



Marco Bacciagaluppi

A workshop on Erich Fromm

A workshop on "**Frommian** Therapeutic Practice" was organized from August 30 to September 1, 1991, by the International Erich Fromm Society, in cooperation with the "Istituto Erich Fromm di Psicoanalisi Neofreudiana" of Bologna, Italy. The workshop took place in **Verbania-Pallanza**, on the Italian part of Lake Maggiore. Fromm spent the last years of his life on the Swiss part of the lake, in Locarno. During his lifetime, in 1974, Bernard Landis organized a seminar in Locarno on **Fromm's** clinical practice. Another meeting was held in Locarno in 1988 to commemorate Fromm. This year it was felt appropriate to organize a meeting on the Italian part of the lake, in recognition of the large Italian membership of the Fromm Society.

The subject of the meeting was the elusive topic of **Fromm's** psychoanalytic technique. Since Fromm wrote so little on the subject, the workshop focused on the two main sources still available to reconstruct how Fromm actually worked in his clinical practice.

The first source is some hitherto unpublished material - such as a lecture delivered by Fromm in New York in 1964, and his remarks at the Locarno seminar mentioned above - which has now appeared in Volume 5 of the German edition of **Fromm's** unpublished works (Schriften aus dem Nachlass, Band 5: Von



der Kunst des Zuhörens; Beltz, Weinheim/Basel, 1991). At the start of the workshop, Rainer Funk - **Fromm's** literary executor, and editor of his **unpublished works** - presented a selection of **Fromm's** unpublished writings on psychoanalytic technique.

The second source consists in the reports of people who were associated with Fromm. At the workshop we were lucky in having two such persons: Jorge Silva Garcia and Ruth Lesser. Silva, who was for a long time associated with Fromm in Mexico, presented the case history of "Fernando". An interesting point was raised in the ensuing discussion between Silva and Lesser. Because Silva felt that at the outset his patient was very precarious, he adopted a tolerant attitude: he prefers to wait and allow the patient to grow his own way. Ruth Lesser felt that Fromm would not wait and would tend to set limits.

Ruth Lesser, from NYU, presented the case of "Herbert", which was supervised by Fromm. She also presented notes from two seminars with Fromm. From her report it transpired that in many ways Fromm was close to the more radical psychoanalytic approach, the origin of which can be traced back to Ferenczi. Fromm would acknowledge his mistakes; he wanted the analyst and the patient to both be subjects of enquiry; the analyst's response should not be hidden, and Fromm therefore advocated a face-to-face position; any statement of the patient about the analyst should not be dismissed as transference: it is better to make mistakes on the side of thinking that the patient is correct: Fromm wanted to encourage the patient to develop his powers of observation; actually, Fromm used to invite the patient to report



his observations of him, and if the patient was right Fromm would say so.

However, according to Lesser, Fromm did not want to foster massive regression, and discouraged intense transference reactions: he felt this did not help the adult part of the patient. In this, she felt, he differed, for example, from British authors. Likewise, Fromm considered that also intense countertransference is not appropriate. Lesser did not think that Fromm would subscribe to Merton Gill's third principle of the **transference**, according to which, sooner or later, the analyst falls in with the patient's negative expectations. She felt that, in such cases, Fromm would have been concerned that the analyst was not maintaining objectivity. Fromm wanted the analyst to be as rational as possible (which is different from being **intellectual**).

Lesser stressed that **Fromm's** main thrust in analysis was to bring to awareness who the patient is, what is his core orientation. In achieving this aim, Fromm was not interested in the "why" - in historical material. Awareness - not an explanation - makes the difference. To quote from the selection of **Fromm's** unpublished writings: historical research "has value only when it's a part of uncovering what is the hidden experience the patient has now". To reach this goal, Fromm placed much value on dreams. He also made use of free associations, but it had to be directed free **associations**, because he had a sense of urgency and was against a waste of time.

Silva stated that he used to feel "shaken" by this confrontational approach of **Fromm's**. But according to Lesser, Fromm used to temper his confrontational approach both **verbally**, e.g. by asking how the patient responded, and **nonverbally**, e.g. by asking "Is that so?" with a twinkle in



his eye.

The other three papers were by people who never met **Fromm** personally. Thus, they did not claim to contribute to a reconstruction of **Fromm's** technique, but, rather, to apply or extend his ideas in the clinical context.

In his paper on "The being mode in the psychoanalytic **hour**", Romano Biancoli made extensive use of six unpublished lectures given by Fromm in Mexico. Biancoli stated that in analysis the question "Who am I?" can only be answered in the being mode, whereas social filters tend to organize experience according to the having mode. Thus, in a psychoanalytic session, memory has to become a living memory. The being mode is also the condition for "center-to-center" relatedness between analyst and patient, in which the analyst experiences in him/herself all that the patient experiences, and thus sees the patient, so to speak, from inside. Biancoli exemplified these concepts in an actual exchange with a patient.

"Core-to-core" relatedness was also the subject of my own paper, in which I described the initial contact in two cases. These two patients re-enacted with me the most basic parent-child interaction, that at the beginning of life, in its two opposite forms: rejection in one case, **acceptance** in the other. In this paper I also tried to establish connections between **Fromm's** concepts and those of other analysts, both in Britain and the USA.

Finally, Antonello Bazzan presented a paper titled "From the patient as a '**guilty child**' to the patient as '**co-analyst**'". He described the case of a girl who was seduced by her employer at the age of seventeen and felt guilty about it. He suggested that the patient's past could be understood in terms



of **Fromm's** discussion of the authoritarian family, the authoritarian **conscience** and authoritarian religion. The analyst at first made the Freudian **error** of viewing the patient as guilty. He then acknowledged his mistake, thus implicitly offering the patient to «take ~~on~~ the role of co-analyst.

One issue which was raised during the meeting was the comparison between Fromm and Sullivan. Marco Conci pointed out the similarity between Sullivan's one-genus postulate and Fromm's humanistic premise ("Nothing human is alien to me"). Ruth Lesser added that for both Fromm and Sullivan enquiry was essential. She also felt that Sullivan, like Fromm, would not have subscribed to **Gill's** third principle. She also pointed out certain differences between them: Sullivan was interested in adaptation, Fromm instead wanted people to criticize the social structure; Sullivan wanted a general explanation of behavior, Fromm was interested in a person's uniqueness.

At the end, Bainer Funk remarked that two themes had emerged in the meeting: on the one hand there had been important contributions to the reconstruction of Fromm's technique; on the other, there had been **attempts** to apply and extend his ideas, and to connect them with other developments in **psychoanalysis**.