



## THE ART OF LIVING IN OTTO RANK'S WILL THERAPY

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Otto Rank's approach to psychotherapy, developed after his separation from Freud, encourages living life fully in spite of death and limitation. In his emphasis on the here and now, new experience in the therapeutic relationship, and collaboration and creativity in the therapy process, Rank was ahead of his time. As a theorist of personality and of creativity, his work is well known, but his influence on the practices of humanistic, existential, and post-psychoanalytic relational therapists is largely unacknowledged. Rank's creative legacy is an approach to psychotherapy that calls forth artistry and collaboration between therapist and client.

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### THE ART OF LIVING

Otto Rank was an original: an *artist-type*, a creative individual whose approach to psychotherapy encourages an *art of living*. "Life itself must be formed artistically," said Rank in his diary at age 20, "Real living must be created so that it has need of no other life, no art, beyond itself" (Lieberman, 1985, p. 37). Rank was referring not just to his own life, but to the artist's life and to life in general, and to the possibility for each person to live more artfully, more fully, and with deeper existential awareness.

Life lived fully—not avoided, but experienced with all its pain and joy, and despite its limitation in death—is the ultimate creative act. Rank's understanding of this truth underlies his explication of "the artist type," an individual who, in contrast to the over-analytical, life-withholding, neurotic, willingly faces life's limitation in order to create. Artists confront limitations of medium, skill, and time to create works of lasting significance. Conflicts and disappointments are inevitable in life, but in contrast to the neurotic whose "failed art" leads to a despairing sense of loss, artists take what is given and use it to make something new.

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Rank's understanding of artists and their creative process had great appeal to the artists who consulted with him in the 1920s and 1930s. Brief revivals of interest in Rank (Progoff, 1956; Becker, 1973) brought attention to his work, and his writings have influenced researchers and scholars interested in the psychology of creativity and aesthetics (e.g., MacKinnon, 1965; Spitz, 1989), but except for Esther Menaker's treatment of Rank's approach (1982), his insights into the creative process of psychotherapy have been less frequently acknowledged.

Rank's approach to psychotherapy is informed by deep study of Nietzsche, humanism, and aesthetic philosophy. His therapy is also a constructive response to Freud and the inner circle of Freud's followers who turned against him. Rank began to explicate this approach around the same time as he was separating from Freud and questioning what he saw as an ideological turn in psychoanalysis. He often described his new *constructive therapy* or *Will Therapy*, in terms of what it was not, namely psychoanalytic method. In the late 1920s, Rank began to offer an alternative: an active, relational psychotherapy, a critically post-Freudian existential therapy, with an emphasis on experience, emotional healing, and creativity. He articulated this approach in his American lectures (Rank, 1996), and in Volumes II and III of his *Technik der Psychoanalyse* (1929–1931) published in English as *Will Therapy* in 1936.

Rank saw himself as an artist, and his life as his work. He understood the experience of the artist first-hand. His scholarly research shows his emerging understanding of creative process. From his earliest study, *The Artist* (Rank, 1907), to his later work encompassing such topics as the "hero" motif in myth (Rank, 1909) and the *double* in literature (Rank, 1914), Rank developed the notion of creative will. In his comprehensive study of art in *Art and Artist* (1932), Rank demonstrated his grasp of the art-making impulse and its expression across time and across cultures. Rank's identification with philosophical artist-types, such as Goethe and Nietzsche shaped how he thought of himself, and by analogy, how he thought of other artist-types.

Rank reflected on the universality of artistic process as revealed in creative productions. Works of art inform us about their creators, to be sure, as in Freud's (1910) study of Leonardo, but also art informs us about the art-making process. Rank refused to pathologize the artist, and tried to understand what creation meant for each individual. He developed a phenomenology of creative experience that reveals what Ellen Handler Spitz called his "exquisite sensitivity to the subjective experience of the working artist" (Spitz, 1989, p. 107). Unlike Freud, whose interpretive method Rank came to regard as reductive, Rank "sought to describe art making and its attendant conflicts from a position that gave them priority

rather than reduced them to a special case of more general theoretical principles" (*ibid.*, p. 97). Art is more than can be revealed in the artist's biography; it partakes of something universal. It is reductive to see art as merely the by-product of unresolved conflict; although works may at times reveal their creator's regressive fixation on the past, they are also progressive—oriented toward the future and the new. Creativity is best seen as fundamentally human, life-giving, and fulfilling. The making of art "constitutes life's most central and intense adventure" (*ibid.*, p. 104), as Spitz put it. Creative willing is no mere act of sublimation, but the artist's *rage against the dying of the light*, a rebuke to mortality itself.

For Rank, then, artists are not the sum total of their early experiences, but are masters of their own destinies, creators of their own personalities, sometimes in spite of their early experiences. This was certainly true of Rank, the brilliant young man once revered by Freud, his mentor and surrogate-father, who cultivated Rank as his heir. Rank is the apostate son, who, at 40, challenged the central tenets of psychoanalysis, and subsequently found himself outside Freud's inner circle, professing something *beyond* psychoanalysis.

Artists, as Rank understood them, are self-appointed, self-aware, and intentional in their response to reality's demands. Of necessity they step outside convention. They recognize themselves as *others* and *outsiders* and are reconciled to their difference. Artists are resourceful; they are successful at adapting to reality, but prefer to shape it for themselves, and share it as new creation. Rank fits this description rather well. He recognized his own type and could see it clearly in others, especially those who sought his counsel and admired his enthusiastically presented, alternative approach. He shaped his own life, separating and individuating when he needed to, first from his family, later from Freud, and in the end, from Psychology itself.

Rank was a creator: early on he was a diarist, for a time a playwright, and later a philosophically informed psychological theorist, an anthropologist and social critic, and the advocate of a "Philosophy of Helping" (1929–1931, p. 2), that could ground the therapeutic enterprise. Rank was the young man recognized by Freud as precocious, if not prescient, as a psychological thinker, and who had an enviable knowledge of myth and art, even at 21. With Freud's help, Rank became a humanistic scholar of the first order; he was extraordinarily well read, and comprehensive in his intellectual research. But he also became an analyst of the first order, as Freud generously acknowledged when he said, in a 1922 letter to Ernest Jones, "Rank...is as good an analyst as any man" (Lieberman and Kramer, 2012, p. 120).

What would become Rank's new approach was present in nascent form while he held a place of high regard within psychoanalysis. With his closest

colleague, Sándor Ferenczi, he proposed an *active* therapy (Ferenczi and Rank, 1924) that emphasized the importance of emotional experience over intellectual insight, and encouraged the analyst “to distinguish between what is infantile and what is justified by the here and now” (Lieberman, 1985, p. 210). Ferenczi and Rank also “taught that remembering, while important, is not the only therapeutic element. Repetition of living and feeling patterns, which Freud considered forms of resistance, were taken...to be inevitable and essential” (*ibid.*, p. 209).

In the years leading up to his split with Freud, Rank thought he was extending psychoanalysis as a discipline, in part by offering a critique. In this he inadequately understood his own traumas of birth and separation (Wadlington, 2005). In the several years following their separation, Rank shaped himself as an independent person. Rank’s critical and ultimately *constructive* or creative response to his mid-life experience [he was 40 when he published *The Trauma of Birth* (1924)] is also his coming to terms with those with whom he had previously identified, especially Freud.

After separating from Freud, he began conceptualizing his work as moving *beyond* psychoanalysis, which he saw as having become ideological, and in response, created his own therapeutic approach. It is a measure of Rank’s success in avoiding ideology that there is no school of *Rankian therapy*, no lineage, and no real tradition. Rank’s approach arose, in part, in response to the zealotry and dogmatism within the fraternity around Freud. He was personally stung by the shunning of his former friends and *ad hominem* attacks on his character by Freud and other colleagues (Rudnytsky, 1984a, p. 336; cf. Lieberman, 1985); Rank’s reaction was a criticism of psychoanalysis, by juxtaposing his approach to Freud’s. In *Will Therapy* (1929–1931) and in his lectures, Rank’s new ideas stood in bold contrast and opposition to the psychoanalytic method.

The enmity of early Freudians drove some of Rank’s works into obscurity and neglect, especially in Europe (see Lugin (2012) in this issue). At the same time, however, an American audience of psychologists and social workers welcomed an approach that went beyond Freud. In a series of brilliant lectures in Philadelphia, Washington, New Haven, and New York (1996), Rank taught what he could of this approach; he warned, however, against movements and cabals. He had clients, followers, students (e.g., Taft, 1933), but he did not want dutiful imitators. He was not an inhibiting precursor to those who encounter his work (Wadlington, 2005). Instead, he encouraged originality and ownership in the spirit of Nietzsche’s (1883) Zarathustra, who said, “this is *my* way, where is yours?” (p. 195).

Rank recognized the risk of any theory becoming dogma, and any practice being reduced to mechanical rules. He saw his method as improv-

isational, and he joked that “my technique consists in having no technique” (Rank, 1929–1931, p. 105). Rank advocated an individualized, context-dependent, highly situational therapy. There could be no manual for this unique approach; each practitioner must take it up and make his or her own. Rank put it succinctly: “every case has its own technique, its own analysis, and its own solution” (1996, p. 175). This is an acknowledgment of the uniqueness of each person’s experience in therapy, and the particularity of each client’s concerns.

But the particular contains the general; the part enfolds the whole. Rank’s thinking is microcosmic; every therapeutic situation is unique, but each embodies within itself the larger, universal concerns that we as humans struggle with: the difficulty of living life fully, and the increasingly insistent inevitability of death. We face the dual fears of living, and of our lives coming to an end. In reaction, we harbor a desire to escape from the present, an urge to withdraw into ourselves, and a belief that we can hide from death. Psychotherapy, for Rank, is an active encounter with limitations, both external and self-imposed. It provides an experience of the limits of therapy itself, and an opportunity for creative overcoming of the ways we inhibit ourselves and prevent full life. Rank’s approach to therapy weaves together three emphases: the present moment as a microcosm, the opportunity for new experiences in the therapeutic relationship, and the possibility of creative improvisation in therapy.

### **EMPHASIS ON PRESENT EXPERIENCE**

For Rank, present experience—experience that is not immediately rationalized, justified, interpreted, or explained—is a state attainable in therapy, and that which can be felt and known in therapy, can be experienced in life. Present-centered awareness in therapy helps bring the client back to full engagement with reality, to spontaneity and aliveness, to the moment. Living in the present requires an acceptance of the partial nature of every experience. The client learns to “endure every experience as such without tying it up causally, totally or finally with the rest of his life, or with what goes on in the world at all. The person then lives more in the present, in the moment, without the longing to make it eternal,” says Rank (1929–1931, p. 177). Therapy works experientially: If the fullness of living can be felt in therapy, it can be felt in life. Rank stated it very simply: “...all therapeutic endeavors...ought to aim towards life itself” (Rank, 1941, p. 278).

The contrast between Rank’s approach and Freud’s is striking. Rank sees the client as a creative agent and the therapeutic moment as an opportunity for change. For Freud, the work is in the excavation of layers of the patient’s accumulated past. As Freud (1914a) puts it, the patient’s “current conflict

becomes comprehensible and admits of solution only when it is traced back to his pre-history" (p. 63). Because of its focus on the past as prologue, Freud's method cannot adequately address the present. As Philip Rieff (1979) explains, Freud regarded certain events in one's past as "prototypical" and "prefigurative...prior in time, and...causally related to later behavior" (p. 48). This view misses the significance of action in the present, and ignores "the possibility of surprise in every life" (*ibid.*, p. 49). Esther Menaker (1984) expressed it this way: "[e]ach individual is unique and carries within him or her the potentiality for creating something new, different and unexpected out of past experience, indeed, of creating himself in a way that one might not have guessed merely from the knowledge of a person's familial history" (p. 18).

Freud's thinking tends to be analogical: what happened in the past, in the history of the patient, is analogous to what happens in the transference. Rank thinks in parallels, microcosmically. Rank's belief is that the present moment, which he called the "here and now" (Rank, 1929–1931, p. 39), or the "therapeutic moment of experience" (*ibid.*, p. 41), is the part by which we gain access to the whole. As he explains, "Here in actual experience as in the therapeutic process, is contained not only the whole present but also the whole past, and only here in the present are psychological understanding and therapeutic effect to be attained" (*ibid.*, p. 28). His interest in the microcosm and the macrocosm as it occurs in the mythic worldview, and its reappearance in the ancient philosophic question of the One and the Many, was lifelong. He thought that the urge to reunite with the mother and the longing for unity with the cosmos were parallel motives. He saw the latter as "an essential factor in the production of human cultural values" (Rank, 1932, p. 113).

He understood the notion of the microcosm in its full significance for psychotherapy. For Rank, the "psychic" itself is "a phenomenon of the present...Thinking and feeling, consciousness and willing can always be only in the present" (*ibid.*, p. 38). What is happening right now in the therapeutic moment is the part in which the whole of the patient's concerns are enfolded. Like a hologram, each part holds a representation of the total picture. Rank's approach is non-linear and holistic; in the late-twenties he was at least 50 years ahead of his time, anticipating Gestalt, systemic, and neurobiologically informed psychologies.

At a time when modernism was swirling around him, Rank was aware of the individualist messages of contemporary art and literature. Rank was also eagerly absorbing emerging ideas in 20th-century science, and their implications for psychology. Rank challenged Freud's historico-causal thinking and Freud's belief that psychoanalysis accounts for fundamental facts. Rank considered Freud's "psychic determinism" a remnant of

19th-century science. Rank could see that ideas like indeterminacy and relativity represented serious challenges to causality. Despite Freud's growing understanding of the multiple causes of human behavior, Freud never relented from justifying his position in the materialist, reductionist language of the Helmholtzian science in which he had been trained. Freud's "psychic determinism," Rank correctly understood, was ultimately a reduction to the phylogenetic past (cf. Wadlington, 1983, pp. 85–88).

Psychic determinism is a doctrine that shifts the emphasis from the individual's responsibility for his or her actions to causes in the past. Rank felt Freud ignored the efficacy and intentionality of the patient, and his or her ability to consciously choose and act in the present. As Peter Rudnytsky (1984) notes, "Rank...is right to point to a fundamental contradiction in that psychoanalysis adheres in principle to a strict psychic determinism, but must endeavor in therapeutic practice to effect an enlargement of the sphere of ego or will" (p. 341).

Rank also questioned the notion of a factual, historical basis for psychoanalytic interpretations, and the idea that making the unconscious conscious was actually possible. He wondered if the interpretation of the patient's present behavior as re-enactment of the past, as transference, was anything but an interpretation. Rank distinguished between "making conscious," the process of interpreting and explaining, and "becoming conscious" (1929–1931, p. 22), the client's experience of emotion in the present, which he or she is able to verbalize. Rank also had a grasp of factual relativity, the notion that even so-called "facts" are interpretations, as in Goethe's assertion that "everything factual is itself theoretical" (in Cassirer, 1929, p. 409). Rank (1996) said "the psychical itself is only to be understood phenomenologically...there are no facts but only interpretations of facts" (p. 230). As he saw it, "Whenever we explain causally, we explain historically, and when we explain historically, we interpret" (Rank, 1929–1931, p. 27). To Rank's way of thinking, patients find the analyst's historical interpretations comforting, and a way to avoid feeling in the moment. For Rank, "...the so-called fixation on the past, the living in reminiscence, is only a protection from the surrender to the present" (*ibid.*, p. 39). The patient, according to Rank, "lives too much in the past anyway, that is, to that extent he actually does not live" (*ibid.*, p. 27).

Rank boldly critiques Freud's Oedipal project (see Rudnytsky, 1987). Rank thought Freud failed to see beyond the ancient belief in destiny on which his interpretation of the Oedipal struggle was based. Freud thought we are inexorably, fatally, drawn to repeat our mistakes. We project the father we are destined to kill, onto our analyst. According to Rank, the question is not about compulsion but about freedom of will. The Oedipal explanation of the actual feelings the client has toward the analyst "affords



the patient displacement of the actual emotional reaction to an infantile past situation" (*ibid.*, p. 29). The transference interpretation allows the patient to avoid the guilt he or she feels in the present over feelings that have arisen toward the therapist. That the patient "is not able to will at all without getting guilt feeling," according to Rank, "is the real psychological problem" (*ibid.*, p. 29).

Rank's understanding is that the Oedipus saga is a warning against "intellectual pride," and the relentless pursuit of knowledge hiding behind appearances. Rank saw Oedipus as "an over-weening riddle solver" (*ibid.*, p. 51), whose mistaken interpretation of Fate (the will of the Gods), and his actions based on that interpretation, was his downfall. Rank thought acknowledgment of his human origins and acceptance of his limitations was what Oedipus needed. Oedipus' struggle is against fate; the true task is to take responsibility for action without undue guilt—to live, in other words, with human fallibility.

Both Freud and Rank might appear to advocate present awareness. Freud's technique of free association is, ostensibly, present-focused. But while Freud's technical advice to the analyst to maintain "evenly hovering attention" (1912, p. 118) emphasizes acute observational skill and attunement to what is being said each moment, the goal in analysis is always interpretation of connections between present and past experiences. Like Freud, Rank was attuned to the patient, but he wanted to allow for intuition and for the irrational, unexpected, spontaneous things that occur in the therapeutic relationship, events that both therapist and patient want to be present for. Lived experience in the present, or *Erlebnis*, was Rank's recurrent focus.

Ferenczi and Rank invoke the idea of *Erlebnis* in *The Development of Psychoanalysis* (1924), their attempt to frame an active approach. Rank's (1932) reading of Wilhelm Dilthey, the 19th-century German philosopher (p. 46), was the source of his emphasis on *Erlebnis* in contrast to *Erfahrung*. The latter term refers to experience in the sense of "an external happening from which practical knowledge, learnings, or discoveries are drawn" (Kramer in Rank, 1996, p. xviii). *Erlebnis*, on the other hand, refers to something more immediate and might be thought of as "aliveness." Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) points out that for Dilthey, *Erleben* is "to be alive when something happens," an "immediacy...which precedes all interpretation" (p. 53)

Rank's emphasis on the *here and now* was experienced by his patients as an invitation to aliveness, a chance to glimpse what had been relinquished in a superstitious neurotic bargain with death. ("If I don't fully live, I can avoid suffering. I will limit myself before death can limit me.") Jesse Taft (1933) described Rank's therapy as "an opportunity to feel in the



present" (p. 94). In her therapy with him, Anaïs Nin (1966) experienced Rank's "spontaneity, [his] darting opportunism" (p. 289). Rank's *opportunism* was his openness to the unexpected and his interest in seizing opportunities here and now, rather than gathering data to support a later interpretation. Nin felt Rank "restored [the patient] to the flow of life" (*ibid.*, p. 298).

### EMPHASIS ON NEW EXPERIENCE

Rank's Boston lecture of April 1928, titled "Beyond Psychoanalysis," was published as the lead article in the January 1929 issue of *The Psychoanalytic Review* (Rank, 1929a). His title is a play on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, published in 1920. Rank's challenge to Freud, 4 years after their separation, is a balanced, although very condensed, philosophical critique of Freud's materialism and reductionism. This talk also offers a meta-psychological critique of psychoanalysis, which Rank (1996) called a "metapsychanalysis" (p. 232). Rank takes on the element that distinguished psychoanalysis from other methods of its time: the technique of interpretation of the present in terms of the past. Rank not only criticizes psychoanalysis as theory but as an over-intellectualized cultural phenomenon as well.

In this lecture, Rank distinguishes between repetition in psychoanalysis and new experience in psychotherapy. Freud understood repetition as an inevitable obstacle to progress in analysis. Freud's view, in his important paper, "Recollection, Repetition, and Working Through" (1914b), is that "the search for memories alone will not suffice because much of the past is enacted, that is, repeated in action, rather than remembered in ideas, and this acting out (repetition) constitutes the transference" (Gill, 1982, p. 154). The "transference...itself," says Freud, "is only a bit of repetition" (1914b, p. 161)

Freud took up the topic again in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), where he considered repetition compulsion an example of Nietzsche's *eternal recurrence*. Given Freud's ambivalence—his simultaneous denial of Nietzsche's influence, and his envy of Nietzsche's philosophic stature (Mazlish, 1968; Wadlington, 2005)—his intent by invoking Nietzsche seems to be to quote authority, and thereby give philosophical legitimacy to psychoanalysis. Freud knew Rank had read Nietzsche deeply, and predictably Rank responded, several years later, in his *Will Therapy* (1929–1931). Here he acknowledged that Freud is correct in this reading of eternal recurrence as fate and cause, as an outside force beyond our control. For Freud, eternal recurrence is the ultimate and irresistible pull of entropy, and thus of death. But for Nietzsche, and for Rank, death need not be dreaded and

awaited, but is present in every moment that is not lived as well as it could be lived. Death is a limit, but also an invitation to the dance of everyday life. As another existential thinker, Kierkegaard (1844), put it, "a limit is precisely a torment for passion, though it also serves as an incitement" (p. 55). Eternal recurrence is not the end of possibilities, but the beginning. While repetition is an outer force, within the "psychic," the human will is a parallel inner force. Willing, for Rank, is "a voluntary and conscious creating of one's own fate" (Rank, 1929–1931, p. 91). "Fate is causal force, self determination is ethical freedom of will" (*ibid.*, p. 89). For Rank, as for Nietzsche, "eternal recurrence is not a theory of the world but a view of the self" (Nehamas, 1985, p. 150).

Freud saw repetition as compulsion; Rank attributed that view to Freud's fatalism. Rank regarded eternal recurrence as a reminder that human beings have a choice. For Rank, Nietzsche is referring to free will and not fate. To resist change is to deny one's will, one's freedom to choose how to be. Freud emphasized the resistance and interpreted it fatalistically as compulsion, and evidence of the inexorable drive to death. Rank focused on the resisting, and understood it as evidence of free will, and the urge toward life. We are not hapless victims of fate, but make our own fate through creative action in the world. According to Rank, "What repeats itself, or as Nietzsche says, what eternally recurs, is only willing" (1929–1931, p. 90). Furthermore, "even if the patient repeats...he does not do it...cannot do it without changing at the same time...whether one emphasizes the repetition or the change has a determinative difference for the therapy" (*ibid.*, p. 104).

Rank's critique is philosophical and meta-psychological. He challenges Freud's theory as materialistic and reductionistic. Rank criticizes two of Freud's fundamental assumptions: that there is a biological basis for psychic phenomena, and that "everything can be reduced to the individual's past" (1996, p. 228). He also confronts Freud on the question of what constitutes the "psychical": Is it consciousness, the recovered memory of that which is being unconsciously repeated, or is it rather insight joined to emotional experience and will?

Rank's critical turn from psychoanalysis is around this issue: do we interpret the past, or live in the present? What Rank calls *the new* is what happens spontaneously, in the moment, in the therapeutic relationship. "[T]he interesting and valuable," says Rank (1996), "is just that which is new, and which lies beyond the 'transference,' that is *beyond the repetition of the Oedipus situation*" (p. 230). Rank further asserts that "even in actual experience [*Erleben*] psychoanalysis has emphasized the repetition of the individual's past and has not correspondingly valued the individual's own present life and its significance" (p. 228).

The new, for Rank, represents the constructive element in therapy, the element that makes therapeutic change possible. In his *Technik*, Rank (1929–1931) says that from the transference Freud has deduced the “so-called repetition compulsion” but has neglected “the new which alone is constructive” (p. 3). Rank states the issue very directly: “the most serious criticism I have made against psychoanalysis is...that it interprets the actual analytic situation historically as repetition of the past and does not understand how to evaluate it in its dynamic present meaning” (p. 110). The new, not the past, is the focus of importance in psychotherapy. Insight alone, like that achieved in analysis, is not enough; new experience is the locus of change.

### EMPHASIS ON CREATIVE EXPERIENCE

According to Rank (1929–1931), “[t]he therapeutic experience is...only to be understood from the creative experience because it is itself a creative experience” (p. 80). More than any psychologist before, or perhaps since, Rank understood artists for themselves. Artists are creative individuals who “nominate” or identify themselves. Artists are “all in” in the sense that “an artist’s calling is not a means of livelihood, but life itself” (1932, p. 371). Artists are not sublimators who trade pain for later pleasure, but individuals who willingly sacrifice, giving part of their lives to the hard work of creation. Rank quotes Nietzsche who said, “you think I strive for my happiness; I really strive toward my art work” (in Rank, 1907, p. 52).

But creation carries with it guilt. Artists, according to Rank, must also overcome the sheer guilt of creation; Rank believed it resulted from “going beyond the limits set by nature” (1929b, p. 69), of bringing something new into existence. Artists face a challenge Rank called a “fight with art.” They must overcome convention and the very culture in which they are immersed. As Spitz (1989) puts it, “[T]he conflict” is between a need “to participate in a tradition of some sort (be it technical, stylistic, iconographic, ideological, etc.) versus a powerful, contrasting wish to create that which is absolutely new and one’s own” (pp. 102–103). Ironically, the artist’s own work can become an inhibiting double (Wadlington, 2001). Past work, especially if successful, can inhibit work in the present. Artists constructively respond by attempting to defy their own rules, by focusing on process rather than content, and by working with what is at hand, *ad hoc*. Artists work in the present, attempt something new, and accomplish this through improvisation. There is no manual for original expression.

What Rank understood about creative process, he applied to psychotherapy (Wadlington, 1983). Thus, psychotherapy is a process; therapeutic effect is made possible by paying attention to the current therapeutic relationship, to the dynamically changing here and now. Theories and beliefs,

or what Rank considered *ideologies*, can interfere with present focus, as can too much awareness of what happened or what worked in the past. The client has to be seen for his or her uniqueness. In Rank's (1929–1931) words, "In each separate case it is necessary to create, as it were, a theory and technique made for the occasion without trying to carry over this individual solution to the next case...the essential factors remains always the capacity to understand the individual from himself" (p. 3).

The therapy situation itself is seen as a creative medium, out of which the individual can form a new self. "The really therapeutic agent is the freeing of the creative tendency in the individual and allowing its utilization in the creating, transforming and endless destroying of the therapeutic relationship" (p. 190). Thus, the relationship between the client and the therapist itself, the core of therapy, can inhibit growth if it is not superseded, replaced by new creation.

As a therapist, Rank relied on his intuition and responded in the moment. His patient Anaïs Nin succinctly put it, "He improvised" (1966, p. 273). Rank (1929–1931) said, "The value of the therapeutic experience like that of every real experience lies in its spontaneity and uniqueness..." (p. 5). Therapy is a medium for expression of things previously unknown, things that could not have been anticipated. In other words, therapy has to go beyond both deductive knowledge (what works with whom) and procedural knowledge (experiential knowledge of change itself) to improvisational or performative knowledge—the ability to adjust to ever-evolving circumstances (cf. Schön, 1983). Rank (1996) said, "To each particular case I apply no general therapy or theory. I let the patient work out his own psychology...and apply to his psychology a kind of *ad hoc* therapeutic approach" (pp. 244–245). For Rank (1932) "the fundamental process of artistic production...consists in...this deliberate appropriation of that which happens and is given...in the form of individual new creation" (p. 64). Improvisation is just that—taking what is given, and going with it.

## AN ART OF LIVING

Rank's psychotherapy is a gift to both therapists and patients. He quotes Immanuel Kant, "You will learn from me not philosophy but to philosophize, not thoughts to be imitated but to think," (Rank, 1929–1931, p. 1). This quotation serves as an epigraph for his opening chapter on "The Therapeutic Experience" in *Will Therapy*. It captures the spirit of Rank's approach: "The therapist should learn therefore, not definite rules and prescriptions, tricks and catches, general theories and typical interpretations, no definite theory and technique of psychoanalysis, but to analyze..." (*ibid.*, p. 5).

The emphases in Rank's approach—on the *here and now*, on *new experience in the therapeutic relationship*, and on *therapy as a creative*

*encounter*—have entered the mainstream, and are constantly being rediscovered by therapists of many persuasions: humanistic, existential, experiential therapists as well as post-Freudian psychoanalytic interpersonal and relational practitioners (see Rudnytsky, 1984). Rank was prescient and his followers forgetful. Rank's approach is impossible to formalize and teach; it relies on intuition and experiential knowledge, and comes to light when therapist and client are immersed in the therapy process.

Rank's insight into psychotherapy process is that what happens spontaneously and cannot be anticipated is often of most interest. Therapy, by its very nature is situational, styled by and for the client, and non-replicable. If it were able to be performed the same way each time, it would inevitably become stale and irrelevant. That Rank was the first to recognize this is often overlooked. Contemporary practitioners of various orientations intuitively grasp the need for flexibility and creativity in therapy, but few know that Rank wrote and spoke of this well ahead of his time.

An artist's life is an always-unfinished work. Therapy comes to an end, but living—not just adaptively, but creatively—goes on. Rank's judicious use of *end-setting* is a limit against which the client can test his or her newfound will (O'Dowd, 1986). Jesse Taft, who was Rank's analysand, later his supervisee, and later still his translator and biographer, gave the best description of how Rank's therapy works: "...analysis of the Rankian variety is nothing but an opportunity to feel in the present and gradually to begin to accept responsibility for one's own feelings and impulses in all their ambivalence, with as little denial, rationalization and justification as [possible]" (Taft, 1933, p. 94). "The neurotic," according to Taft, "is caught in life as in a trap...What he needs is to learn to flow with life, not against it." Taft understood therapy as a "depth of union" (*ibid.*, p. 291), an experience of wholeness, which nevertheless needs to be creatively superseded by an act of individuation lest therapy itself become an end and a trap. In facing limitations, of the therapy hour and of the therapy itself, the client is put in touch with the functioning of their creative will to separate, to individuate, to create a new self. Taft's description highlights the present focus of the work in therapy, and the necessary emphasis on ownership of and responsibility for feelings that arise, as well as the need to terminate effectively, and to creatively form, beyond therapy, a self.

A gift that is freely given, Rank's psychotherapy is an approach to living the patient acquires without undue indebtedness to the therapist. As Rank (1996) put it, the therapy "can and should be made a personal *creation* of the patient's which he can then accept without guilt feeling and without extreme reactions, as his own accomplishment, indeed as an expression of his own *newly created* personality" (p. 174). Nor did Rank want us as therapists to be unduly indebted to him. He left an approach that literally

cannot be imitated, and that ultimately must be made one's own. Rank's ideas and his approach speak to the artistry and creativity in each of us. Otto Rank's unacknowledged genius was that he encouraged therapists who would later encounter his work to use their own aliveness and resourcefulness in helping their clients to become artists at living life.

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