

On Working-Through *

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Four questions can help us to tackle this concept.

1) In the case discussed in 'La Direction de la Cure' (Écrits), when the mistress relates her famous dream to Lacan's patient and he recovers his powers miraculously there and then, what prevents us from speaking about a working-through?

2) Why is it that once Freud had elaborated this concept in 1914 no one wrote anything serious about it for at least thirty years? A survey of the manuals of analytic technique by the first and second generation of Freud's pupils bears little fruit here.

3) Why are there so few references to literature in Freud's papers on technique when his work is well-known for the abundance of precisely such references?

4) Why has the term 'working-through' itself posed so many problems, to the extent that Lacan could say in the Écrits (p.249), that it has "*désespéré les traducteurs*"?

Let us start with this last question. At the moment when Strachey was translating the 1914 article 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through', the term *Durcharbeitung* had a precise translation: *working out*. Freud's term evoked, at that time, a reference to musical theory. In sonata form, there are traditionally three times: the introduction, the development and the conclusion. *Durcharbeitung* (or *Durchführung*) designates the second of these, the musical time which involves the treatment of the theme or subject of the introduction which is now complicated and elaborated by a varied treatment in different keys. The theme is disintegrated into its constituent parts and these are then combined and varied before returning, in the final cadence, to the original key of the introduction. There is thus an explicit tension between the work of *Durcharbeitung* and repetition, a tension that musicologists have situated as the key dynamic of sonata form. Hence it is perhaps no accident that the two terms, repetition and working-through, are found juxtaposed in Freud's title.

If Strachey was familiar with the musical connotation of the term, as were other students of Freud, why did he avoid the contemporary term of *working out*? Perhaps because working out is what you do in a gym, not what you do in a consulting room. The inconvenience is that the term Strachey chooses, working-through, implies something which is not present in Freud's conception, a progress which is different from the analytic work discussed in the 1914 article. This difference is clearly demonstrated in Strachey's choice to ignore the changes made by Freud to the second version of the article. Freud wrote at first: "the patient requires time to become closer to the resistance of which he is now conscious (*sich in den ihm nun bekannten Widerstand zu vertiefen*)". He then modified this phrase in the second version so that *nun bekannten* became *unbekannten*, "this resistance which he ignores". Strachey decided to keep the earlier formulation, a consequence of the idea of progress reflected in the choice of the term 'working-through'. Freud, as his revision shows, was rather more reserved on this point: he did not include the notion of 'becoming conscious' within the theory of *Durcharbeitung*.

The musical reference of *Durcharbeitung* does not imply that Freud was melomaniac, simply that well-known contemporary terms formed a part of the conceptual framework in which he was working and thus require a careful reading. Lacan was not melomaniac either but it would hardly be judicious to attempt an interpretation of a term like *la raison* on p.693 of the Écrits and choose to ignore musical theory. A further example may be evoked here. There is a current in analytic literature which is concerned with the question of tact. Loewenstein and other analysts in France wrote on this, understanding tact in the sense of a species of politeness. Yet why not argue that this current derives from an erroneous reading of certain remarks made by Freud to the effect that, in an interpretation, “*es bleibt dem Takt überlassen*”, where the term ‘*Takt*’ has the sense of a musical bar or scansion. This would suggest that Freud's references invite us to formulate not so much a theory of politeness as a theory of time.

This brings us to our third question, to explain the paucity of literary references in Freud's technical writings, particularly in a text like ‘Analysis Terminable and Interminable’. We can note that this latter text begins with the phrase “*das Tempo der analytische Therapie*”. Rather than simply making a reference to the ‘time’ of analysis, he says ‘tempo’, which evokes a musical time. And, after all, the structure of literary time, in the restricted sense of the eighteenth and nineteenth century novel, is more or less linear, exactly what one does not find in analysis which involves time travel in the strict sense of the term. One could oppose the linear time of the classical novel with the cyclical time of music or poetry. What distinguishes analytic time travel from the time travel of many philosophers is something very simple: as Slavoj Žižek pointed out, in the analytic field, one changes the past, but it is only in changing the past that the latter can become what it always was. For the logical reason that in the ‘first’ scene or moment the subject did not include or count its own involvement. Hence the subject has to return in order to count itself.

Let us go back to our first question now. Why is it that when Lacan's patient recovers his potency so miraculously, we would not be justified in speaking of a working-through? This question evokes the classical idea of *Durcharbeitung* as the time between an interpretation and the disappearance of a symptom. This is patently false. The refutation is given by the well-known clinical fact that a lot of people will lose their manifest symptoms after one or two preliminary interviews, for the very good reason that they are willing to do anything so as not to do an analysis. Hence the disappearance of symptoms cannot serve as the criterion for the existence of a working-through. And indeed, if we take the reference to sonata form seriously, it implies, on the contrary, that after a *Durcharbeitung*, there will be precisely a reemergence of symptoms! After all, the the last moment of the second musical time will end with the re-evocation of the principal key of the movement in order to introduce the conclusion. This is clinically observable. Many commentators have tried to explain why it is that after long years of arduous analytic work and the disappearance of the most serious symptoms, these latter will often reappear in the last stages of the analysis even if they have been absent for quite some time. Without running through all the various explanations that have been proffered for this curious fact, we can examine the most interesting of them, that of a certain Ekstein published in the Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association in 1965. Ekstein thinks that symptoms are like actors in a theatre and after the long spectacle which is an analysis, they come back on stage at the end to say their farewell. This idea is so curious that one is tempted to try to save it. Let us take the analogy with the theatre seriously for a moment. What happens when the cast come to say goodnight? Their presence is accompanied by a material effect, the curtain. And, in the history of the

theatre, what is there before the introduction of the curtain in latin drama? The ubiquity of the phallus, something which we no longer see in the new theatre concerned above all with questions of anagnorisis. There is thus a passage from the imaginary phallus to the phallus in its more symbolic form, ciphered in the motif of the veil, inviting us to reread Ekstein's article with the Lacanian notion of the "*mise à plat du phallus*".

This restructuring implies a certain symbolic work on the imaginary and represents the position of Lacan in 1958 on the *Durcharbeitung*. We find the term in the *Écrits* (p.630) defined as "*l'épuisement*" in "the work of the transference", and Lacan elaborates on it with the motif of the labyrinth. "*Il n'y faut pas seulement le plan d'un labyrinthe reconstruit ni meme un lot de plans déjà relevés. Il faut avant tout posséder la combinatoire générale qui préside à leur variété sans doute, mais qui, plus utilement encore, nous rend compte des trompe-l'oeil, mieux, des changements de vue du labyrinthe.*" This last sentence reminds us of Jacques-Alain Miller's remarks on the analytic anamorphosis and indicates how the work of analysis, in showing the different facets of an object, can produce anamorphic effects.

To develop this point, we can take the term *épuisement* in its strict mathematical sense, like the term "exhaustion" which we also find in the *Écrits* (p.520). This will help to formulate an answer to the second of our questions, concerning the lack of theoretical contributions to the theory of working-through in analytic literature. Glover explains this poverty with the idea that a thorough study of the concept would put in question the efficacy of the work of analysts. Indeed, most of the thinkers who have tackled the problem of the *Durcharbeitung* don't say what it is but rather what it is like: it is explained away via clinical analogies. The best-known of these, of course, is the analogy with mourning. This view was held by Rado, Fenichel and Alexander among others. But surely one can do a bit better than this. What mourning and working-through have in common resides in the use of detail, yet if we really must find some analogy in the clinical field for working-through, it is more interesting to think not of mourning but of phobia. Why?

For several reasons. Here is one of them. Lacan often refers to "the crystal of phobia" and what is it that characterises the history of the science of crystals if not a symbolic work of formalisation. With the introduction of the mathematics of the theory of groups, a crystal ceased to be a shiny, glassy stone but became identified with a series of mathematically defined classes based on considerations of symmetry. This formalisation had as a consequence the fact that certain objects like liquids 'became' crystals: the imaginary object, the shiny stone, becomes annulled by the action of the symbolic. The new crystal was now, to use the terms supplied by Little Hans, a crumpled one. The symbolic operation thus has two results: the annulling of the image and the production of anamorphic effects (certain liquids now become crystals), results which certainly characterise the process of working-through.

Let us conclude with one last point. We have discussed, however briefly, the imaginary and the symbolic in the *Durcharbeitung*, but not the real. One way to do this would involve raising the question of the role of the superego in working-through, the agency that Lacan qualified in his reply to M. André Albert as "an ally" of the analyst. After the last war we know that the term "ally" is not a simple one, so how should we understand it?

Most analysts who have written on the role of the superego at the end of analysis have tended to describe it as somehow more lenient: after the work of the

transference it becomes much nicer. But Bergler had another idea. He argued that the superego was just as severe as before but it was a superego that had changed its methods. Going beyond the habitual comparison of the superego and a cop, he introduces the differentiation of Swiss and Tzarist police. The Swiss police are warm and absolutely incorruptible whereas the Tzarist police are cruel but corruptible. What this means is that ultimately it is the Tzarist police who are more approachable since it is possible to bribe them. And for the neurotic, what is the bribe ? Answer: neurotic suffering. Thus the work of analysis has to make the superego Swiss: as severe as before but no longer accepting suffering as its illicit payment. This argument leads Bergler to his definition of working-through as “an exchange of methods of torture”. With the work of anamorphosis involved in working-through, certain forms of suffering cease to be valid for the superego.

The paradox here is obvious. If we qualify the superego after the work of *Durcharbeitung* as softer, then surely we have to modify the accepted definition of the superego as an imperative to jouissance. But this circularity can be avoided. If we follow and modify Bergler’s peculiar argument, we can formulate certain conceptions of the superego after *Durcharbeitung* which appear less contradictory. One of these would evoke the Freudian form of the presence of the superego which is humour. This is the sort of version of the end of analysis that Jacques-Alain Miller has stressed, less as tragedy than as comedy.

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