



Propriety of the Erich Fromm Document Center. For personal use only. Citation or publication of material prohibited without express written permission of the copyright holder.

Eigentum des Erich Fromm Dokumentationszentrums. Nutzung nur für persönliche Zwecke. Veröffentlichungen – auch von Teilen – bedürfen der schriftlichen Erlaubnis des Rechteinhabers.

---

## Erich Fromm's Views on Psychoanalytic „Technique”

Marco Bacciagaluppi

Paper presented at the Symposium „Erich Fromm: Vita e Opera“, that took place on May, 12.-15, 1988 in Locarno. An English translation was published under the title „Erich Fromm's Views on Psychoanalytic 'Technique'“ in *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (April 1989). A German translation was published under the title „Erich Fromms Ansichten zur psychoanalytischen 'Technik'“, in: *Wissenschaft vom Menschen - Science of Man*. Jahrbuch der Internationalen Erich-Fromm-Gesellschaft, Münster (LIT Verlag), Vol. 1 (1990), pp. 85-107. A modified Italian version was published under the title „Le idee di Erich Fromm sulla 'tecnica' psicoanalitica“ in *Psicoterapia e scienza umane*, Volume 23, No. 3 (1989). Publication of the original paper in: *Fromm Forum* (English edition), Tübingen (Selbstverlag), No. 11 (2007), pp. 5-13.

**Copyright** © 1989 and 2011 by Dr. Marco Bacciagaluppi, Via Pellini 4, I-20125 Milano / Italien - E-Mail: m.bacciagaluppi[at-symbol]marcobacciagaluppi.com.

### Introduction

The first point to be discussed is the title of this lecture, and more precisely, the quotation marks around the word „technique”. Fromm objected to the application of this term to psychoanalysis. In some unpublished notes titled „Psychoanalytic 'technique' - or the art of listening”, Fromm says that the word „technical” refers „to the mechanical, to that which is not alive, while the proper word for dealing with that which is alive is 'art'“.

The second point is the fact that Fromm's writings on this subject are so few. He meant to remedy this omission towards the end of his life by publishing his views on psychoanalytic theory and technique, but only succeeded in completing the first part of this project, the result of which was his last book, *Greatness and Limitations of Freud's Thought* (1979a; GA VIII).

Lacking a systematic work by Fromm himself, the available sources for reconstructing his technique can be grouped into several categories:

1. Fromm's published work on technique. These include a prewar paper (1935a; GA I), the four chapters on dreams in *The Forgotten Language* (1951a, GA IX), a short paper on free association (1955d), and the Evans interview of December 1963, which appeared as a film and

later in the form of a book (which was not approved by Fromm).

2. Unpublished work by Fromm on technique. Those I have consulted include the short note on technique already referred to and the transcript of ten seminars held in Locarno in 1974.

3. Technical remarks in Fromm's work of more general interest. Some of the most important ones can be found in his book on Zen Buddhism (1960a; GA VI).

4. Reports by Fromm's students in (a) in USA, (b) Mexico and (c) Europa. Among the reports of American students of Fromm, two are particularly useful as far as technique is concerned: a paper by David Schecter, published in 1981 but actually written in 1958, reporting on a seminar held in Mexico in 1957, and a paper of 1981 by Bernard Landis. In this lecture I shall limit myself to sources (1), (2), (3) and (4a).

For data on Fromm's activity in Mexico I refer to Dr. Silva Garcia. One of his most relevant contributions is a paper of 1983 on transference in Freud, Ferenczi and Fromm.

As to Fromm's last years in Europe, in a recent paper titled *Erich Fromm's therapeutische Annäherung oder die Kunst der Psychotherapie*, Luban Plozza and Biancoli (1987) report on technical recommendations and remarks on groups, psychosomatic symptoms and relaxation



techniques. This paper is also an overview of Fromm's technical contributions, drawing on published and unpublished material, so there will be some overlap between this paper and my lecture. Finally, the paper by Luban-Plozza and Biancoli draws technical consequences from some of Fromm's writings not dealing specifically with technique, especially his later ones. For example, on the basis of *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, the importance of expressing defensive aggressiveness in therapy is stressed (op. cit., p.122), and the analysis of the experience of time in *To Have Or to Be?* is applied to the therapeutic situation (op. cit., p. 127).

This is a valuable work of interpretation. However, following Wolstein (1981), who recommends to distinguish between interpretations of Fromm and his own statement of his clinical procedure, in this lecture I shall limit myself to Fromm's own statements, whether directly expressed or reported by others.

I shall also try to compare Fromm's position with that of Freud, on the one hand, and with more recent psychoanalytic developments, on the other.

### Early Work

An early account of Fromm's ideas on theory and technique, in which at the same time he himself compares his position to Freud's is contained in a prewar paper of his, *Die gesellschaftliche Bedingtheit der psychoanalytischen Therapie* (1935a; GA I, p. 115). This paper appeared in German in the „Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung“, which at that time was being published in Paris. It is not often quoted, possibly because it has never been translated into English, but I believe it deserves to be more widely known.

In this paper, Fromm discusses the attitude of tolerance recommended by Freud towards the patient. Fromm maintains that, in contrast to this conscious attitude, Freud and his followers have at an unconscious level a judgmental attitude which confirms the social taboos of bourgeois society.

*Fromm points out that, although in one*

*passage Freud did see the analytic situation as characterized by truthfulness, he by and large considered it as „a medical-therapeutic procedure, as it had actually developed out of hypnosis“ (op. cit., p. 119). Through detailed references to Freud's papers on technique, Fromm stresses that Freud recommended that the analyst should have an attitude of „coldness“ and „indifference“, on the model of the surgeon. Tolerance is „actually the only positive recommendation Freud gives for the analyst's attitude“ (op. cit., p. 120).*

*Later in the paper, Fromm criticizes the aim of analysis, as defined by Freud, of winning back a part of the patient's capacity for work and enjoyment. Fromm points out that, whereas Freud presents this capacity as a biological category, it is actually a social requirement. „The analyst himself represents in this sense a model“ (op. cit., p. 127). What Freud is really doing is to present the capitalistic character as a model and to define as neurotic anything which deviates from this norm (op. cit., p. 128).*

Towards the end of the paper, Fromm views Freud's disapproval of deviant followers as indirect evidence of his basic identification with social norms. Here Fromm discusses at length Ferenczi's half-hearted opposition to Freud. His extensive quotations from Ferenczi's last papers show that Fromm had read them closely and sympathetically. He quotes approvingly Ferenczi's recommendations to show the patient „unshakable goodwill“, to acknowledge the analyst's mistakes, to avoid replacing one super-ego with another. He points out that Ferenczi put the „principle of indulgence“ in the place of the „principle of frustration“.

Then, Fromm criticizes the concept of tolerance itself, on account of the relativism it implies towards conscious evaluations. He advises the analyst to openly take sides and to say, for example: „Ich meine auch, Sie haben damit recht“ („also I think you are right there“) (op. cit. p. 135). *He points out that the patient is not so much afraid of the analyst's judgement as of the fact of being judged unconsciously and in the sense of conventional taboos. Further, the patient is not so much afraid of his behaviour being judged as of being judged as a person.*

*Finally, Fromm asks which are the condi-*



tions for an optimal effectiveness of psychoanalytic technique. Ferenczi recommends that the analyst's personal analysis should reach the deepest levels. Fromm believes that this is not sufficient. It is necessary to see the social character of taboos, and not to view them as biological or natural (*op. cit.*, p. 136).

I think this paper contains implicitly most of Fromm's principles of technique, either in the negative form of a critique of Freud, or in the indirect form of an approval of Ferenczi.

### Later Work

These principles are stated more explicitly in later work. Before we examine these later work, a preliminary consideration is necessary. In 1959, Edward Tauber wrote: „Fromm has experienced a change in himself since approximately 1954, and this change has affected his conception of psychoanalysis and his way of doing therapy. He sees the change in himself as qualitative, whereas I see as quantitative” (Tauber, 1959).

Fromm's later view, according to Tauber, is that psychoanalysis should penetrate as deeply as possible to the very core of the patient's life and force him to face his resistances. In this endeavor, the analyst should be his full self with the patient.

The change in Fromm is also mentioned by Wolstein, in a note written in 1981, after Fromm's death, and already quoted earlier. In this paper, Wolstein reports on a case which he presented to Fromm in 1955. To his surprise, Fromm, in contrast to his theoretical views, seemed to be still following at the time the classical procedure outlined by Freud in 1915-17 in the *First Introductory Lectures*.

With the exception of the prewar paper, *The Forgotten Language*, of 1951, and the short paper on free association, of 1955, all the published and unpublished material which will be mentioned in this lecture belongs to the later period of Fromm's development.

Fromm always applied the three essential discoveries of Freud: the existence of (1) unconscious processes, (2) resistance and (3) transference (unpublished seminars, 9, p. 316). The first

of these topics leads us to a discussion of the aim of psychoanalysis.

In his book on Zen (1960a; GA VI, p. 351; p. 135 of the English paperback edition) Fromm agrees with Freud that the aim of psychoanalysis is that of making the unconscious conscious.

Freud's concept, however, had two limitations: (1) the content of the unconscious to be discovered was limited to infantile instinctual drives, and (2) the sector to be uncovered was determined by the therapeutic need to cure a particular symptom. Fromm extends this aim to the full recovery of the unconscious. As he says in one of the unpublished seminars (2, p. 55), this involves viewing psychoanalysis „not as a therapy but as an instrument for self-understanding. That is to say an instrument for self-liberation, an instrument in the art of living.” More succinctly, in a later seminar (8, p. 265) he says that the aim of psychoanalysis is „to know oneself”.

In accordance with widening of the aim of psychoanalysis, Fromm differentiated between the medical or therapeutic goal of psychoanalysis and the goal of „well-being”. This may correspond to two categories of patients (Tauber, 1959), or to two phases in the analysis of a single patient (Schechter, 1981).

As regards the *methods for the observation of the unconscious*, Fromm (1955d, p. 2) follows Freud and lists the interpretation of dreams, the analysis of transference, and the use of free association (he omits to mention fantasies).

We shall talk about transference later. Fromm discusses dreams in chapters 3 to 6 of *The Forgotten Language* and in the Evans interview. This is by far the longest contribution by Fromm on a topic of psychoanalytic technique. This probably reflects his predilection of dream interpretation. In the Evans interview he says: „I believe that dream interpretation is about the most important instrument we have in psychoanalytic therapy.” In one of the unpublished seminars (9, p. 318) he adds: „Besides that, it's really great fun. I have been interpreting dreams for so many years now and I must say I enjoy each new dream.”

In *The Forgotten Language* there is at first a theoretical statement of Fromm's position in



comparison to Freud's. According to Freud, dreams are the hallucinatory fulfillment of irrational wishes. According to Fromm, dreams are the expression of any kind of mental activity which occurs during sleep - not only of irrational impulses but also of the best part of ourselves. Instead, Fromm is in agreement with Freud's description of the formal mechanisms at work in dreams.

At a practical level, there is some case material in chapter 3 of *The Forgotten Language* and especially in chapter 6. Here, in three cases, verbatim interchanges between analyst and patient are reported. From a technical point of view, these reports show that Fromm always asked for associations, that he actively stimulated them, and that he had a special concern for the events of the day preceding the dream. From the point of view of content, in addition to the fulfillment of irrational wishes, Fromm emphasizes the presence in dreams of strivings towards growth and of insight into the patient's situation.

In a report of a case seminar with Fromm held in New York in 1973, Kwawer (1975) confirms that Fromm saw dreams as repressed insights, and comments that this notion draws more on the cognitive-perceptual functions than does the classical view.

One comment by Fromm in the Evans interview implies a further comparison with Freud on the subject of dreams. Fromm says that, in Freud's book on dreams, interpretation is „a tremendous intellectual exercise” but does not lead to a better understanding of the dreamer. It must be said, in all fairness, that also Freud, in his first paper on technique, draws a distinction between dream research and the use of dreams in therapy, and at the end of his third technical paper warns against the danger of intellectualization.

Fromm discusses free association in a short paper, *Remarks on the Problem of Free Association* (1955d). He points out that in orthodox Freudian analysis free association has often become an empty ritual, and makes suggestions to revitalize this procedure by various kinds of stimulation. He also says that the analyst must react with his own imagination and free associations (op. cit., p. 6). This point is in keeping

with Freud's recommendations in his third technical paper on the analyst's attitude of „evenly-hovering attention” (Collected Papers, II, pp. 324 and 328). This paper by Fromm is summarized by Schecter (1981).

Fromm differs most sharply from Freud on the *role of the analyst*. I shall deal with this subject at some length, because Fromm's concept of the analyst's role influences his view of the transference and the way he handles resistances.

In his first paper published in English (1939a), Fromm writes that the detached attitude is in his opinion the most serious defect in Freud's technique. Freud's most quoted model in this connection is that of the mirror, which he mentions in his third technical paper (C.P. II, p. 331). Actually, Freud mentions the mirror only to guard against self-disclosure on the part of the analyst. But in the same paper, Freud also mentions the model of the surgeon and his coldness in feeling (op. cit., p. 327). This confirms that he not only recommended not to express emotions, but also not to feel them.

Instead, in his unpublished notes on technique Fromm says: „The basic rule for practising this art is the complete concentration of the listener.” „He must be endowed with a capacity for empathy.” „The condition for such empathy is the capacity for love.” „Understanding and loving are inseparable.” In the unpublished seminars (9, p. 322) he also describes this attitude as one of „real concern”. Fromm also discusses the role of the analyst in his book on Zen (1960a; GA VI, pp. 332-333; pp. 11-112 of the English paperback edition), where he states the same principle in similar terms. Here he says: „The analyst understands the patient only inasmuch as he experiences in himself all that the patient experiences.”

Here he speaks of „productive relatedness between analyst and patient”, of „being fully engaged with the patient, fully open and responsive to him”, of „center-to-center relatedness”. „The analyst must become the patient, yet he must be himself.” In the Evans interview, Fromm bases this capacity for empathy on a humanistic premise: „There is nothing human which is alien to me.” This is the classical version of the one-genus statement, taken from Terence: „Homo sum, humani nil a me alienum puto.”



Sullivan expressed the same concept when he said: „We are all much more simply human than otherwise.”

Let us compare in more detail this view of the analyst's role with Freud's view. In the Evans interview, Fromm says: „While I am listening, I have responses, which are the responses of a trained instrument. What you tell me makes me hear certain things.” Here there is a similarity to what Freud says concerning the analyst's attitude. In his third technical paper he tries to establish a rule for the analyst which is complementary to the fundamental rule for the patient. (C.P. II, pp. 324 and 328). This is the rule of „evenly-hovering attention”. Freud says that the analyst „must bend his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the emerging unconscious of the patient” and „use his own unconscious in this way as an instrument”. The difference lies in the fact that Freud is only referring to a response in terms of ideas, not in terms of feelings. Fromm, instead, suggests that the analyst should respond with his whole self.

On the other hand, in his book on Zen (GA VI, p. 344; p. 126 of the English paperback edition), Fromm warns that this direct relatedness should be „free from any [...] interference of the analyst in the life of the patient. If the patient wants to get well [...] the analyst is willing to help him. If his resistance to change is too great, this is not the analyst's responsibility”. Instead, both in the interview and according to Landis (1981), Fromm strongly emphasizes the patient's responsibility.

In his book on Zen (GA VI, pp. 332-33; pp. 111-12 of the English paperback edition), Fromm outlines a history of the concept of the analyst's role. He says that Freud's „concept of the detached observer was modified from two sides, first by Ferenczi, who in the last years of his life postulated that it was not enough for the analyst to observe and to interpret; that he had to be able to love the patient with the very love which the patient had needed as a child.” Then by Sullivan, with his concept of the participant observer. But Fromm is dissatisfied with this, and suggests the term „observant participant”. Still dissatisfied, he reaches the emphatic definition already quoted: „The analyst understands the patient only inasmuch as he experiences in

himself all that the patient experiences.”

This historical outline, coupled with the extensive references to Ferenczi in the prewar paper quoted earlier, suggests that Ferenczi may have been an important precursor of Fromm's concept of non-erotic love as the most appropriate attitude for the analyst. This would further increase Ferenczi's importance in the development of alternative approaches in psychoanalysis. Ferenczi's influence was already evident both on the British school and on the American interpersonal-cultural school through Clara Thompson. It may be that Fromm provided a second channel of influence on the interpersonal-cultural school.

I further suggest that this influence could be understood in terms of another concept of Fromm, that of social selection. This concept is most clearly spelled out in Fromm's and MacCoby's Mexican study (1970a; GA III, p. 478; p. 232 of the original English edition), but it is already present in the prewar paper, applied to psychoanalysis itself. In that paper (GA I, p. 137), Fromm points out that Freud's approach was the dominant one in psychoanalysis because it corresponded to the dominant social character structure. The social character structure, however, represents an average value. There is always a number of individuals who, for causes lying in „individual destiny”, show a gradual divergence from this average value. Using Fromm's later terminology, we could say that a biophilic character orientation predisposed Fromm and other analysts to respond to Ferenczi's loving approach and thus strengthened what was then a marginal position, making it into an alternative pathway in the development of psychoanalysis. It would be important to determine what modifications in the social environment allowed this alternative development to emerge.

To go back to the discussion of technique: related to the role of the analyst is the subject of the communication of the analyst. In the interview, Fromm says that he is very active in his interventions, and does not want to wait a long time until the resistances are broken through. He thus explicitly differs from Freud's caution. Fromm's active approach would probably have been considered by Freud an example of „wild



psychoanalysis". In his 1910 paper on this subject, Freud utters his first call for caution (C.P. II, p. 302). At the end of this paper, however, Freud recognizes some merit to wild psychoanalysis. He goes back to this point at the end of his fourth technical paper (C.P. II, pp. 363-364), where he says that an active approach „first arouses resistances, but then sets a mental process in action”.

Freud affirms the same need for caution in his fourth technical paper, in which he says that „one must be careful not to communicate [an interpretation] until the the patient is already close upon it”. (C.P. II, p. 361). Another expression of Freud’s caution is the rule, stated in his first technical paper (C.P. II, pp. 306 and 307), according to which one should start from what is on the surface of the patient’s mind.

There is some contradiction between this impatience with the length of the treatment, expressed by Fromm in the interview, and the opinion he states in other places, for instance in his book on Zen (GA VI, p. 309; pp. 84-85 of the English paperback edition), in which he admires Freud’s willingness to devote so much time to one person, as an attitude transcending contemporary Western values.

In addition to the basic difference on the role of the analyst, Fromm also differs from Freud on various *technical details* of the psychoanalytic procedure. In his first book on Freud of 1959, he criticizes the use of the couch, the frequency of four or five weekly sessions and the analyst’s silence. Fromm says that all these features have become part of a ritual, and that many patients are attracted by the ritual itself, because it gives them the feeling of belonging to the psychoanalytic movement (1959a; GA VIII, pp. 213-214).

Landis (1981, p. 539) gives a good description of Fromm’s approach at the beginning of a psychoanalytic treatment. He says that Fromm established the analyst’s competence from the outset. He quotes Fromm as saying: „The patient is always impressed by indications that the analyst has listened with concentration and interest.”

Among the technical details, Fromm basically agrees with the fundamental rule concerning the communications of the patient, which

Freud set forth in his fourth technical paper (C.P. II, p. 355). In the Evans interview and in other places Fromm states this rule in a basically similar form.

Another important technical topic is the *rule of abstinence*. Menninger and Holzman (1973) consider it „Freud’s second ‘fundamental rule’ of psychoanalysis”. Freud mentions it twice in his papers on technique: once in his sixth paper, on „Transference Love”, where it is directed against the gratification of the erotic transference (C.P. II, p. 383), and again in the later 1919 paper on „Turnings in the Ways of Psycho-Analytic Therapy”, where it is directed against acting out in general (C.P. II, p. 396).

This subject is also addressed by Fromm in the unpublished seminars (9, p. 332). This is another point on which he basically agrees with Freud. He says: „If you act out the very thing you want to analyze, that you want to get rid of, then indeed there are very great limitations to what you can do analytically”.

So much for Freud’s first essential discovery - the existence of unconscious processes, the methods of discovering them, and the analyst’s role in doing so. Fromm has written much less on the other two essential discoveries of Freud - transference and resistance. Here we have to rely mainly on the Evans interview, on reports by students and on the unpublished seminars.

*Transference* is discussed at the very beginning of the interview. Fromm makes a distinction between transference in a narrow sense, arising in the analytic situation, and transference in a more general sense, which arises in relationship to many other people. I wish to point out that here Fromm does not differ from Freud, who says the same thing in his second paper on technique (C.P. II, p. 313).

Fromm then goes on to say that the analytic relationship takes place on two separate levels. The analyst „must offer himself as an object of transference, and analyze, but he must offer himself as a real person, and respond as a real person.”

This, of course, is a consequence of the different view of the analyst’s role, which we have already discussed: the analyst is not merely the detached observer of transference and countertransference distortions, but participates in the



relationship.

A consequence of the phenomenon of transference is the emergence of *dependency feelings*. This is another topic which is discussed in the interview. Evans points out that Fromm, by his emphasis on the patient's responsibility, discourages dependence from arising. When Evans asks if this limits the number of patients who continue, Fromm denies it, but then recognizes that it is a question of dosage, and that more caution is required with more severe cases.

### Excerpts From Interview

The emphasis on the real relationship, coupled with the discouragement of dependency, gives the impression that, of the two levels of the relationship, Fromm favors one over the other - the level of the real relationship over the transference level.

Let us now turn to Freud's third essential discovery - that of *resistances* to the uncovering of unconscious material. In the unpublished seminars (8, p. 283) Fromm says: „perhaps the most important thing in analysis is the recognition of resistance.“. He goes on to acknowledge the importance of Wilhelm Reich's contribution in this respect. He then lists the use of improvement, of dreams and of free associations as resistances. He omits the very important topic of transference as resistance, which figures prominently in Freud's second technical paper on „The Dynamics of the Transference“. This omission may be further evidence of Fromm's tendency to discourage an intense transference.

In describing Fromm's model of direct relatedness, Schecter (1981) presents a picture of Fromm stripping away „The layers of character defense and neurotic avenues of escape“, and converting „a chronic or alienated life situation into an acute crisis in the here and now“. This is reminiscent of certain modern techniques of brief psychotherapy, such as the anxiety-arousing technique of Sifneos or the anger-provoking approach of Davanloo, and confirms that Fromm had a very active approach to resistance.

Another issue raised in the Evans interview is that of the *field of investigation*. At one point,

the interviewer asks Fromm if he has a situational or a historical orientation. Fromm thinks that is a wrong dichotomy. He says his aim „is to arrive at an insight into the unconscious processes which the patient has right now“ - what he calls „a X-ray approach“. This is equivalent to asking the question „Who am I?“, rather than „Why am I the way I am?“ (unpublished seminars, 4, p. 139). „However“, adds Fromm in the interview, „the patient himself will understand this only if he can [...] re-experience some childhood experiences.“

Today, analysts generally consider three fields of events, which are actually three classes of relationships: current events outside the treatment situation, current events in treatment situation, and past events. This idea is referred to as Menninger's „triangle of insight“, or Malan's „triangle of person“, but it had already been presented by Sullivan in *The Psychiatric Interview* (1954).

With his „X-ray approach“, Fromm seems to differ from present analytic practice. This is in keeping with Tauber's remark to the effect that „Fromm has tended more recently to lay much less stress on the effects of other individuals than on the patient“ (Tauber, 1959, p. 1814). Instead, in the clinical material reported in chapter 6 of *The Forgotten Language*, Fromm seemed to be very sensitive to the importance of early relations and their influence on later life. On the other hand, both Landis (1981, p. 547) and Schecter (1981, p. 471) agree that also in his later phase Fromm had an historical orientation. He believed the patient had to go back to the point where something went wrong and examine possible alternatives.

Another technical subject is what Freud calls the *mechanism of the cure*, which he discusses at the end of his fourth technical paper, the one on beginning the treatment (C.P. II, pp. 362-365). Freud says that knowledge in itself is not enough. A shift in the distribution of energy, by means of the transference, has to occur.

Fromm addresses the same subject in one of the unpublished seminars (8, pp. 247-283), where he discusses the therapeutic effects of psychoanalysis. Also Fromm mentions both insight and energy. At first he mentions „the increase of freedom which a person has when he can see his



real conflicts instead of fictional conflicts” (op. cit. p. 274). Then he says: „Once you lift the repression [...] energy becomes available” (op. cit., p. 277). Finally, „innate strivings for health can begin to work”. Freud also acknowledged these strivings in his 1919 paper (C.P. II, p. 395).

This leads to one final point which actually transcends analysis, namely the *additional steps* which are necessary beyond analysis. Fromm discusses them in the unpublished seminars (9, pp. 301-313). I shall only mention the first, which is „to change one’s action”, to take steps „which are the consequences of this new awareness” (op. cit., p. 301).

### Case Material

After discussing psychoanalytic technique in theoretical terms, we would like to be able to examine case material. In the field of psychoanalysis, this would be the most suitable way for arriving at what Fromm calls „experiential knowledge” in his book on Zen (GA VI, p. 332; p. III of the English paperback edition), or „affective knowledge” in his unpublished seminars (I, p. 18). Here, however, Fromm’s contributions are even fewer. Luban-Plozza and Biancoli (1987) ascribe this to Fromm’s refusal to exploit another person (p. 119). As I mentioned before, there is some reference to patients in the chapters on dreams in *The Forgotten Language*, especially in chapter 6. This is possibly the richest source of case material in Fromm’s published writings.

Only case material could reveal certain facets of Fromm’s technique. For example, according to Schechter (1981, p. 471), „one of Fromm’s greatest clinical talents is his ability to delineate in a relatively short time the central strivings and issues in the patient.”

I expect there is unpublished material on other cases in Mexico and the USA. In the sources I consulted I have found an extensive presentation of only one case, which was discussed in the unpublished Locarno seminars and partly published, in disguised form, in the paper by Bernhard Landis (1981).

In the published part, Fromm makes clear his very active approach to resistance: „The re-

sistance will be enormous. I would tell her of her resistance, hitting very hard to drive it home” (Landis, 1981, p. 544). In the unpublished part, Fromm reveals an attitude which may be the ultimate explanation of what enabled his patients to face the anxiety aroused by his direct approach. Fromm says: „The problem is of taking sides. There is no neutrality in this question.” For example, he would say to this patient, who is reporting a negative attitude in her mother: „That’s what you feel and you’re damned right” (op. cit., p. 237). Here Fromm is repeating literally what he had already said in his prewar paper: „Sie haben damit recht” („you’re right there”). This is an interpretation in terms of real-life situations, in the spirit of psychoanalysis prior to 1897. To the charge of making value judgements he answers: „It is not a value judgement. This is a statement of facts” (unpublished seminars 7, p. 358).

In the modern psychoanalytic literature, a comparable forthrightness is to be found in Bowlby, who, in *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds* (Bowlby, 1979), reports telling a patient. „Your mother never has really loved you” (p. 150).

### Comparison With Other Psychoanalysts

In the previous section, the account of Fromm’s views on technique involved at the same time a comparison with the view of two earlier analysts, Ferenczi and, especially, Freud. Now I would like to compare Fromm’s position with that of contemporary or later analysts.

Fromm is not often quoted in the psychoanalytic literature. This may be due to his radical views and to the scarcity of his technical contributions. For instance, in Merton Gill’s important paper on the interpersonal paradigm (Gill, 1983), Fromm is not even mentioned. On the other hand, it must be admitted that this neglect is reciprocated by Fromm. In his unpublished seminars, the only contemporary analyst to whom he refers is Sullivan, and among more recent writers, the only one he mentions is Ronald Laing, in order to express admiration for his work on the families of schizophrenics.

Fromm antedated certain modern psycho-





analytic concepts, such as symbiosis, by decades (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983, p. 196). In order to obtain recognition for his priority and to make his concepts circulate more widely in the psychoanalytic community, they have to be integrated with the developments which have taken place, to a large extent, independently from him.

In his discussion of Sullivan (unpublished seminars, 4, pp. 144-161), Fromm gives him credit for having continued in Pinel's tradition of giving the psychotic the dignity of a human being. Secondly, he recognizes the importance of Sullivan's emphasis on interpersonal relations. He differs from Sullivan on his view of human nature. For Sullivan, according to Fromm, „there is no core”, „there is no individual self” (op. cit., p. 154). Sullivan's concept of man, says Fromm, is actually „a description of the marketing character”, „a description of contemporary character in American society” (op. cit., p. 160).

Next to these theoretical differences there are corresponding differences in therapeutic technique. Sullivan, for example, was careful never to arouse too much anxiety in his patients. However, this antinomy can be solved by realizing that Fromm and Sullivan were addressing two very different types of patients. Sullivan's cases were much more severe than Fromm's, and it could be argued that for them the goal of transcending the culture was not feasible. In his 1981 paper, already referred to, Wolstein suggests that these two approaches should be integrated. Maybe, we could say that Fromm has better defined the ultimate aim of psychoanalysis, but that in many cases an analysis of dependency is an indispensable means to reach that aim.

In order to compare Fromm's position to other recent developments in psychoanalysis, I shall make use of a very valuable recent paper by Hirsch (1987), who examines these developments in terms of the varying degrees of participation on the part of the analyst. We have seen that this is the central point in Fromm's theory of technique, and the one on which he differs most from Freud.

Hirsch starts by remarking that analysts vary in the relative therapeutic importance accorded to (1) insight and (2) the experience of a

new relationship, with the orthodox Freudian position standing at one extreme, that of insight. Hirsch then refers between radical and conservative critics of the blank-screen model. Hirsch calls the radical critics „observing participants” and the conservative critics merely „participants”. The analysts he lists come from different theoretical backgrounds. Among the observing participants are Gill, Levenson, Racker, Sandler and Searles. Among the participants are Fairbairn, Melanie Klein, Winnicott, Kohut and Sullivan.

According to Hirsch, three features characterize the radical group of „observing participants”: (1) in the inevitable enmeshment of the analyst in the patient's pattern of repetition; this is Merton Gill's (1983) third principle of the transference, which states that, sooner or later, the analyst inevitably falls in with the patient's negative expectations; this means that, sooner or later, the analyst will behave like the bad parent; when this happens, it has to be acknowledged and analysed; as Levenson (1972) puts it, we have to be trapped in the patient's situation, then work our way out of it; (2) the view of the patient as being sought in a basic conflict between repeating the past and differentiating the self; (3) the importance of providing clarity to the patient by making the therapeutic interaction explicit.

I find Greenberg (1981) makes a useful distinction between „participating with” the patient's strivings towards health and „participating in” the patient's pathological relationships. Hirsch's „participant” group could be characterized as only „participating with”, whereas his more radical group of „observing participants” could be characterized as also „participating in”.

I have tried to present these various groupings in a table which is added to the text of this lecture (Table I).

Hirsch claims that the term „observing participants”, with which he defines the more radical group, is taken from *The Heart of Man*. Actually, Fromm uses this term in a slightly different form - „observant participant” - and in a different place - in his book on Zen Buddhism (1960a; GA VI, p. 333; p. 112 of the English paperback edition).

Aside from this formal question, I would



like to raise a substantial question: although Hirsch uses a term taken from Fromm to characterize the more radical group of analysts, where does Fromm actually stand? As we have seen, Fromm certainly views himself as participating intensely in the therapeutic relationship, but at an empathic level, namely as „participating with”. I doubt if Fromm sees himself as inevitably enmeshed in the patient’s past patterns, namely as „participating in”.

If we consider the three features which, according to Hirsch, characterize the more radical group, Fromm certainly shares the view of the patient as being caught in a basic conflict between repeating the past and differentiating the self. But, as to the inevitability of „participating in”, which may be viewed as an extreme form of transference and countertransference involvement, we have seen that Fromm tends to discourage an intense transference. As to insight, it is the most important aim for Fromm, who extended it beyond Freud’s original meaning. Fromm, however, does not seem to consider the therapeutic interaction itself as one of the areas to which insight should be applied. By being intensely involved at an empathic level, but by not seeing himself as inevitably enmeshed in the repetition of the past and by not making the therapeutic interaction explicit, I suggest that Fromm is nearer to Hirsch’s „participant” group - which I would characterize as only „participating with”. I therefore believe it would be misleading to describe the radical group of analysts with Fromm’s term of „observing participants”.

On the other hand, Fromm differs from all these groups because of his wider frame of reference, characterized by his view of man as having basic needs and by a critical view of society as frustrating these basic needs. To define Fromm’s position in comparison to these groups of analysts, I would place him on the outside of the „participant” group. I would also place Ferenczi at the top of the „participants”, as the precursor of this group, and Bowlby at the bottom, as the most recent exponent of the British school. In my opinion, Bowlby is the closest to Fromm in regarding man as endowed of basic needs and in having a critical view of society, although less explicit than Fromm’s.

## Conclusion

From this comparison of Fromm’s position with that of other analysts we can try to draw some conclusions on Fromm’s therapeutic technique. There is something paradoxical in Fromm’s discussion of this subject. Of the two essential therapeutic factors listed by Hirsch - insight, and the experience of a new relationship - , Fromm only stresses the first. Yet, his insistence on direct, „core-to-core” relatedness implies that the patient’s experience of a new relationship with the analyst would inevitably become the second major factor in a Frommian analysis. Fromm does not discuss this factor in theoretical terms.

As a first, general definition, the new relationship provided by Fromm could be regarded as what Franz Alexander termed a „corrective emotional experience”. More specifically, Fromm’s reference to non-erotic love would lead to define his attitude as that of parental love, although Fromm himself would probably be suspicious of this definition because of the danger of encouraging the analyst’s narcissistic view of him/herself as a good parent.

Fromm differs from the radical group of analysts because he apparently does not believe that the patient’s unconscious efforts to provoke confirmations of his/her negative expectations can make the analyst really behave like the bad parent. In this respect he resembles Winnicott, who believes he can withstand the patient’s pressure and remain the good - or „good-enough” - parent.

On the other hand, Fromm also differs from Winnicott and the other analysts of the „participant” group. What we said in connection with Sullivan can apply to this group as a whole. These analysts are mostly involved with children or with severe cases, and they are mainly oriented towards the patient’s attachment needs. Fromm, instead, is mainly oriented towards autonomy needs. The other analysts of this group would maintain that, in order to relinquish the attachment to bad objects, an alternative good relationship with the analyst is necessary, Bowlby, in particular, would say that, in order to acquire insight, to explore, one needs a safe base. Fromm does not theorize this, but, when he says to the patient „Sie haben Recht”



Propriety of the Erich Fromm Document Center. For personal use only. Citation or publication of material prohibited without express written permission of the copyright holder.

Eigentum des Erich Fromm Dokumentationszentrums. Nutzung nur für persönliche Zwecke. Veröffentlichungen – auch von Teilen – bedürfen der schriftlichen Erlaubnis des Rechteinhabers.

or „You’re damned right”, also he supplies a basic security.

I would sum up by saying that Fromm as an analyst gives the impression of a good parent

intensely concerned with the growth of his patient, and providing a basic security implicitly.

**TABLE I**

*Groupings of analysts according to the degree of participation*

| only observation   | observation and "participation with"   | observation, "participation with" and "participation in"   |
|--------------------|--|--|
| orthodox Freudians | conservative critics of the blanc-screen model (Hoffman 1983)                    | radicals critics of the blanc-screen model (Hoffman, 1983) |
|                    | "participants" (Hirsch 1987)   | "observing participants" (Hirsch 1987)                     |
|                    | Ferenczi<br>Sullivan, Kohut<br>M. Klein, Fairbairn<br>Winnicott, Bowlby<br>Fromm | Gill<br>Levenson<br>Racker<br>Sandler<br>Searles           |

**References**

Bowlby, J. (1979) *The Making and Breaking of Affective Bonds*. London: Tavistock Publications.

Freud, S. (1959) *Collected Papers*. New York; Basic Books.

Fromm, E. (1955d) Remarks on the problem of free association. *Psychiatric Research Reports of the American Psychiatric Association* N. 2.

Fromm, E. (1963) Filmed interview on videotape. Tübingen: Erich Fromm Archives.

Fromm, E. (1974) Transcript of ten unpublished seminars held in Locarno (Switzerland) in July 1974 Tübingen: Erich Fromm Archives.

Fromm, E. (1977) Psychoanalytic „technique” - or the art of listening. Unpublished notes. Tübingen: Erich Fromm Archives.

Fromm, E. (1980-81) *Gesamtausgabe*. Ed. R. Funk. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt.

Fromm, E. & Maccoby, M. (1970b) *Social Character in a Mexican Village: A Socialpsychoanalytic Study*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Gill, M.M. (1983) The interpersonal paradigm and the degree of the therapist’s involvement. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 19: 200-237.

Greenberg, J.R. (1981) Prescription or description: therapeutic action of psychoanalysis. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 17: 239-257.

Greenberg, J.R. & Mitchell, S.A. (1983) *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hirsch, I. (1987) Varying modes of analytic participation. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, 15: 205-222.

Hoffman, I. (1983) The patient as interpreter of the analyst’s experience. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 19: 389-422.

Kwawer, J.S. (1975) A case seminar with Erich Fromm. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 11: 453-455.

Landis, B. (1981) Fromm’s approach to psychoanalytic technique. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 17: 537-551.

Levenson, E. (1972) *The Fallacy of Understanding*. New York: Basic Books.

Luban-Plozza, B. & Biancoli, R. (1987) Erich Fromms therapeutische Annäherung oder die Kunst der Kunst der Psychotherapie. In: *Der unbekannte Fromm*, Ed. L. v. Werder. Frankfurt am Main: Haag & Herchen.

Menninger, K.A. & Holzman, P.S. (1973) *Theory of Psychoanalytic Technique*. Second Edition. New York: Basic Books.

Schechter, D.E. (1981) Contributions of Erich Fromm. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 17: 468-480.

Silva Garcia, J. (1983) La transferencia: Freud, Ferenczi y Fromm. Paper presented at the Encuentro Internacional sobre la obra de Sandor



Propriety of the Erich Fromm Document Center. For personal use only. Citation or publication of material prohibited without express written permission of the copyright holder.

Eigentum des Erich Fromm Dokumentationszentrums. Nutzung nur für persönliche Zwecke. Veröffentlichungen – auch von Teilen – bedürfen der schriftlichen Erlaubnis des Rechteinhabers.

- 
- Ferenczi, Santader.  
Sullivan, H.S. (1954) *Sullivan Psychiatric Interview*.  
Eds. H. Perry and M.Gawel. New York:  
W.W. Norton & Co.  
Suzuki, D.T., Fromm, E. & De Martino, R. (1960a)  
*Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*. New  
York: Grove Press, 1963.  
Tauber, E.S. (1959) The sense of immediacy in  
Fromm's conceptions. In: *American hand-  
book of Psychiatry*, Vol. II, Ed. S. Arieti.  
New York: Basic Books.  
Wolstein, B. (1981) A historical note on Erich Fromm:  
1955. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 17. 481-  
485.

Copyright © 1989 and 2008 by Dr. Marco Bacciagaluppi, Via Pellini 4, I-20125 Milano / Italien  
E-Mail: bacciagaluppi[at-symbol]iol.it.