the suggested, the synthetic, the artificial, the simulated. Whoever counts on "fabricated" ability has "fabricated" feelings as well. He or she impresses with a "fabricated" personality; his or her experience of relationship is directed by "fabricated" interactions, and the children's upbringing is not that of the father or the mother but that "fabricated" by child-rearing manuals (and carried out by the parents).

The conscious feeling of unlimited Ego-potency by using fabricated abilities (instead of own human abilities) is only possible if the persons do not become aware of how dependent they are on all these fabricated abilities and that they

5 This fundamental change can be illustrated on the concept of "technical ability" itself. According to the Brockhaus encyclopedia, the concept "techne" still had the meaning of "art" and "skill" for the Greeks, and denoted human "artistic skillfulness to achieve something specific." When "technical ability" is spoken of here and now it no longer denotes a human skill or ability but the competencies or "skills" of products created by human beings. "Techne" has become know-how in dealing with products. We no longer must be able to do something ourselves; instead, we must merely know how to use these products in order to utilize their competencies. The human subject is no longer able or capable but the personal computer or the software or the management system.

6 Due to time limitation the next paragraph was not presented to the audience of the Forum.



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are nothing and totally powerless, empty, weak, passive, lifeless and without any "anima", if they are not constituted by the animation of fabricated abilities, that is to say, if they are not "re-animated". I-am-me-oriented characters feel unconsciously totally dependent and without vitality, and it is this unconscious dependence and lifelessness that makes them seek for self-determination, feel positive and become addicted to events and happenings and all that which is active in order not to get aware of their unconscious feelings.

The repression of those feelings has to be very strong. Only a deep-reaching defense mechanism can make the I-am-me-oriented person sure that he will not be confronted with his dependency and emptiness. It is therefore not surprising that the I-am-me-oriented person seeks a symbiosis with the fabricated abilities of his or her products by a projective identification with the fabricated abilities.

To make this point clearer: The experience of relationship that is typical for a projective identification was first described in the therapeutic setting, namely, where it is a matter of aggressive aspects of the self belonging to the patient but perceived by the therapist. The way in which a therapist reacts to this projection is of decisive significance for the patient. If in this situation the therapist directs his or her attention more closely to the ego experience of the person from whom the aggression proceeds, a strong denial of his or her own aggression is observable as well as a heightened interest in how the person identified with the aggression deals with the aggression projected onto him or her: whether he or she can direct it, or tries to conceal it, or even reacts to it in a devastating manner (by discontinuing the patient's therapy), or whether he or she can interpret it.

If the therapist affords the projection a "psychic space," he or she gives the patient the opportunity to observe how he or she deals with that aspect of the self which is generally experienced as extremely threatening—whether he or she fears it in the same way, or whether he or she can exorcise it. If the therapist is successful in doing the latter, he or she demonstrates a less threatening reaction for both, establishing the preconditions for a re-introjection in the patient.

The particular self-interest of the patient in this type of projection exists in his or her placement of something which he or she cannot accept in himself or herself onto the therapist, in order to monitor how he or she handles it. This moment of monitoring on the part of the patient is essential, because it causes him or her to recognize that he or she is in control and can observe how the therapist is fighting against this projection. In this way the patient's ego no longer experiences itself as being passively threatened but as actively controlling, resulting in the "role reversal" typical of the projective identification.



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In the meantime the significance of projective identification has also been described as a mode of communication and is also applied to other areas of complicated interactions extending even to management consulting. The process of projective identification is thus able to explain what actually goes on psychically when a person with an I-am-me orientation replaces his or her human ability with "fabricated" ability.

Because the contemporary human being is constantly confronted with the inadequacy and disgracefulness of his or her own powers and ego competencies in comparison with the greater effectiveness of "made" and "fabricated" ability, he or she denies his or her human ability and projects it onto objects capable of greater achievement—onto capabilities and techniques or technologies created by the human being. Now he or she concentrates totally on discovering how the machines, the (software) programs, the operational mechanisms, the staging techniques, the program for customer relations, personality development courses, media-assisted presentations, etc. can construct and shape reality for him or her.

In utilizing the competencies of his or her products the postmodern human being causes them to be creative and to construct reality, a creativity that does not have anything more at all to do with his or her own human ability. In a projective way he or she has "housed" his or her human ability in "made" ability, and can then, as observer and agent, as user and as man or woman of action, experience what "made" ability can do.

The implementation of the projective identification impacts the intended role reversal: the person with an I-am-me orientation is neither preoccupied with discovering his or her own human ability in the "fabricated" ability nor with coming into contact with his or her ego competencies through the use of "fabricated" ability (as is the case with the projection of the individual powers onto authorities in the authoritarian character orientation). On the contrary, his or her striving is aimed at having nothing more to do with his or her much more modest productive powers in the long run.

The person with an I-am-me orientation must focus all his or her attention on the direction and control of the "made" ability. He or she doesn't really mind doing this at all; otherwise people would not spend hours engrossed in trying to find out what their cell phones or a specific software is capable of doing – except, of course, if he or she is deprived of the possibility of control when the "made" ability fails to function.



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3. Conclusions: Obstacles to and opportunities for making a space for the interchange of psychoanalytic movements

Now, what is the connection of these postmodern phenomena with the question of making a space for the interchange of psychoanalytic movements?

First of all I tried to give an explanation beyond the narcissism argument of why there is not enough space for the interchange. My answer is: the more the I-am-me-orientation determines also the relationships of psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic societies, the less emotional relatedness and interest in what is going on in the other may be expected and will be practiced. There *is* a common space for contacts and events, for presentation and performances, but there is a diminishing space for commitment and common responsibility and for the future of psychoanalysis.

Secondly, I wanted to show what really should be our common interests and for which questions we should make a space. We know a lot about the repressed sexuality in former times and what *was* unconscious; but we know little about what is *now* unconscious in all of us. Nowadays, the I-am-me-orientation is very influential and emerges more and more in all aspects of life. It also penetrates psychoanalytic theory and therapy, the organization of health systems and the organization of psychoanalytic training und societies.

I would like to make this last point more explicit by adding some remarks.

(1) A first remark refers to our own unconscious feelings as psychoanalysts. According to my own experience and to reports of colleagues about their feelings we doubtless feel to a large extent not only devalued by our patients but increasingly also made impotent, because we have to be identified with the patients' impotence and weakness and are controlled by them in how we cope with being ineffective and without therapeutic potency.

(2) But it is not only the problem of projective identification with the patients' feelings of inner impotence. Inasmuch as psychoanalysis is focused on what is unconscious, the ways of getting in contact with unconscious feelings, strivings, conflicts, fantasies and so on, are bound to interpretation and affective insight. Yet psychoanalytic interpretation and affective insight are hermeneutic means. They cannot be replaced by empirical methods which today dominate the field of the social sciences and the humanities. Nevertheless we feel the public pressure that our treatment has to fulfill the standards of empirical methods and that we have to offer empirical proofs to be effective.

There are many ways to escape those inferiority feelings. One way is to avoid the contact with what is unconscious and to replace it by speaking about it or



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just by conversation. Another way to escape is to construct highly complicated and sophisticated theories and to coin new terms and concepts. I am unable to follow many of the papers in our psychoanalytic journals since I cannot get in contact with the reality and the experiences behind those terms and concepts. Another way to escape inferiority feelings is to join powerful psychoanalytic organizations that seem to be beyond all doubt.

(3) A third remark refers to our own being seduced to compensate our feelings of impotence by projecting our therapeutic potency into therapeutic techniques and manuals which then are more powerful and effective than we are with our human and therapeutic faculties. That is to say that we do the same as the I-am-me-oriented person. We are convinced that techniques and manuals are more powerful and effective than our compassionate feelings, ideas, intuitions and our being *emotionally* related to a patient.

Due to economic interests and so called scientific standards we are confronted with requirements to introduce psychotechniques in treatment and sociotechniques into the organisation of the health system – techniques, that are independent from the respective psychoanalyst and his or her very personal therapeutic abilities. More and more people are convinced that "made" and "fabricated" abilities – condensed in programs and techniques – shall replace human abilities because the products are more effective than the producer and the instruments of managing are more capable than the manager. Competence is no more an attribute of a person and his or her human potency but of a technique one has to apply. Care management programs are wiser, more competent and more effective than the person of the therapist ever can be.

Due to this development, we are confronted with a bureaucratization on all levels. We not only have to learn the newest techniques and the application of manuals stipulated by insurance companies, our treatment has to be focused on symptoms and on repairing defects. We have to collect points for our advanced trainings and to report about the proceedings of the treatment. Not to forget the blessings of quality management for psychotherapists.

All these mostly stupid things that prevent us from focusing on the unconscious in the patient and in ourselves and that threaten the idea of psychoanalysis are – as I understand it – part of a symbiotic system between the all-powerful reality of sociotechniques and psychotechniques on the one side and the powerless human being who has submitted himself and herself to the control mechanisms in order to avoid becoming aware of his and her inner impotence and powerlessness and their dependency on fabricated potency on the other side.

To make a space for interchange would require first of all to overcome the social



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amnesia of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic societies and to become aware in our days of what Fromm called the social unconscious. Or to put it in the terms of the topic of this Forum: Discussing the interplay of internal and external world, we should become aware of the role economic and social requirements play in regard to what is unconscious and repressed.