

**FREUD AND
THE CHANGING WORLD**
Contemporary Psychoanalysis
and Its Troubles

Stefano Bolognini and Luca Nicoli



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Acknowledgements

The conversation at the centre of Chapter 4, “Soul and body”, was prompted by and refers to two books that I consider illuminating of Stefano Bolognini’s thought, *Vital Flows Between the Self and Non-Self: The Interpsychic* (Routledge, 2022) and *Secret Passages: The Theory and Technique of Interpsychic Relations* (Routledge, 2011): a collection of texts of extraordinary clinical and theoretical interest as well as of rare practical utility.

Chapter 9, “Offline and online”, takes its cue from “What we have learned: A conversation with Stefano Bolognini”—Report by Pietro Roberto Goisis and Silvio A. Merciai from *Covid-19 Pandemic and Online Therapy* published in 2021 in *Gamma Function* (48), <https://www.funzionegamma.it/en/covid-19-pandemic-and-online-therapy/>.

About the authors

Stefano Bolognini is a psychiatrist and a training and supervising analyst of the Italian Psychoanalytic Society (SPI). He is the former President of the SPI and past President of the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA), after having been IPA board representative for two mandates and member and chair of several IPA committees. He is a former member of the European editorial board of the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* and of the European Psychoanalytical Federation (EPF) theoretical working party. He is also an honorary member of the New York Contemporary Freudian Society (CFS), the Los Angeles Institute and Society for Psychoanalytic Studies (LAISPS), and the Florence Psychoanalytic Center (CPF), and a member of the advisory board of the International Psychoanalytic University of Berlin (IPU). He was the founder of the IPA *Inter-Regional Encyclopedic Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (IRED) and former chair. He has published over 280 psychoanalytic papers and eight books, including *Vital Flows Between the Self and Non-Self: The Interpsychic* (Routledge, 2022), which won the 2023 Gradiva Award. Dr Bolognini lives and works in Bologna, Italy.

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Preface

Paul Newman, patient 2.0, and our present

It is with great pleasure that I introduce the reader to the discovery of this book, a text capable of meeting both the attention of the professional audience and the curiosity of anyone who wants to take a look, even for the first time, at the world of psychoanalysis. The questioning acumen of Luca Nicoli, a pioneer in the field of a new genre of nonfiction, that of “Interviews with the Masters of Contemporary Psychoanalysis”, solicits Stefano Bolognini’s thought, his clinical and institutional experience, and his psychoanalytic wisdom into dialogue. Out of this encounter comes a work of lively discussion, captivating and enthralling the reader in the exploration of crucial and highly topical issues.

Bolognini, with his trademark grace, clarity, depth, and strictness, takes us on a close observation of psychoanalysis. He highlights the changes in clinical practice and theory that have happened over the past century, since Sigmund Freud devised a method of knowledge and treatment capable of going beyond the appearances of human behaviour, initiating an epistemological revolution in the understanding of the individual’s psychiatric functioning and its psychopathological drifts, personality development, and relational life. At the centre, and at the foundation of everything, is the recognition of the existence of the

dynamic unconscious, a dimension of the psyche inescapable for any reflection on psychoanalysis.

In the dialogue between Bolognini and Nicoli, the attention to the constituent nucleus of the analytic experience is always central: the development, in the therapeutic relationship, of a particular intimacy, functional to the cure, between a human being who becomes a “patient”, with his suffering and his request for help, and another human being, the analyst, endowed with a professional competence conjugated to his most authentic personal presence. Two people who talk in a room, “an encounter between two persons” as captured by Luciana Nissim Momigliano: two people who, for several years, meet regularly defining a very special relationship, through which the patient has the possibility of finding a way out of the blind alleys of anguish, improving his mental functioning and the quality of relationship with himself and others.

To better illustrate the meaning of these considerations, I bring back a clinical episode with a patient of mine who was nearing the end of treatment. After several years of sessions, which began with pervasive anguish over great difficulty in relationships with women, he told me about a dream in which he sees himself in the mirror with the face of Paul Newman. In all evidence, although he was a man of pleasant appearance, his aesthetics were decidedly far from the loveliness of the famous Hollywood actor, but there was no need for any particular interpretative contortions in search of grandiose fantasies of beauty, seductive capacities towards the female sex, or envious attacks on an idealised and unattainable oedipal rival. The dream interpreted itself, so to speak, and spoke explicitly to us of its new condition, of the changes that had become entrenched in the inner world of that patient, who happened to be named Paul ...

The red thread of a reflection on contemporaneity is what guides the development of all the chapters of this book: both in referring to the characteristics and critical issues that define the global context in which we live, and in pointing out clearly what it can mean to “do psychoanalysis” today. The authors give us back a picture of psychoanalysis in step with the times, contradicted by theoretical and technical innovations that allow clinical practice to be declined in the context of a human reality, individual and social, profoundly different from that of its origins.

The reader can easily understand what it means, today, to be a patient and what being an analyst entails.

I will point out, for the less experienced, that the psychoanalyst is entitled to the competence of a working method acquired during a long training, theoretical and clinical, of study and experience, which leads him or her to undergo first-hand a long and careful analysis, without which he or she is not qualified to apply the same process to his or her patients.

Bolognini and Nicoli tell us that psychoanalysis is far from being in crisis, or even dead, as a certain and recurring (sub)cultural tendency with a scientific imprint would have us believe. On the contrary, psychoanalysis still has much to offer, and its challenge is to intercept new needs and new forms of suffering, and to propose modes of intervention that contemporary subjectivities can follow.

An example is provided by the references in the book to the complexity of the work the analyst has to do in defining the analytic setting and in ensuring its resilience, including the discourse of online analysis, which, unsurprisingly, the global Covid-19 pandemic led us to experience. The setting, for today's analyst, cannot give itself exclusively as a framework pre-constituted from established technocratic prescriptions, but must be carefully constructed, respecting on the one hand the singularities of the patient, and on the other hand the needs for invariance inherent in the psychoanalytic method. It is increasingly essential to be able to make adjustments to the setting that try to ensure the best possible analytic work for each specific clinical experience. The viability of an analysis is to be defined by the contributions of the patient, who tends to "stay in the setting" according to the determinants of his or her mental structure and specific relational modes. And, on this point, "patient 2.0" imposes new stresses that necessitate inevitable readjustments of the analyst's theoretical and co-technical toolkit.

In this sense, this book does not renege on the promise of its title, *Freud and the Changing World*. The contents get straight to the point, offering a psychoanalytic look at contemporaneity and the difficulties that afflict individuals' emotional lives and the quality of interpersonal relationships today. We find here many of the themes dear to Stefano Bolognini: empathy, analytic intimacy, the intersubjective, the dialectic

between the centred ego and the experiential self (in the patient and the analyst), the importance of the preconscious, the different types of transference, relational action, new modes of interpretation, to name but a few. As a testimony to the widespread interest in psychoanalysis, I would add that *Freud and the Changing World* is also the name of a successful popularisation initiative that, for over ten years, together with Luca Nicoli, we have been carrying out in the territory of the province of Modena, with the lively participation of a very heterogeneous public.

One aspect that guarantees particular enjoyment in reading this book is the skilful use of metaphors and references to everyday situations that, in their easy and immediate usability, effectively represent the complexities of psychic functioning and relational interactions. Bolognini, in recounting significant episodes of personal experience, shows us how it is possible, as well as desirable, to achieve that process of integration which lies at the base of a healthy professional identity: the integration between one's own human subjectivity and the theoretical–clinical options, profoundly and authentically assimilated, as the foundation of the possibility of exercising a valid analytic function finalised to patient care.

One final note. In the argumentative developments of the book, the dialogue between Bolognini and Nicoli generates a discursive plot charged with an emotional intensity that shows us a “thinking and feeling together” which constitutes, among other things, the qualifying datum of the very experience that takes place between patient and analyst. A captivating dialogue and a fertile confrontation between two different generations of analysts is eloquent testimony to how psychoanalysis can keep pace with our present and, through transformation and evolution in theory and clinical practice, can take us into the future.

My thanks, therefore, to Stefano Bolognini and Luca Nicoli. And, to you, good reading!

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A note from the authors

Dear reader

In reporting our conversation on the written page, we have used our initials, SB for Stefano Bolognini and LN for Luca Nicoli, to show who is speaking. At all times, we try to use accessible language, limiting the use of technical/scientific terms to only where it is essential.

Where it proves necessary to use more technical terms, wherever possible, we clarify the terminology in the text. Where terms require further explanation, we refer the reader to a glossary at the back of the book.

Words and expressions explained in the glossary are indicated by an asterisk (*) the first time they appear in the text.

We hope that this system facilitates the flow of the text to make an enjoyable reading experience, whilst, at the same time, giving a helping hand to those approaching psychoanalytic theory for the first time.

Stefano Bolognini and Luca Nicoli