

## Technique and Understanding

Paul Ricœur on Freud and the Analytic Experience

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### Abstract:

For Ricœur any study of Freud, or of psychoanalysis more generally, needs to take into account the crucial dimension of the *analytic experience* itself. Psychoanalysis, as a “mixed discourse,” aims to anticipate questions of meaning and explication alongside technical questions of energies, repression, displacement, and so on. The analytic experience is one which is practical and intersubjective, but which is also guided by various techniques or methods. These techniques, I will argue, should be understood as a type of *techne*, one which is less concerned with hermeneutic questions of meaning than with quasi-scientific questions of *force*, feedback, struggle, and process. The *practice* of psychoanalysis, on the other hand, deals with the ways in which these forces or drives become *meaningful* for a *particular* subject, and within a singular context or history. This article will aim to draw out both the interrelationship between techniques and practical understanding, and also the productive incommensurability between the two.

*Keywords:* Psychoanalysis, Technique, Practice, Recursivity, Hermeneutics.

### Résumé:

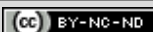
Selon Ricœur, toute analyse de Freud ou de la psychanalyse en général, doit prendre en compte la dimension cruciale de l'*expérience analytique*. En tant que “discours contrasté,” la psychanalyse cherche à anticiper la question de la signification et de l'explication, ainsi que la question de l'énergie, de la répression et du déplacement. Ce qui définit l'expérience analytique, c'est son caractère à la fois pratique et intersubjectif. Cependant, elle est aussi guidée par des techniques et des méthodes variées. Dans cette perspective, l'argument central de cet article consistera à montrer que ces techniques doivent être comprises et approchées sous l'angle de la “techné.” Un type de “techné” qui est moins préoccupé par les questions herméneutiques de sens que par les questions quasi-scientifiques de la *force*, de la rétroaction, de la lutte, et des processus. La *pratique* de la psychanalyse, d'autre part, traite de la façon dont ces forces ou ces pulsions deviennent *significatives* pour un sujet *particulier*, et dans un contexte historique singulier. Cet article vise à mettre au jour la relation entre les techniques et la compréhension pratique, en même temps que l'incommensurabilité productive qui existe entre les deux.

*Keywords:* Psychanalyse, technique, pratique, récursivité, herméneutiques.

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# Technique and Understanding

## Paul Ricœur on Freud and the Analytic Experience

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For Ricœur, any study of Freud, or of psychoanalysis more generally, needs to take into account the crucial dimension of the *analytic experience* itself. It is in the context of this experience that the two hermeneutic attitudes of suspicion and trust become intertwined through the respective figures of *technique* and *practice*. The “school of suspicion,”<sup>1</sup> represented primarily by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, is characterised by its attempt to explain the dynamic forces underlying presented “meanings” or truths. These explanatory frameworks are then utilised in a critical way in order to demonstrate the contingency and fallibility of thoughts, opinions, or beliefs which are typically taken to be transparent for the subject. Ricœur’s readings of these positions aim to demonstrate that works of protest and deconstruction, guided by attitudes of suspicion, always presuppose corresponding works of reconstruction and re-figuration.

This article will explore some of the differences between the two types of knowledge or skills associated with techniques and practices. Psychoanalytic *technique*, I will argue, should be understood as a type of *techne*, one which is less concerned with hermeneutic questions of meaning than with quasi-scientific questions of *force*, feedback, struggle, and process. In contrast, the practice of psychoanalysis deals with the ways in which these forces or drives become meaningful for a particular subject, and within a singular context or history,

Broadly speaking, we may say that the investigatory procedure [psychoanalytic practice] tends to give preference to relations of *meaning* between mental productions, while the method of treatment [psychoanalytic technique] tends to give preference to relations of *force* between systems.<sup>2</sup>

If we wish to pursue questions of hermeneutics after Ricœur and Freud, these two types of practical skills, technique and practical understanding, should be taken as two incommensurable but interrelated moments of a general process of understanding.

Taking the relation between *technique* and understanding seriously is also relevant at a broader level. What the Freudian project does, at least in terms of its reflection on its own practice, is thematise the person as a technical being, that is, as a being who in the process of trying to understand also employs certain techniques, ways, or modes of action which can be explained and even, to an extent, codified. Recognising this aspect of anthropological existence means that any hermeneutic account of human understanding requires detours through an analysis of the various structures or paradigms of action. This does not mean that we need to take the term *technique*, and its associations with *techne*, in a narrow sense. *Techniques*, when understood as being dependant on wider practices or horizons of application, should themselves be understood as incomplete. In Wolfgang Iser’s sense of the term they are recursive, that is, they

are structured like coherent systems, but gain traction through feedback procedures which constantly alter and reshape these structures. This view of technique is also present in Freud's understanding of the term, since for Freud it is strongly linked to the notion of *work* and to a type of work which is a clearing away of resistances so that paths to memory and narrative (to meaning), can be carved out.

The main claims pursued throughout the article will be: (1) psychoanalytic techniques are not interpretive, if we take interpretation in the narrow sense of "explication," rather they are a type of *techne*. However, (2) neither are they *instrumental*, that is, they should not be linked to coercive methods of adaptation nor with the "observational" attitude which Ricœur associates with behavioural psychology. Instead, (3) they should be understood as critical-hermeneutic; they are a type of *register*<sup>3</sup> which enables the emergence of meaning through processes of application. Technique is strongly distinguished from psychoanalytic "theory" which, for Ricœur, often remains blind to insights arising from practical application. In this regard, Ricœur is in agreement with Jean Laplanche in taking Freud's reflections on the analytic situation to represent an "anti-hermeneutics."<sup>4</sup> Psychoanalytic practice, as opposed to its theory, is an anti-hermeneutics to the extent that it resists the idea that there could be a metapsychological "code" or "key" (e.g., the Oedipal complex) which would serve as an interpretive framework for directly translating the analysand's discourse. For Laplanche, psychoanalytic "theories," which are often constructed or built independently of reflections on the analytic experience, misunderstand the fundamentally deconstructive, "unbinding" process of the analysis itself, which proceeds via isolated associations and dissociations rather than via over-arching explanatory frameworks or "codes." In fact, "the application of a new code to an old one, subjecting the manifest to 'rereading,' can only amount to the redoubling of repression."<sup>5</sup> As mentioned above, I will argue that Ricœur is also critical of *this* understanding of hermeneutics, whereby interpretation is synonymous with explication. Yet, Ricœur has a much broader hermeneutic philosophy, which includes the crucial practical moment of appropriation, and it is in the sense of appropriation or practical application that psychoanalysis remains hermeneutic.

The practical field of psychoanalysis, consisting of features such as conversations, confessions, tears, slips of tongue, suspicion, hope, and so on, should be understood as comprising of a much larger set of involvements than the more specific *technique* of psychoanalysis. The practice itself, which is intersubjective and situated, is fundamentally open and indeterminate, but if it can be said to have a defining aim or identifying reference point it is in its combination of a philosophical conception of the nature of consciousness and a clinical claim about human "health" or flourishing in relation to desire. A psychoanalytic practitioner (an analyst), while armed with useful techniques, is always confronted anew by this situation and a diversity of cases. Techniques must be rewritten or retooled if they are to remain effective. Psychoanalysis, as conceived by Ricœur, should not be understood as the *direct application* of a set of methods or techniques to particular situations, but is conceived of as a two-way relation between the types of hermeneutic consciousness associated with practice and the set of techniques associated with this process.

## 1. Technique and Interpretation

Freudian psychoanalysis is a mixed discourse which aims to take into account human consciousness/mental activity, largely concerned with questions of meaning, and the human *unconscious*, which behaves *as* a “thing.”<sup>6</sup> As Habermas points out, this distinguishes psychoanalysis from “traditional” hermeneutics and explains its emancipatory character.<sup>7</sup> It differs from traditional hermeneutic or philological questions of interpretation as they are seen as remaining at the level of the “mental” life of a subject, whereas psychoanalysis, through incorporating questions of force and the unconscious into its theory becomes a *depth hermeneutics*; it aims to interpret not only the mental and public utterances of a speaker or author but also the private, censored, unconscious life of a subject, because these private, “split-off” symbols have an affective or distorting role in relation to public forms of discourse. It becomes an emancipatory project due to the therapeutic clearing away of “split-off” symbols, removing distortions from communication and allowing subjects to engage with one another at a more transparent level.

While largely in agreement with Habermas and Alfred Lorenzer,<sup>8</sup> Ricoeur’s approach to psychoanalysis differs in a key way. He reflects on psychoanalysis from *within* the Freudian framework, where the forces or drives associated with the unconscious and desire are not something which can ever be fully “normalised” or translated into cultural or rational expression, but rather must accompany the “working-through” of the patient indefinitely. If there is an emancipatory character to the Freudian dictum “Where the id was, there ego shall be,” it is not in the cultural project of “overcoming” instinct, but rather in the questioning of the split between the rational and the irrational when discussing concepts such as the self, meaning, and truth.

If the person is alienated from their own hidden motives, the psychoanalytic task is not necessarily one of enlightenment, whereby the hidden causes of action would become explicated through interpretation, but rather is one of appropriation. This appropriation is brought about by way of a struggle to remove the bar between the conscious and the unconscious, and in a sense, challenge the misunderstanding that there is a radical separation between (rational, motivated) “person” and (irrational, casual) “thing.” The person must first recognise their own technicity in order to begin the work of “handling” it well. This is the insight which founds the development of psychoanalytic technique:

We can now complete our description of psychoanalysis as technique. Its technical object (to use Simondon’s term as a designation of the respondent or opponent of the psychoanalytic manoeuvre) is man insofar as he himself is a process of deformation, transposition and distortion applied to all the presentations (whether affective or ideational) of his oldest wishes, those which *The Interpretation of Dreams* calls “indestructible” or “atemporal” and which the article on “The Unconscious” declares to be *zeitlos* or timeless. Psychoanalysis is constituted as technique because, in the process of *Entstellung*, man himself behaves as a mechanism, submits to an external law, and “condenses” or “displaces” his thoughts. [...] In this way the psyche is itself a technique practiced on itself, a technique of disguise and misunderstanding.<sup>9</sup>

Freud’s own papers on technique trace a developmental movement, guided by concrete experiences with patients, from an understanding of technique as interpretation and explication,

towards an understanding of technique as a type of system or register. Technique, understood in this way, aims only *indirectly* at questions of meaning and interpretation. These papers on technique are notable for their departure from speculations regarding theoretical hypotheses in favour of a turn to practical questions regarding issues such as structures of appointments,

I adhere strictly to the principle of leasing a definite hour. Each patient is allotted a particular hour of my available working day; it belongs to him and he is liable for it, even if he does not make use of it. [...] No other way is practicable.<sup>10</sup>

The concern here is with how psychoanalytic therapy can become more effective, not with general questions of human psychology. For Ricœur, the “genre” of these papers is an important aspect of their practical relevance, “I consider these texts to be of an exemplary clarity. They suffice to open an abyss between everything that reflection can draw out of itself and that which only a craft can teach.”<sup>11</sup>

In his essay “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through,” Freud charts three “phases” of psychoanalytic technique, whose progression goes from a model close to that of behavioural/observational psychology, towards the dialogical model of exchange that Ricœur associates with a hermeneutic understanding of technique. The first phase is that of Breuer’s cathartic method, which uses hypnosis to encourage the remembering of past, repressed events. This method of remembering is rejected by Freud on the basis that its focus on the isolated event of trauma does not take into account the crucial aspect of “repeating” associated with the formation of symptoms. Furthermore, the method of hypnosis displaces the work aspect of analysis onto the hypnotic technique itself.

The second phase involved a “deciphering” of the patient’s free associations on the part of the analyst, who would then communicate the interpretations to the analysand. Once again this method did not utilise the working-through aspect which the analysand themselves must go through in order to become conscious. Instead, the analyst performed the bulk of the work of interpretation. More importantly, if an “interpretation” or even a “guess” regarding the patient’s symptom is presented to them before the transference process has begun, it will be as if an external observer has communicated to them their inner-workings and fantasies, and will seem like a violation which provokes aggression and resistance,

[Premature diagnosis] will completely discredit oneself and the treatment in the patient’s eyes and will arouse the most violent opposition in him, whether one’s guess has been true or not; indeed, the truer the guess the more violent will be the resistance.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas “in the earliest days of analytic technique we took an intellectualist view of the situation,”<sup>13</sup> increased knowledge of the “mechanisms” of the unconscious and of the topographical differentiation of mental processes lead to the psychoanalytic insight that a “conscious” recognition did not necessarily imply an unconscious transformation, especially if that area of the mind had been strongly encrypted: “The strange behaviour of patients, in being able to combine a conscious knowing with not knowing, remains inexplicable by what is called normal psychology.”<sup>14</sup> Any “interpretations” or suggestions on the part of the analyst must become secondary to their own task of recognising the occurrence of transference, “When are we

to begin making our communications to the patient? [...] Not until an effective transference has been established in the patient, a proper *rapport* with him.”<sup>15</sup>

The failure of this approach led to the development of a psychoanalytic technique which is not a work of interpretation (of dreams, of symptoms) but is a *struggle against resistances*. This final phase, which Freud himself advocates, redistributes the types of labour associated with psychoanalytic practice and recognises the role of repetition in both the formation and overcoming of symptoms. The work becomes a *shared* work, and energies which would have been previously directed at processes of free-association or recounting, are now directed also at the processes of repeating and working-through. The analyst no longer does the work of remembering *on behalf* of the patient (either through inducing/guiding hypnosis, or by suggesting interpretations to the analysand), but instead aims to *clear away* the patient's resistances so that they can perform the work of remembering themselves,

Finally, there was evolved the consistent technique used today, in which the analyst gives up the attempt to bring a particular moment or problem into focus. He contents himself with studying whatever is present for the time being on the surface of the patient's mind, and employs the art of interpretation mainly for the purpose of recognising the resistances which appear there, and making them conscious to the patient. From this there results a new sort of division of labour: the doctor uncovers the resistances which are unknown to the patient; when these have been got the better of, the patient often relates the forgotten situations and connections without any difficulty.<sup>16</sup>

In hermeneutic terms, the analyst is no longer concerned with “reconstructing” a past event using interpretive methods, but rather focuses on the contemporaneity of the patient's discourse as it presents itself in this new, analytical experience. They, in a sense, cease to be directly interested in the patient themselves, that is in terms of their “psychological” life, and rather become interested in the ways that this psychological life is presented through language in a dialogical situation.

## 2. Technique and Nontechnique

Although psychoanalytic methods of treatment are different than those associated with hermeneutic “explication,” they cannot be separated from the procedure of investigation itself. The procedures of psychoanalysis remain hermeneutic for Ricœur, since the psychoanalytic situation is intersubjective and participatory. The dialectic between the quasi-mechanistic technique and its practical application in a dialogical situation leads to another important distinction for Ricœur. Psychoanalytic technique is not an instrument for “adapting” the analysand or for producing a “normalised” self. It operates on linguistic structures, retaining both its hermeneutic and technical character. This relation with practical, hermeneutic questions of truth and meaning renders it “non-technological” for Ricœur:

In this sense, psychoanalysis is more an anti-technique. [...] When I say that psychoanalysis is not a technique of domination, I wish to emphasize its important feature of being a technique of veracity.<sup>17</sup>

The art of interpretation is indeed replaced with the task of “handling” the patient. However, if, with Ricœur, we aim to recognise the phenomenon of *distanciation* in any realisation of language as discourse, then a productive understanding of *technique* can be adopted without it having to constitute a violation of the patient’s singularity. For example, a patient’s dreams, which are always intimate and personal, are admitted into the analytic situation *via* the process of recounting. That is, what is subjected to the technique of the analyst is the dream content *as it is told* by the analysand, or in other words the dream content realised as discourse. The analyst is not interested in naturalistic questions concerning the actual dream itself, but rather with the way in which the patient recounts it to her. This conversational setting for examining an intimate aspect of the patient’s life could be contrasted with an analysis of a dream in a neurological study using technologies and statistical analysis. Again, through replacing the “art” of interpretation with the work of handling resistances, Freud is ascribing psychoanalytic technique the role not of understanding the patient better (as a singular individual), but of understanding their particular form of *discourse* better. To draw on Ricœur’s hermeneutics of the text, the analyst as technician is no longer directly concerned with the psychic life “behind” the patient’s words, but rather becomes concerned with the types of worlds and meanings opened up *in front of* the patient’s text.

Psychoanalytic technique does depend on, and gain its specificity, through a series of “technological” metaphors, which perhaps at first sight lead it to be confused with a method of controlling or mastering natural drives: “It is a technique, by its character as work and its commerce with energies and mechanisms which are attached to the economy of desire.”<sup>18</sup> But it nevertheless is more concerned with the “derivatives” of instinctual representatives,

The analyst never handles forces directly but always indirectly in the play of meaning, double meaning, and substituted, displaced, or transposed meanings. An economy of desire, yes – but across a semantics of desire. A dynamics, yes – but across a hermeneutics.<sup>19</sup>

It becomes a “technique of veracity” through this interrelationship between a hermeneutics of discourse and a technique of “handling” resistances. The goal of the handling is “access to true discourse,”<sup>20</sup> and not necessarily finding a “cure” for the analysand. Although psychoanalytic treatment does aim to move progressively from the pleasure principle towards the reality principle, the “reality” in question here has to be distinguished from “homologous concepts such as stimuli or environment.”<sup>21</sup> Instead,

this reality is fundamentally the truth of a personal history in a concrete situation; it is not, as in psychology, the order of stimuli as they are known by the experimenter but rather the true meaning which the patient must arrive at through the obscure labyrinth of the fantasy.<sup>22</sup>

This aspect of Freudian psychoanalysis is attested to most strongly through the way in which it conceives of the work of mourning. This work does not consist in a complete “destruction” or annulling of the fantasy object which gives rise to melancholia, but rather in demonstrating the complicity of a fantasy object with the real-life resistances that it gives rise to. Once these resistances have been removed, the fantasy is not dispelled but *unmasked*. It can then

be resituated at the appropriate level, that of the imaginary, and can accompany the patient in their working through without giving rise to further resistance,

Far from restricting itself to vanquishing the fantasy to the benefit of reality, the cure also recovers it as a fantasy to situate it, without confusing it with what is real, on the level of the imaginary. [...] I will venture to say, in summation, that what is psychoanalytically relevant is what a subject makes of his fantasies.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, Ricœur situates the Freudian approach within a philosophical tradition concerned not with mastering or dispelling desire, but with redirecting and working with human desire in the project of becoming a subject. For Ricœur, the analytic experience aims to recover two aspects of human existence, *the ability to speak* and *the ability to love*,<sup>24</sup> aspects of the self which have become detached and dispersed among various idols, pasts, or dogmatic forms of discourse. This “exteriorisation” of desire is what has to be worked-through, via detours, so that the subject can find themselves again:

The thesis of the anteriority, the archaism, of desire is fundamental to a reformulation of the *cogito*: like Aristotle, like Spinoza and Leibniz, like Hegel, Freud places desire at the centre of the act of existing.<sup>25</sup>

The project is not one of “freeing” the will, which would be associated with a technological project of mastering nature, but rather, following Spinoza,

psychoanalysis proceeds [...] by suspending consciousness and thus rendering the subject equal to its real slavery. It is precisely by beginning with the level of this slavery, by delivering oneself without restraint to the imperious flux of deep motivations, that the true situation of consciousness is discovered.<sup>26</sup>

If we associate technological rationality with the will to power, as Heidegger does, then the psychoanalytic method must be understood as a “nontechnique,” as resisting this approach to human nature.

### 3. The Playground of Transference

It should be clear at this point that Ricœur’s understanding of technique is complex. Along with Freud he sees it as being something distinct from an “interpretive” method of explication, and indeed as arising due to the need to resist a too-quick interpretation of symptoms, but also as being separate from “technology,” taken in the sense of being a controlling attitude indifferent to human or culturally specific questions of meaning. In order to explore the function of technique more fully it is necessary to shift focus away from psychoanalytic discourse and towards the hermeneutic sphere of practice, where technique becomes meaningful in relation to human action and understanding. Psychoanalytic technique is not an “instrument,” but rather as a type of *register* which guides the recursive unfolding of experience throughout the course of analysis. The recursivity takes place between concrete subjects, with corresponding (partly concealed) life histories, and the framework represented by the *technique*, whose purpose is to



gradually clear away built up resistances so that new meanings and practical orientations can emerge.

One of the guiding motives here will be that, following Ricœur, critical theory and hermeneutics must be taken as inseparable. A technique of unmasking, led by a critical attitude of suspicion, can never become meaningful or effective until it is situated in a relation which is fundamentally one of *belonging*, “for when all is said and done, it is impossible to destroy anyone *in absentia* or *in effigie*.”<sup>27</sup> Practical understanding cannot occur independently of application, and a situation in which an interpretation is applied is always one to which a subject always already belongs. Of course, analytic experience presupposes the persistence of (historical) distance due to the nature of repression. It is an *archaeology* of desire as much of its work involves forays into past, distant events, such as those of childhood. But this archaeology is always accompanied by a corresponding *teleology* which aims to resituate these past experiences in the present contexts to which the subject belongs and participates in. The patient’s life history is the context for the application; they have not understood an interpretation of their symptom fully if it has not begun to affect their life. This is why the analytic experience has as one of its central forms of “work” the task of forming an appropriate narrative.

“Application” here must be taken in the traditional, but “forgotten,” sense that Gadamer outlines in *Truth and Method*. Rather than being a separate, secondary moment, whereby knowledge or an interpretation is first gained and subsequently applied or “tested,” it should be seen as an integral moment in a process of understanding. The same is true of Ricœur’s concept of appropriation; a text will remain misunderstood until the horizons of the world of the text and the horizons of the world of the reader have been brought into dialogue and transformed through one another. This aspect of understanding is also what renders interpretation perpetually incomplete. There will always be the possibility that a text will be understood in a new way through future processes of application or appropriation. Whereas with romantic hermeneutics the unity of interpretation (*explicare*) and understanding (*intelligendi*) was thematised exclusively (to explicate a meaning is to understand it), prior to this “it was considered obvious that the task of hermeneutics was to adapt the text’s meaning to the concrete situation to which the text is speaking.”<sup>28</sup> This was clear both in cases of legal and biblical hermeneutics:

A law does not exist in order to be understood historically, but to be concretized in its legal validity by being interpreted. Similarly, the gospel does not exist in order to be understood as a merely historical document, but to be taken in such a way that it exercises its saving effect.<sup>29</sup>

In relation to psychoanalysis, we could say the same about the “genre” of the life or case history of a patient. It is an “unsettled” text, a narrative which has beneath it the force of traumatic or repressed past events which have a ripple effect on the surface, literal narrative. Through the lens of psychoanalytic technique this narrative, often appearing as nonsensical and disconnected, becomes re-read as being subjected to these forces, with the result that seemingly disparate moments become signs of a repetition of the same event. Through the work of reflection, they cease to become “literal” and instead become “symbolic.” However, this re-telling process can only take place at the level of analytic experience itself, and therefore takes on a

fundamentally *applied* character. It is not an instantaneous moment of revelation, but rather a constant and enduring working-through of resistances. The patient's text is not something which has to be "mined" for meaning, it is not a series of symptoms which merely have to be reconnected to an original event in order to be overcome, rather the analysis takes place in an *intersubjective* or dialogical setting and it is this context which sets the scene for the working-through. In this way, Freud's metaphor of translation should be compared with Gadamer's understanding of the translator's task, "the interpreter's task is not simply to repeat what one of the partners says in the discussion he is translating, but to express what is said in a way that seems most appropriate to him."<sup>30</sup> The analyst struggles to translate the analysand's utterances into the appropriate register of the technique, but the analysand must also struggle to find a way to render the technique *meaningful* in relation to their own life, a life which contains a much larger set of involvements and experiences than can be incorporated into the psychoanalytic situation and its techniques. Divorced from its dependency on practical application, technique can become a dangerous tool for moulding the patient as an "object," for example in the case of Dora (Ida Bauer),

As several of Freud's successors noted, the "talking cure" did not actually work for Dora for the probable reason that Freud construed her story according to his own unconscious identifications – in particular with the virile Herr K., whom Freud believed Dora wished to marry. [...] The problem with Dora's case may well be that it was treated by Freud less as a life in search of a history than as a (case) history in search of a life.<sup>31</sup>

This radical distancing on the part of the therapist, the refusal to recognise the claims of the patient *as* another, and not just as a "case" to submit to a technique, can be as therapeutically negligent as a situation in which a technique aiming at a cure is abandoned altogether.

Freud's outline of *transference* serves as a unique and productive contribution to a critical-practical understanding. Characterising psychoanalytic technique as a struggle against resistances means putting transference at the heart of psychoanalysis, since, "finally every conflict has to be fought out in the sphere of transference."<sup>32</sup> Transference is interesting in the context of this article because it productively combines aspects of technique (struggle against resistances, "handling" of the patient) and practical understanding. In terms of practical understanding, it plays on key aspects of dialogue, understood in a hermeneutic sense. As was mentioned above, Freud's own term for the type of relationship established through transference is one of *rapprochement* between two partners. Furthermore, it draws implicitly on hermeneutic conceptions of *play* and *history*. The theoretical claim underpinning transference is that a subject, shaped by childhood experiences, carries with them a type of template, which contributes (often negatively) to the formation of relations with others. The mixture of innate characteristics and early formative experiences "produces what might be described as a stereotype plate (or several such), which is constantly repeated – constantly reprinted afresh – in the course of the person's life."<sup>33</sup> The analyst becomes inserted into this series via transference,

Thus it is a perfectly normal and intelligible thing that the libidinal cathexis of someone who is partly unsatisfied, a cathexis which is held ready in anticipation, should be directed as well to the figure of the doctor [...] the cathexis will introduce the doctor into one of the psychical "series" which the patient has already formed.<sup>34</sup>

The technique of transference, which is developed around this insight, consists not in a critical “removal” of stereotypical models, but rather in a *bringing into play* of these models in the context of a situation which is guided by a technique of unmasking.

This bringing into play of the fore-structures of the patient, so that they can be transformed through application, is what renders analytic experience a *hermeneutics* of suspicion, rather than a “direct” *Aufklärung* or, “prejudice against prejudice.” The hermeneutic parallel of this “staging” of a repetitive series, or a “transposing [of] the drama that generated the neurotic situation onto a sort of miniature artificial stage,”<sup>35</sup> is found in Ricœur’s account of the dialectic between tradition and innovation. A tradition or life history is altered through repeating it in novel or different ways, not simply through “distanced” critique. There is a parallel between the task of approaching a text, and the task of approaching one’s own textual history. Transference is not just projection; it is also an *exposure* to the other within oneself. In a similar way to engaging with a text, putting one’s own assumptions or life history in play is what is required for transformation to occur,

To understand is not to project oneself into the text but to expose oneself to it; it is to receive a self enlarged by the appropriation of the proposed worlds that interpretation unfolds. [...] The metamorphosis of the world in play is also the playful metamorphosis of the ego.<sup>36</sup>

Psychoanalytic technique, understood as a struggle against resistances, can be characterised finally as a type of *register*, whose technological metaphors aim at bringing to light aspects of the analysand’s motivations and desires which remain hidden to them. Every case of psychoanalysis begins with or is founded on a recognition of suffering and a corresponding motivation to alleviate or better understand this suffering. However, taken on their own, these motivations or resources found in the suffering person are not sufficient to overcome the psychic conflict. The right paths to follow on the way to the “cure” are opaque. The technique of psychoanalysis aims to gradually bring to light which paths will work through the clearing away of resistances, and a corresponding “handling” or redirecting of libidinal energies toward these paths (or a “storing up” of libidinal energy for this purpose through various techniques, e.g., abstinence),

Two things are lacking in the [motive force to annul suffering]: it does not know what paths to follow to reach this end and it does not possess the necessary quota of energy with which to oppose the resistances. The analytic treatment helps to remedy both of these deficiencies.<sup>37</sup>

Arguably, the type of work involved in this clearing away of resistances is one which is fundamentally *recursive*. The analytic experience takes place over a long period of time, and involves many alterations to the techniques being employed as the subject matter of the analysand shifts and more layers of their history and condition unfold. For Wolfgang Iser, Ricœur’s reading of Freud succeeds in drawing out the specificity of psychoanalytic theory as being fundamentally concerned with *hidden* or obscured subject matters and which has therefore developed a corresponding mode of interpretation which is that of a *transactional loop*,

The looping operation is designed to regain what is lost; by making the repressed return, it clears blockages, thus recovering what the subject had been striving for when losing itself to the otherness of life. What is glimpsed of the hidden *archê* is to be fed forward into a surmised *telos*, from which a feedback will be received.<sup>38</sup>

This necessary “feedback” process, characteristic of a recursive procedure, is caused by the nesting of the method of treatment (technique) into the investigatory procedure of analysis. The investigatory procedure, the field of meaning and discourse, and the methods of treatment, which are concerned with questions of force and the struggle against resistances, are two fundamentally incommensurable modes of practical understanding. This is what gives rise to “feedback” and the characterisation of the experience as recursive. Arguably, Ricœur’s readings of Freud work to thematise this incommensurability by demonstrating the ways that a hermeneutics of suspicion presupposes a phenomenological understanding of meaning and consciousness. Ricœur’s grafting of both the Hegelian and Husserlian understandings of intersubjectivity and the process of becoming conscious onto Freud’s archaeology of desire aims to destabilise “dogmatic” interpretations of Freud and show instead the fundamentally *regional* aspects of Freudian methods of interpretation. The psychoanalytic experience itself depends on the incommensurability between techniques and practical investigation since the *working-through* aspect of understanding proposed by Freud is something which explicitly resists “instant” or immediate events of comprehension in favour of the gradual, and potentially interminable, process of clarification. The tension between the technique and practice opens up what Iser refers to as a “liminal” space in which conflicts are constantly negotiated and renegotiated. The technique conditions the quality or nature of this liminal space, whilst also providing a means of access or “pathway” to hidden motivations

The register brought to bear in such an [interpretive] act is marked by a basic duality: (a) it is meant to provide a means of access to what is interpreted, but (b) it is also the framework into which the subject matter is translated. These two functions of the register are interdependent, and this holds true – at least up to a point – even if the register is more or less superimposed on the subject matter. In this case, the framework nevertheless functions as a means of access.<sup>39</sup>

This point also marks the limits of psychoanalytic technique. The regional, practical “subject matter” to which the technique is employed is one which extends beyond the analytic experience. It incorporates the life histories of both the analyst and analysand. As Vinicio Busacchi notes, the particular framework of the method of treatment proposed by Freud was seen, to an extent, as being surpassable by Ricœur, through an alternative framework derived from narrative understanding:<sup>40</sup>

It is no longer possible to preserve the economic, I would even say quasi-energetic model of Freudianism. It is necessary to reincorporate the linguistic element, the dialogical element, the element having to do with the relation between appearance and truth in the imaginary (an element one can call Platonic), and the narrative element, and to coordinate these four elements to make up the basis of a theory appropriate to the analytic experience, a hermeneutics.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, there is a crucial concept of *work* captured by the technological, energetic metaphors of technique. The hermeneutic reading of the psychoanalytic experience aims to draw out the value of this work in-itself, as opposed to seeing it simply as a means of production,

For its part, the work of mourning, since it requires time, projects the artisan of the work ahead of himself: he will have to continue, one by one, to cut the ties that hold him in the grip of the lost objects of his love and his hate; as for reconciliation with the loss itself, this will forever remain an unfinished task.<sup>42</sup>

Psychoanalytic technique, understood as a register or framework to aid in the clearing away of resistances, is still invaluable when considering the above “artisanal” task of “cutting the ties” between oneself and the fantasy objects which have been “unsuccessfully” mourned, but it is a hermeneutics of practice which accompanies the patient beyond the therapy room and which anticipates the fundamental negativity of experience and the impossibility of total reconciliation.

## Conclusion

To conclude, I have aimed to elucidate three key features of psychoanalytic technique which demonstrate the ways in which it should be moved from being taken in a *general* sense as a method or art of discerning hidden meanings in human consciousness, toward a greater appreciation of its fundamentally *regional* character. The evolution of psychoanalytic technique, guided by insights from this region of analytic experience and the concrete work of engaging with patients, shows that it becomes less and less an intellectual tool of explication, and more of a *techne* or skill of handling the “thing-like” character of discourse, that is, those aspects of language which behave in ways not bound to relations of “meaning,” but which still are *recognisable* as forces, displacements, distortions, and so on. The wager of psychoanalytic technique understood in this sense is that if one pays attention to the (technical) ways in which resistances form, and aims to address *this* aspect of the analytic experience, new narrative paths and orientations will *emerge* naturally.

However, the task of working-through resistances is not one of moulding or adapting the patient’s identity, but rather a redirecting of desires and motivations. This means that the analysand’s concrete life history must be taken as the start and end point for the technique. The technique does not “suggest” or impose a model of health or flourishing for the analysand, but rather works with, and through, the pre-given material found in their life history and self-understanding. It does not aim to totally nullify or demythologize idols, but rather to situate them on a more appropriate plane of understanding, through which they become *unmasked* and seen as scattered aspects of the imaginary and therefore of oneself.

Psychoanalytic technique is inextricably linked to the practical tasks of application and understanding. It remains distinctive from practical concerns with meaning, but is fundamentally bound to the symbolic, lived experience of the psychoanalytic procedure of investigation. Techniques of transference consist in bringing into play aspects of the implicit understandings of the analysand so that these understandings can be made more explicit and worked through. This conception of technique is instructive for hermeneutics more generally, as it highlights the recursivity of experience, especially practical experiences which are mediated by various registers

or frameworks. The persistent tension between the *techne* or craft of psychoanalysis, involving a handling of and struggle against resistances, and the field of meaning (the analysand's life history) to which it is applied, gives rise to a form of hermeneutic understanding which is not one of interpretation as "explication," but of interpretation as involving a mixture of tasks of clarification alongside a "playing with" prehistories and hidden subject matters. The meanings which emerge through this process are different from the types of meaning which emerge from an "intellectual" or philological interpretation of a text.

Finally, we must ask if there is not an asymmetry between psychoanalytic technique and practical understanding. The practical understandings of a subject will always involve "concealed" elements, and will always remain subject to change and transformation through encounters with a plurality of frameworks and registers. In this way psychoanalytic technique can only go so far in the important works of mourning, remembering and becoming a subject. Outside of the analytic experience, these tasks must be continued indefinitely,

Melancholy is not simply a psychic disturbance. It is a threat inscribed in each of us, once we begin to consent to sadness, to fatigue, to discouragement. Its name then is despair, the "sickness unto death" described by Kierkegaard.<sup>43</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans., Denis Savage (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 32-36.
- <sup>2</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Question of Proof in Freud's Psychoanalytic Writings," in *On Psychoanalysis*, trans., David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 23.
- <sup>3</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Range of Interpretation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
- <sup>4</sup> Jean Laplanche, "Psychoanalysis as anti-hermeneutics," *Radical Philosophy* 79 (1996). Although Laplanche opposes his view to Ricœur's on the basis that Ricœur "takes no account of the methods of Freud himself," this may be due to the fact that he focuses on *Freud and Philosophy*, rather than on many of Ricœur's subsequent writings on psychoanalysis which focus more directly on the analytic experience and methods of treatment. In agreement with Laplanche, Ricœur is critical of psychoanalytic theories which are often misunderstood as arising "organically" from the analytic experience: "It is the misunderstanding of the circular connection between the procedure of investigation, method of treatment, and theoretical system that has led to overestimation of the theoretical system and, at the same time, to not noting possible discordances between what psychoanalysis *does* and what it *says* it does." Paul Ricœur, "Image and Language in Psychoanalysis," in *On Psychoanalysis*, trans., David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 95.
- <sup>5</sup> Laplanche, "Psychoanalysis as anti-hermeneutics," 11.
- <sup>6</sup> For example, in the case of dreams: "Two separate functions may be distinguished in mental activity during the construction of a dream: the production of dream thoughts, and their transformation into the content of the dream." This activity "is completely different (from waking thought) qualitatively and for that reason not immediately comparable to it. *It does not think, calculate or judge in any way at all; it restricts itself to giving things a new form,*" Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 5*, 506-507; quoted in Ricœur, "The Question of Proof," fn. 24; italics added.
- <sup>7</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans., Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 214-45.
- <sup>8</sup> Ricœur, "The Question of Proof," 30-33.
- <sup>9</sup> Paul Ricœur, "Technique and Nontechnique in Interpretation," trans. Willis Domingo, in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 184-85.
- <sup>10</sup> Sigmund Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 12*, trans., James Strachey (London: Vintage, 1958), 126-27.

- <sup>11</sup> Ricœur, "Technique and Nontechnique," 183.
- <sup>12</sup> Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment," 140
- <sup>13</sup> Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment," 141
- <sup>14</sup> Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment," 142
- <sup>15</sup> Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment," 139 (emphasis mine).
- <sup>16</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 12*, trans., James Strachey (London: Vintage, 1958), 147.
- <sup>17</sup> Ricœur, "Technique and Nontechnique," 185.
- <sup>18</sup> Ricœur, "Technique and Nontechnique," 187.
- <sup>19</sup> Ricœur, "Technique and Nontechnique," 187.
- <sup>20</sup> Ricœur, "Technique and Nontechnique," 188.
- <sup>21</sup> Ricœur, "Technique and Nontechnique," 188.
- <sup>22</sup> Ricœur, "Technique and Nontechnique," 188.
- <sup>23</sup> Ricœur, "The Question of Proof," 19-20.
- <sup>24</sup> Ricœur, "Technique and Nontechnique," 192-94.
- <sup>25</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology," trans., Kathleen McLaughlin, in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 243.
- <sup>26</sup> Ricœur, "Technique and Nontechnique," 191-92.
- <sup>27</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The Dynamics of Transference," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 12*, trans., James Strachey (London: Vintage, 1958), 108.
- <sup>28</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Trans., Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Continuum, 1975), 307.



- <sup>29</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 307.
- <sup>30</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 307.
- <sup>31</sup> Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 35-40.
- <sup>32</sup> Freud, "The Dynamics of Transference," 104
- <sup>33</sup> Freud, "The Dynamics of Transference," 99-100.
- <sup>34</sup> Freud, "The Dynamics of Transference," 100.
- <sup>35</sup> Ricœur, "The Question of Proof," 16.
- <sup>36</sup> Paul Ricœur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans., Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 292.
- <sup>37</sup> Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment," 143
- <sup>38</sup> Iser, *The Range of Interpretation*, 80.
- <sup>39</sup> Iser, *The Range of Interpretation*, 151.
- <sup>40</sup> Vinicio Busacchi, "Postface: Desire, Identity, the Other – Psychoanalysis for Paul Ricœur after *Freud and Philosophy*," in *On Psychoanalysis*, trans., David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 224.
- <sup>41</sup> Paul Ricœur, "Narrative: Its Place in Psychoanalysis," in *On Psychoanalysis*, trans., David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 208.
- <sup>42</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans., Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 88.
- <sup>43</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Difference between the Normal and the Pathological as a Source of Respect," in *Reflections on the Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 196.