

KÁROLY VARGA

AN OEUVRE THAT PARALLELS THE GENESIS OF TODAY'S PSYCHOTHERAPY

BUDA, B. (2004) *Pszichoterápia: Kapcsolat és kommunikáció* (Budapest: Akadémiai) 524 pp., ISBN: 963 05 8154 X, HUF 4,400.

'In communication, the signal "the following don't have to be taken seriously" has to be taken seriously', is the old paradox of the anthropologist Gregory Bateson which launched a new paradigm in the psychological and social scientific thinking of the 20th century. Indeed, this *framing*, as well as the distinction between the object level and meta-level is such an 'archaic' phenomenon that it can already be discovered in the social contacts of the higher-ranking animals, such as beavers, dogs, predators, and anthropoid apes. They, too, are able to communicate that their 'aggressive' behavior is only a game. In the case of humans, this meta-communicative level can qualify the contents of direct communication, just as much as the relationship between the communicating parties, or otherwise, the situation of the communication (or all these at the same time). Its general characteristic is, therefore, that there is communication going on about communication.

In that sense, this immense book is also a meta-communicative work. In the monographic integration of B. Buda's oeuvre of (so far) sixty volumes, it is not only his own school within the profession of psychotherapy that he characterises with the subtitle *Rapport and Communication*, but with an overview one meta-level higher. He communicates the whole of the discipline (its theory and practice) as, first and foremost, ever more complex and integrated communication. He directs the object level of the fifty themes within the 12 sections of the work with comments from the meta-level of the interposed integrating-interpreting reflections: from the socio-cultural background of healing through the models and effect mechanisms of psychotherapy, and on the basis of introducing the criteria of effectiveness, strategic view, and integrative options of its schools to the core-themes like 'empathy', 'language and communication in the Stanford school' or the 'semantic theory of the unconscious', and through several other application fields and border problems towards the philosophical climax written in the defense of the psychotherapeutic way of looking, with the title: 'Mind and body: The (cultural and scientific) history and relevance of a (pseudo-) problem from the point of view of today's psychiatry'. In as much as both are aimed at integration, this great summarising attempt of the author parallels one of his most significant integrative achievements: the discovery of the system-theoretical resultant of psychoanalytical therapy and the semantic theory of the unconscious.

What in the course of psychoanalytic therapy takes place, is a strengthening and an *integration* of the semantic system of the *self*, i.e. of the conscious part of the ego, which

actively governs behavior. The unconscious is a temporary concept attached to a psychological method, which served to make the semantic factors of behavior and experience theoretically expressible, and to elucidate the fact that by means of broadening the range of concepts, the scope and accuracy of this regulation can be enhanced, and that can be healing.

Accordingly in this integration of Buda's life-work, a 'self-similarity' appears which is well illustrated by the sight-identity emphasised in fractal-theoretic technical literature, and which can be gained if we view a broken-off branch held at arm's length together with its own tree, ash with the ash, fir with the fir. Therefore, what the author exposes in integrating the semantic theory of psychoanalysis and the unconscious, comes into effect in this summarising work.

Getting to know the unconscious is not a clarification of something absolutely new, up to the then unknown (for example a new realm of knowledge, language, history, or culture opening up in front of somebody through learning), but much rather realising new semantic contents and connections of things already known.

Furthermore, to contrast knowledge and understanding more drastically, he quotes the sharper phrasing of Adler: 'The neurotic person knows much more than he understands.' Buda, in undertaking this more recent and more developed integration in the course of his career, and by continuously deepening and enriching inwardly as well, parallel to its thematic volume (namely, again and again under the simple entry *Psychotherapy*, making it always clearer how little triviality there is about its two-front emancipatory battle against biological psychiatry on the one hand, and magical healing methods on the other hand) repeatedly generates a meta-level understanding out of this immense material knowledge for himself and his reading public.

Reflecting on this peculiarly self-surpassing attempt, Buda himself terms the meta-level observation, and turn-by-turn commenting on the object level of his subject matter, as a spiral construction. The author declares that it is in this spiral ascent, 'the – if I may say so – didactic intentions' that the instruments of understanding come to effect. This quasi-apologising for the word *didactic* throws light upon one of Buda's governing attitudes: he himself does not arrogate the right to an *ordinarial* sight or instruction (an allusion to the *Ordinarius*, the almighty *Lehrstuhlinhaber* of the traditional German university) whose reason for existence he calls into question in the ambitions of any psychotherapeutic school. Of course, apart from this, the voluntary disciples who have been orientating themselves from the oeuvre of Buda for decades, can make use of this advantage: from such a highly educated and profound (and at the same time, in a broad spectrum of audience, 'user friendly') introduction of the space-time dimensions of the 20th century evolution of psychiatry, they can take lessons from the strategic and cautiously – so far merely in hope – integrative view of up-to-date psychotherapy. The Archimedean point is never authority but controlled effect. Reflecting on his implementing program, Buda records this in the following way:

The author repeatedly returns to the research on the effects of psychotherapy, as well as to the examination of effectiveness, because that is where he sees the chance of an up-to-date scientific basis of psychotherapy, and these are where he hopes for the real incentive for an integration of different schools.

It is also to be taken seriously from the above that all this took place in the course of a *two-front self-identity struggle* within the four-decade-long practice as well as research results of the practising and researching psychiatrist-psychotherapists, and this is where it gains an exact-disciplinary introduction. And, thankfully, it is a far more flexible narrative-autobiographical introduction.

Nowadays, psychotherapy is obviously on the defensive, and in the process of being superseded. This is caused primarily by the pushing forward of pharmako-psychiatry and biological psychiatry. Although the biological way of looking at the world always acknowledges the reason for existence and the role of psychotherapy in words, in practice it calls into question the existence of psychogenic illnesses and symptoms, in an attempt to fit these into a framework of biologically determined entities. Psychotherapy, shattered into schools as it is, has little chance of resisting these tendencies. From another direction, the existence of psychotherapies is threatened by the spreading of alternative medicine and magical healing methods (natural healing, acupuncture, imposition, etc.) The chance for survival lies in theoretical and methodical integration.

The demand for a strategic view, the search for some kind of an integration of schools, and the valid identification of healing effects, all create a theme-triad, an organic unit, a spirally recurring insistence in the *pauses* of the rich material argumentation, and it achieves a biographical authenticity through the experience of a conviction originating from discovery.

I was lucky enough to follow the unraveling of the integrative strategic view in the course of my career (from the publication of *Strategies of Psychotherapy* by HALEY, 1963) almost simultaneously, and I could publish and represent the essence of this view at an early stage in my writings. At first I grasped the perspectives of the new communication theory, which I first correlated with the up-to-date evaluation of psychotherapy, then, making the possibility of method integration self-evident, with the client-centered school of Rogers, and then completely with the strategic attitude, whose central concept is the operational definition of psychotherapy. The data displaying equal or similar effectiveness enhanced the criticism of the factors and explanations concerning effect mechanisms proclaimed in the given school on the one hand, and the search for the *mutual background factors* on the other hand, which none of the schools managed to enrich substantially more than the others. In general, therefore, it is the eclectic, integrative efforts that are important in view of the future of psychotherapy. The psychotherapeutic '*multilingualism*', that is, the capability to think and act according to the theories and methodologies of more directions is beginning to become a value.

Talking about integrative attempts, Buda emphasises the following:

They start from the clients, first of all throwing light upon their *self-structuring* work or *development of identity* and it is these in their significance that they correlate with the elements of the psychotherapeutic process, which in this way appear as principally non-specific.

What is relevant here is the future of the patient role, which has already been transformed into the role of a *client* engaging a service, and which develops into a set of roles belonging to 'the autonomous person taking care of his health and possessing

a psychotherapeutic culture'. Yet the deconstruction coming into effect here, which devotes attention to factors (validly measurable variables) sorted out of the schools instead of their readymade *parcels*, and among the former, laying special emphasis upon the demands of the individual, the gains on the side of the latter will necessarily have to be accounted for as losses at another point. This deficient instance is no other than *ritualised orthodoxies and authority* playing a central role in earlier ages. Again, the author visualises this change of emphasis by means of an autobiographical passage: The telephonic therapy job he liked so much – whose recorded material is an authentic analytical basis – made him realise the change of paradigm in psychotherapeutic practice and research.

In the seventies, I myself also saw the essence of psychotherapy in a kind of a structural model. I reckoned that it is either blocked development and distortion, or regression and the forming of pathologic mechanisms that leads to the crisis, and this deformed structure has to be changed by psychotherapy. Therefore, I deemed the options of telephonic contact therapy to be more restricted than those of a personal meeting, which attempted the therapeutic change within a contract-based relationship. Psychotherapeutic research, however, has radically changed the earlier image of therapy. The therapist is not so much a partner regulating and governing actions, but much rather an occasional help. *The relevant moments of change take place within the system of the client.* The processes within traditional therapies are rather rites and institutionalised forms, which, according to the investigations, have a very scarce efficiency, restricting the autonomy of the client and creating a dependence. Today, we are of the opinion that the client does not necessarily have to continuously 'work' on himself, he only requires help in the course of certain blocks or crises, and first of all when he cannot have access to these within his own contact system.

From this kind of self-apostrophising as a (partly) transcended development level on Buda's part, not even the research results that are considered to be the most significant can be exempt. For example, his theory about the isomorphism of psychoanalysis and the cognitive as well as the semantic school, and within these, about the role of concept structures in the regulation of behavior, as well as his earlier views and practice concerning the consequences of this unified model influencing the parameters of healing, namely its *time demand*, which was elaborated in the mid-Seventies, fell victim (or at least, underwent a flexible reinterpretation) following the enhancement of the dramatic weight of the corrective emotional experience, as well as occasional guidance.

The autobiographical touch of life is not missing from the lead-up of the crowning Chapter XII (which is also greatly needed here because of being rather unorthodox: with the author's argumentative position set up in nine big computer-*powerpoint* text chart presentations, and condensed into their more flexible lecturing train of thought). The birth circumstances of the study, and then the forced position it had to take up unexpectedly, cast a sharp light on the author's paradox message: psychotherapy has to be defended. It has to be defended first of all against the accusation of something it never had the slightest intention to do: against the Platonic ('The Farewell Words of Socrates in Phaidon'), as well as Cartesian (*res cogitans* versus *res extensa*) *dualism*, against which, in the decades of Marxism, a fierce inquisition was

(mistakenly) pursued because of its religious connotations, and whose unfounded accusation is maintained up to the present time by the colleagues with a 'hard core' biological disposition. It came to Buda's 'Anti-Socratic' Apology as follows: 'In 2001, I was asked for a plenary lecture at the general assembly of the Psychiatric Society, where I was offered a free choice of theme' – the author discusses the dramaturgy worthy of the theme, which, however, does not betray him concerning battle positions, because he continues as follows:

Because of the large-scale and superseding dominance of biological psychiatry, the eclipse of scientific and, most of all, healthcare application, I decided to make one more, probably last attempt to defend psychotherapy against the accusation of dualism. . . Besides, this theme presented itself because of *the great recognition of the previous year* being that by means of modern image forming operations, it was possible to point out changes in the different structural elements of the brain as a result of psychotherapy which were similar to those pointed out in the course of adequate psycho-pharmacological treatments. . . Perhaps it was intelligible, although it did not resonate seriously in the circle of 'hard core' biologically oriented colleagues. I not only had no inspiration to write it up in more detail but I wouldn't have found a forum, either. However, as the similar minded people, the psychotherapists, also asked for and demanded the textual version, I elaborated a short text for the 'mates', retaining the reference system. Another event that gave rise to this was that out of necessity, I had to give up editing and publishing the journal *Addictive Diseases*, created by myself. The manuscript was some kind of a *goodbye* to this undertaking.

This comment, inserted as *the great recognition of the previous year*, about the change of psychotherapeutic influence detected in the brain structure, can be paralleled with the thesis in the study, 'Can Spirit Spring up from Matter?' published in several languages, written by the recently deceased Jesuit philosopher B. Weissmahr, similarly reflecting on the empirical evidence brought up in the Buda-publication on a *meta-level*.

Psychic power or dynamics, which is able to exert an influence on matter, is not a 'ghost in the machine'. Every finite spirit which is able to formally reflect on itself is material, thus, the human soul, as well, and they are not beyond space and time, even if its space-restriction differs from the space-restriction of physically perceptible matter.

Therefore, in their rejection of dualism, these authors with faraway cultural backgrounds and professions declare congruent views.

Reference

HALEY, J. (1963) *Strategies of Psychotherapy* (New York: Grune and Stratton).