



**HAL**  
open science

# DRAWING ON PSYCHOANALYTIC PEDAGOGY: THE INFLUENCE OF AUGUST AICHHORN ON THE PSYCHOTHERAPY OF ADOLESCENTS

Florian Houssier, François Marty

► **To cite this version:**

Florian Houssier, François Marty. DRAWING ON PSYCHOANALYTIC PEDAGOGY: THE INFLUENCE OF AUGUST AICHHORN ON THE PSYCHOTHERAPY OF ADOLESCENTS. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 2012, LXXVIII, pp.1091 - 1108. 10.1002/j.2167-4086.2009.tb00428.x . hal-01423205

**HAL Id: hal-01423205**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01423205>**

Submitted on 28 Dec 2016

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# DRAWING ON PSYCHOANALYTIC PEDAGOGY: THE INFLUENCE OF AUGUST AICHHORN ON THE PSYCHOTHERAPY OF ADOLESCENTS

By Florian Houssier and François Marty

[Florian Houssier, Psychologist, Psychoanalyst, Member of the International College of the Adolescence (C.I.L.A.), Master of Conferences, Laboratory of Clinical Psychology and Psychopathology (LPCP, EA 4056), Paris Descartes University ; François Marty, Psychologist, Psychoanalyst, Professor of Universities, Director of Laboratory of Clinical Psychology and Psychopathology (LPCP, EA 4056), Director of the Institute of Psychology, Paris Descartes University, Director of the International College of the Adolescence (C.I.L.A.)]

[Abstract:] The authors locate August Aichhorn's pioneering ideas about the psychodynamics and psychotherapy of adolescents in the context of psychoanalytic pedagogy in Europe in the 1920s and '30s. Strongly influenced by Freud's discoveries and theory, Aichhorn was himself a major influence on the work of Anna Freud and of many other child and adolescent psychoanalytic theoreticians, including Spitz, Mahler, Eissler, Erikson, and Blos. His technique drew heavily on the element of surprise and on the adolescent patient's identification with the analyst, as well as on the use of humor and empathy in treatment. The authors utilize brief vignettes from Aichhorn's descriptions of his practice to illustrate his unique clinical style.

Keywords: August Aichhorn, adolescent psychotherapy, child and adolescent psychoanalysis, history of analysis, psychoanalytic pedagogy, delinquency, identification, transference.

## INTRODUCTION

August Aichhorn's work with young delinquents has been praised by many major psychoanalysts, from Sigmund Freud himself to Jean Laplanche, Donald Winnicott, and Jacques

Lacan. Though some have said that he was essentially a clinical genius rather than a theoretician (A. Freud 1951), one could argue that all clinical practice is based on theory, if only implicitly. In this case, a great deal remains open to theoretical exploration, as shown by the striking topicality of the issues raised by Aichhorn and the recurrence of questions concerning the behavioral disorders of children and adolescents. Aichhorn's psychotherapeutic method relied on intuition and risk-taking, on the here-and-now assessment of a situation, thanks to a practice based on openness and the rejection of all forms of therapeutic ideology or orthodoxy, be they psychoanalytic or educational. The context in which this method is applied, in educational institutions and in family consultations, also underscores the fact that these disorders, linked to deprivation and delinquency, are among the most difficult to handle.

Aichhorn's innovative approach seems to have indeed opened a "royal road." standing up in defense of young delinquents, he criticized those who stigmatized them as the cause of society's ills and institutional problems. Today, in the field of social work, few institutions can withstand the attacks of troubled adolescents over the long term without losing control or demanding that the trouble-seekers be expelled. Social workers and psychoanalysts face the challenge of caring for these adolescents and tolerating their destructiveness. Aichhorn's art lay precisely in his ability to turn this confusion into clinical material, translate the distress lurking beneath transgressive behavior into a call for help, and create the possibility for dialogue through dramatized exchanges with the adolescent patient (Aichhorn 1925).

Aichhorn's work played a decisive role in the construction of a theoretical and clinical framework for establishing contact with and treating adolescents (Eissler 1949). First and foremost, he had a considerable influence on Anna Freud, to whom he was initially introduced by Wilhelm Hoffer. In fact, as Young-Bruehl (1988) notes:

Anna Freud's [first] education about the Viennese social services system came from Aichhorn. [Anna wrote to Lou Andreas-Salomé in 1924 that Aichhorn] "... drags me . . . to all the most remote regions of the city and shows me institutions and welfare arrangements and we meet the people involved in them." [pp. 100-101]

Anna is also known to have referred adolescent patients to Aichhorn (Young-Bruehl, p. 179). Furthermore, he was a strong influence on many other key figures in child and adolescent psychoanalysis; for example, Mahler has been described as "Aichhorn's protégée," and Spitz's research was influenced by "Aichhorn's work with children who had suffered early deprivations" (Young-Bruehl, p. 366). Blos (1962) and Erikson (1968, 1974) were both supervised by Aichhorn at the Hietzing School in Vienna; this was a private school for young adolescents directed by Anna Freud, Dorothy Burlingham, Eva Rosenfeld, and later by Aichhorn himself (Houssier, 2010). Eissler (1949), may be his major follower, devoted him a collective book on the occasion of the 80's birthday.

Therefore, Aichhorn can rightly be called a pioneer in this field. But before going any further, we must describe the context in which his practice developed.

### PSYCHOANALYTIC PEDAGOGY AND THE BEGINNINGS OF CHILD PSYCHOANALYSIS

Aichhorn's ideas and practice belong to the psychoanalytic pedagogy movement, which became popular in Europe in the 1920s and '30s. He was its main representative, and he also actively promoted its views by training social workers wishing to be introduced to psychoanalysis.

In the wake of the social and political transformations of these years, pedagogical principles were also undergoing profound change: their new goal was to free the child from the domination of adults. Progressive educational principles focused on the child himself, on understanding what he was experiencing. In "Red Vienna," as the city was called because of its

social-democratic governance, the liberalization of mores lay at the heart of emerging youth movements.

This preoccupation stemmed from the view that parents supposedly played a traumatic role in their children's education, in particular regarding sexual education, considered too repressive. At the core of the alliance between pedagogy and psychoanalysis was the idea, supported by Freud himself, that greater freedom in sexual education might possibly prevent neurosis. The position that social reform in the sexual realm could prevent the reemergence of sexual trauma at puberty thus finds its underpinnings in the theory of trauma and deferred action (Nunberg and Federn 1967). For the analyst-pedagogues, psychoanalysis was considered a form of "post-education," and pedagogy a form of therapy (Erikson 1974).

In this alliance between pedagogy and psychoanalysis, a decisive role was played by the third chapter of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*---devoted to the transformations of puberty (Freud 1905)---and by the analysis of the case of Little Hans (Freud 1909). A component of Freud's causal theory, these texts form an essential theoretical and clinical basis for the study of the psyche of the child and the adolescent. Various avenues were distinguished for the investigation of adolescent psychology: therapy (Anna Freud), social work (August Aichhorn), and cultural activities (Siegfried Bernfeld). In the early 1920s, Anna Freud invited both Aichhorn and Bernfeld, along with Wilhelm Hoffer, to her home to discuss child and adolescent cases. Already at that time, they adopted a critical stance toward some of Melanie Klein's positions on the subject. Indeed, Sigmund Freud considered that educational factors were essential in child analysis; thus, in a letter to Klein (February 22, 1928), he criticized the idea that child analysis could fail to be concerned with educational measures (Grosskurth 1986).

Although Aichhorn had been an educator before coming to psychoanalysis, and thus the influences on him from within the field were not as great as they might otherwise have been, he

was very much influenced by Freud---particularly his writings on the ego and on group psychology---and by his own analyst, Paul Federn. He also exchanged many letters and clinical observations with Hermine von Hug Hellmuth, the first child psychoanalyst. These letters show that he wrote to Hellmuth about his work with disturbed adolescents and seem to indicate that he may have been a greater influence on her work than she was on his, in our reading.

The emerging collective interest in child psychology fueled a new goal, that of creating institutions for children and adolescents inspired by psychoanalytic thought; toward this end, experiments were conducted at the end of the 1910s by Bernfeld and Aichhorn in the foundation of educational institutions for children and adolescents, and in 1921 by Schmidt with small children.

In his preface to Aichhorn's central work *Wayward Youth* (1925), Freud described the child as having replaced the neurotic as the main object of psychoanalysis. He encouraged others in his circle to become child psychoanalysts, with the aim of observing *in vivo* what he had reconstructed from his analyses of adult patients. However, an obstacle to this goal soon became apparent in the inability of some young patients to overcome their violent drives; indeed, analytic treatment requires mental abilities that seemed to be absent in delinquent subjects. Freud, however, believed in the necessity for reeducation, and this is what Aichhorn set out to accomplish.

#### SURPRISE AS A FORM OF INTERPRETATION

Aichhorn's practice of analysis was tied to a fact that remains true today: a young delinquent rarely consults an analyst. Nevertheless, a shift in analytic practice was occurring, which generated new ideas in the field of pedagogy. Aichhorn's own brand of it was a form of psychoanalytic therapy; without the couch setting, that retained one of its essential tools:

transference and its manipulation, which he implicitly knew was crucial right from the first meeting with a child, and especially with an adolescent. These initial moments were decisive: “the mutual identification attempt” happened within a split second, depending on the mood of the moment when the dissocial youth crossed the threshold of the analyst’s office.

Identification with the adolescent helped Aichhorn understand his emotional needs; he used different approaches such as empathy, reassuring explanations of his role (neither as judge nor policeman), a sense of humor, and the “struggle for influence” (1925). Seduction and shrewdness were used to provoke transference and make the subject temporarily dependent on an adult figure of reference; this emotional dependence was thought to help rekindle the shattered or halted development of infantile identifications, in an anticipation of Laufer and Laufer’s (1984) notion of developmental breakdown.

In a lecture he gave on June 21, 1922, for his admission to the Vienna Psychoanalytical Society, Aichhorn told the story of an 18-year-old adolescent known to have already committed several thefts, who was admitted to his institution, “Ober-Hollabrun.” After a few months, “as part of [his] plan,” Aichhorn put the young man in charge of the tobacco shop. A few weeks later, the cashier realized that 450 crowns were missing. Aichhorn writes: “It seemed to me that I had now the proper occasion of exposing the pupil to shock and emotion so as to bring about catharsis, although I had no idea how to start.” He called the young man into his office, and still “in doubt about how to proceed,” suggested “that he might help me in dusting my books and putting them in order” (Aichhorn 1964, p. 26). He nevertheless kept his method in mind:

The “drama” must develop so as to arouse his anxiety and to increase it to the point of unbearable intensity. At the moment when catastrophe would seem unavoidable to him, the crisis should be given such a turn that anxiety would change abruptly into emotional outburst. This sudden contrast in affects would cause an excitation which might bring about, or at least pave the way, for therapy. [p. 26]

Thus, the aim is not to replace psychoanalytic psychotherapy, but to produce psychotherapeutic effects in order to make further psychotherapy possible, or to trigger a “plunge into transference” that can have psychotherapeutic effects in a difficult adolescent.

In the following example, Aichhorn constructs a “dramatic play” with this 18-year-old, gradually bringing up the subject of the tobacco shop. Here is an excerpt from their dialogue:

“How much money do you take in per week?”

“Between 700 and 800 crowns.” . . .

“Does your cash always come out right?” . . . “When do you sell most of your tobacco?”

“Before noon.”

[Then a little later, Aichhorn speaks again, after which he describes the boy’s reaction.] “Some day I must drop in and have a look at your cashbox.” The boy grew visibly restive, but I pretended to ignore it and went on working with him, rather on him, coming back again and again to the matter of tobacco and cash . . . . When his uneasiness reached the point which I deemed proper for a climax, I put him suddenly before the dreaded decision: “Listen, when we’re through with our work here, I’ll go and have a look at your cashbox.”

[The adolescent then took a book out of the library to dust, and promptly dropped it. At this point, Aichhorn decided to notice his nervousness.] “What’s the matter?”

“Nothing . . . .”

“You’re short of cash? How much?”

“450 crowns,” stammered the young man. Without a word, I handed him over the precise amount . . . . I didn’t let him talk . . . . I just sent him away with a friendly nod and an encouraging gesture of the hand. After about ten minutes, he came back, laid the 450 crowns on my desk, and said: “Put me in prison, I don’t deserve your help. I’ll steal again, I know I will.” These words, spoken in a paroxysm of emotion, were drowned in bitter sobbing . . . .

[Aichhorn then invited him to sit down and talk.] The adolescent told me about his dishonesty, his relationship with his family, and everything that burdened him . . . . [Aichhorn gave him the money once again, assuring him that he did not think he would steal again, and that, in any case, the boy was well worth 450 crowns to Aichhorn, and that the boy could pay him back gradually by saving on tobacco.]

From the practical, educational standpoint, the treatment had been successfully completed; indeed, afterwards, during the short time he stayed with us, the youth behaved quite decently. Since then he has been employed as a draftsman in a big furniture factory in Vienna, where he is doing very well. [Aichhorn 1964, pp. 27-28]

When engaging in a relationship with an adolescent, Aichhorn would launch an offensive, a militant alliance aimed at conquering a common goal; the adolescent was thus given the possibility of transforming his acting-out behavior into an acceptable and achievable goal. In this

way, he was shown a way out of the position that had been assigned to him throughout his life, from which he had derived a negative identity (Erikson 1968), and he was given the ability to recover some mobility in his identifications, in the service of the adolescent process.

Aichhorn's standpoint on the role of interpretation is clear: "Interpretations do not help them [adolescents] at all . . . . The wayward youth is only interested in immediate gratification at any price" (Aichhorn quoted by Perner 1993, p. 90; translation by \_\_\_\_). He investigated and used nonverbal communication; his observation of gestures and attitudes referred back to the fact that motor activity plays a decisive role in the early stages of life, in particular as a way to communicate with the environment. This perceptive approach sustained the incipient relationship, thanks to an initial binding movement, both transferential and representational. So Aichhorn's "interpretations" were not only a matter of words, but also of behavior, eye contact, and intonation, with which he would catch unaware the antisocial youth who was expecting something more predictable, more in line with his infantile experience of relationships. In this clinical context, the art of creating surprise and the unexpected is an essential element of Aichhorn's technique, as important as verbalized interpretations in the analysis of adult neurotics.

Dramatization helps bind affects and representations, providing the adolescent with a wide range of associations; now that he has become the hero of an unfolding drama, everything spills out (Houssier and Marty 2007). Thus, Aichhorn stages an act that makes it possible to link the actual scene with the infantile scene. Thanks to dramatized action, he translates and interprets *in vivo* the impression made on him by the adolescent. The psychodramatization of the transference relationship favors representation through the reemergence of traumatic elements. Instead of trying to neutralize his emotions, Aichhorn intentionally becomes emotionally involved, and the setting itself is used as support for interpretation. In this respect, his approach is close to Ferenczi's "elasticity of technique" and to psychodrama, with the dramatization of affects (Dupeu

2005).

### A BREAKTHROUGH: THE NARCISSISTIC TRANSFERENCE

A. Freud (1951) considered the discovery of narcissistic transference to be Aichhorn's greatest technical contribution to the treatment of difficult patients, in particular that of the delinquent "impostor." The cathartic dimension of his work is reminiscent of attempts to trigger the emotional discharge of "blocked affects," characteristic of practice during the preanalytic period (Breuer and Freud 1895). We can also hypothesize that Aichhorn anticipated the psychoanalytic approach to narcissistic cases later developed in the United States by Kohut, with whom Aichhorn corresponded.

The following example illustrates the reversal into the opposite of a negative transference, thus making possible the treatment of a young "impostor."

A father brought his son for consultation. The young man's expression, Aichhorn observed, was critical and supercilious, showing that he had no use for the procedure. While the father recounted at great length the son's offenses, the latter displayed only growing boredom. Once the father had finished speaking, Aichhorn replied, as if he had ignored the son's presence altogether: "I don't treat cases of swindling. It would be a pity to waste my time and your money; if your son commits no further offense, everything will be all right anyhow; and should he revert to his old tricks, then they'll lock him up and you'll be rid of him."

Turning to the son, he then continued: "Or perhaps you prefer to shoot yourself, if you aren't a coward---that's another way of closing the case." Aichhorn then terminated the interview, to the father's dismay. But Aichhorn knew that he had achieved his aim, that the provocation had worked: the son was showing signs of irritation. On the threshold, he shook hands with the young man, adding: "You'll find no treatment at my clinic, but if you wish to talk with me once more,

you may come and see me tomorrow,” and gave him an exact time at which to come.

A few moments later, the father returned alone to see Aichhorn and complained bitterly; the latter then explained to him the necessity to adapt his conduct to the son’s attitude. Aichhorn insisted that the father must not in any way influence his son’s decision to return or not.

“The next day, at the appointed hour, the young man came to my office in quite a different mood--much less tense, more open to argument, and full of expectation: the transference had begun to work” (Aichhorn 1964, p. 191).

According to Thomas Aichhorn (2006), August Aichhorn offered himself to the adolescent as an ideal reflection, enabling the latter to renounce the immediate gratification of his desires. The adolescent would then turn toward the narcissistic gratification stemming from his desire to match his ego ideal, embodied by Aichhorn. For the latter, this process could be compared to the state of being in love. The adult object of this idealizing transference then becomes a source of “emotional nurturing,” thanks in particular to the introduction of tender feelings. With this type of delinquent adolescent, who cannot be treated according to usual psychotherapeutic techniques, Aichhorn does not aim to embody an object belonging to the external world, but rather a “glorified replica of his own delinquent ego and ego ideal” (Aichhorn quoted in Bydlowski 1974, p. 97; translation by \_\_\_\_\_). The chosen object, thus internalized or even introjected through incorporation, becomes a narcissistic, glorious object; but in order to obtain satisfaction from it, the adolescent must submit to it, in the same way that a child can accept punishment thanks to his tender feelings for the father figure.

For Aichhorn, adolescent acting out should be considered not as an enemy to be fought against, but as a key symptom. For this reason, he advocated a form of therapy based on the verbalization of affects and the mobilization of narcissistic transference. Action thus gradually becomes a regressive outlet for reminiscence, which can then be played out and changed; just as

the impulse triggering a dream is played out in the oneiric visual scene, here the affects, instead of images, serve as conduction toward representation cathexis.

To achieve this aim, Aichhorn used the surprise factor, manipulating paradox to break the certainty of transference repetition, according to the punished-child model (Freud 1916) or the beaten-child model (Freud 1919b). During adolescence, there is a risk of regressive fixation on this type of sadomasochistic relationship. Following up on these observations, in defining children's responses to early deprivation, Aichhorn spoke of a "clinging" drive: he considered these children to be abandoned not only externally by their environment, but also internally, within themselves (Aichhorn, unpublished; see also Houssier 2003).

The use of surprise thus made it possible to work in an intermediary realm. Aichhorn would resort to the "playing" potential of his relationship with the patient (as opposed to a game with rules) (Winnicott 1971), in order to seek out the point of emotional connection that would trigger the development of transference. He walked an emotional tightrope, not knowing where it would take him. True, we are missing the story of his "failures"---examples that would have subjected his practice to dialectical analysis, thus allowing his approach to earn greater "scientific" value as a theory. At the same time, his intuitive tactic is precisely what allows a hypothetical-deductive reading of his work, since his clinical experience elicits echoes of the reader's own experience with its vivid reminders of one's own countertransference emotions.

#### PROVOKING TRANSFERENCE AND AWAITING IDENTIFICATION

Aichhorn's work was based on the most important aspect of psychoanalytic practice, transference, but he used it in a different way: he did not work *on* transference, but *with* transference. He also met his youthful patients' need for authority, underscored by Freud (1910), and was aware of playing the role of substitute father, adopting a stance that was both

authoritarian and anti-authoritarian. His approach was based on the implicit hypothesis that the adolescent is “awaiting identification.” His first meeting with an adolescent, during which his aim was to provoke almost immediate affects, could thus be compared to an instance of “love at first sight.” The adolescent’s anxiety is linked to the indetermination and absence of the object (to be cathected or identified with) and to the state of awaiting that object. The affect, being bound to the drive, finds its source in the youth’s relationship with his first love objects; as Freud (1932) pointed out, affect is the crystallization of reminiscence, while at the same time it is a psychic event tied to a movement awaiting form (Green 1985). Just as in a game of poker, each player lays down on the table what he has in hand at that moment---his affects---while the related representations are being elaborated. If, as Freud (1895) maintained, thinking is trial acting, the statement can also be reversed: trial acting is thinking.

Provoking transference activates projection and displacement, with the underlying search for an object to satisfy the frustrated libido; more specifically, the resultant free-floating affect reflects the neurotic aspects of the patient’s psyche. The neurotic’s “constant search for objects with whom he can identify, to whom he can transfer feelings” (Ferenczi 1909, p. 40-41) is similar to the adolescent’s: the adolescent must introject---that is, draw inside himself---the objects that are within his sphere of interest. Love and hate are displaced onto the objects that provoke these affects.

The combination of intimidation (through authority) and tenderness (due to the absence of punishment and retaliation) opens the way for suggestion and obedience. What we have here is also a transference of omnipotence: through identification, the adolescent attributes to himself the omnipotence he has transferred onto his therapist. “The stronger his attachment to me and his identification with me,’ Aichhorn said of his conquests, ‘the more he loosens his hold on “delinquency” and incidentally becomes social . . . .” (Young Bruehl 1988, p. 302).

Aichhorn brings these identifications into play through dramatization, sometimes quite playfully, which enables him to replace affects within a transference relationship. Role playing, which sometimes may seem akin to manipulation, corresponds nevertheless to what Aichhorn feels has been missing for these adolescents: an area of make-believe, of shared dreams, backed by a maternal presence. This hypothesis has been productive for understanding the sources of delinquency.

The glorious object represented by Aichhorn becomes a model of attraction for the adolescent; his capacity for cathexis and sublimation is remobilized. Once the youth has chosen his model, he can evolve toward object love by giving satisfaction to the object through the internalization of his values.

#### MAKING CONTACT WITH THE ADOLESCENT

Historically, delinquency has always been one of the principal ways of access to understanding the adolescent process (Houssier 2007). When in 1958, Anna Freud launched a “historical appeal” to psychoanalysts to develop research on adolescence, she observed that existing studies on the subject were insufficient. Indeed, at that time, few analysts had had the experience of treating adolescents over a long period of time. Among the obstacles encountered by early analysts was the idea that the mobilization of defense mechanisms characteristic of adolescence was contradictory to one of the aims of psychoanalysis, which is to ease the rigidity of defense mechanisms (Fraiberg 1955). Another barrier was the idea that one cannot make contact with adolescents (Gitelson 1948). These views were frequently expressed in the works of specialists on adolescence (Houssier, in press), as an aftermath of Freud’s therapeutic failure with Dora.

Aichhorn’s practice was founded on the idea that transference is not specific to the

analytic setting, even though the latter intensifies it. He realized the massive nature of adolescents' transference and anticipated one of its characteristics: the need to transform preexisting hostile transference---intense negative feelings toward adults---into positive transference. Aichhorn was famous for his ability to establish a relationship with even the most unwilling of adolescents---the main stumbling block of analysts who strictly apply the Freudian technique developed for the treatment of neurotic adults (A. Freud 1958).

In this context, Aichhorn's discoveries were gradually accounted for in the theoretical and clinical debates on the psychotherapy of adolescents. Thus, according to Geleerd (1957), the relationship with the analyst plays an important role for the adolescent, whereas adults must usually deal with the imaginary impact of transference. With adolescents, the analyst must be his own person, and this personal contact helps the adolescent improve his relation to reality. The analyst thus presents himself---for the purposes of representation---as an open human being, understanding of the problems of adolescence, not mysterious, and encouraging confidence (Fraiberg 1955).

Today, for some authors, adolescents' tendency to act out by breaking off relationships, which was previously considered an obstacle to treatment, is understood in an alternative way. Acting-out behavior during the treatment, with the technical problems it poses, reflects the adolescent's tendency to express his conflicts through action, as shown in the examples of transgressive behavior given by Aichhorn. Acting out within the framework of psychotherapy can be seen as giving a particular dynamism to the transference relationship (Godfrind-Haber and Haber 2002). The same is true for psychotherapeutic practice: relinquishing neutrality---but, most important, analyzing countertransference movements triggered by adolescents---is crucial to gaining an understanding of how they function. The negative view of treating adolescents can thus be turned into a dynamic position, based on identification with the adolescent's experience,

an approach that Aichhorn was the first to explore. The focus then shifts from the adolescent's (bad) behavior to a questioning of the analyst's own position. The success of the encounter between adolescent and therapist is not so much due to the analyst's technical abilities as to his ability to identify with the adolescent, thanks to his own internal freedom and sense of security (Kestenberg 1999).

#### DIALOGUE AND INSIGHT: A SPECIFIC STYLE OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

The importance given to the environment is central to the psychotherapeutic treatment of adolescents: the adolescent's link with the outside world is considered to be a reflection of his inner world. Mâle (1964) thus believed that with adolescents, speaking of the outside meant working on the inside. What the adolescent says is no longer deemed banal, but is to be considered as clinical material, to be worked through with the therapist. The object relation is modified as a result; with adolescents, neutrality and passivity cannot sustain the transference relationship. Discussion and exchanges centered on the adolescent's present difficulties, in the absence of an attempt to understand infantile conflicts (Gutton 2000), are techniques that Aichhorn anticipated in his recommendations for authentic and rather close contact, no interpretations, and opening the possibility of a modulating distance as the relationship develops. The underlying aim is not only the co-creation of a positive transference relationship. Priority has shifted from working on representations to achieving a more "dialogic" style, emphasizing affects as an avenue leading to representation.

According to Richard (2002, p. 123), this "dialogic style" enables the adolescent to recognize the therapist's supporting parental function. Adolescents and their families need a flexible setting, to be used as a pedagogical instrument, making it possible to discuss each person's role in the current conflict. Overall, the psychotherapist's position aims to establish the

primacy of the paternal function (Gutton 2000, p. 158) at a time when the superego is weakened. Withdrawal of the libido from parental figures goes along with a weakening of the libido tied to the cathexis of parental prohibitions. By encouraging the adolescent's own elaboration instead of interpreting, one ensures that the therapeutic relationship will not be disturbed by the analyst's interpretations, which can potentially be experienced as reflecting the analyst's wish to control the patient.

Through narrative, the adolescent can gradually represent his experience. These exchanges favor the development of a "relationship culture" (Parat 1995, p. 185). Identification with the analyst thus serves as a protective shield against the traumatic elements brought up during adolescence. Psychic pain can be represented and contained as a soothing counterpoint to the loss of a maternal, protective shield.

Moments of shared emotion are also specific to Aichhorn's clinical work. These valuable shared experiences strengthen the patient's sense of being, and provide narcissistic support for patients with a fragile sense of existence.

## CONCLUSION

Freud himself (1919a) was in favor of modifying the analytic setting in some cases: he wrote that for most patients, the psychoanalyst must sometimes provide educational help, such as advice, and even hypnotic suggestion. His belief was that the psychoanalytic technique alone could not adequately treat all the different cases raised by different clinical situations, though he did hope that other forms of treatment would converge with its goals (Freud 1925). Aichhorn's practice is indeed representative of the combination of alliances enabling modifications in the setting, modifications that are now a reference point for contemporary developments in psychotherapy (Brusset 2002).

During adolescence, the libido tied to the first love objects is redirected toward the ego, causing a transitory stasis of narcissistic libido; only after this stage is completed can other, non-incestuous objects gradually be recathected (Freud 1905). Today, the failure of this process serves to explain borderline cases, considered by some to be the new paradigm of psychoanalytic clinical practice (Green 1990). Indeed, like borderline patients, adolescents compel us to reverse our perspective: psychoanalysis becomes an instrument of thought at the service of the patient and his problem, and not a model based on the treatment of adult neurotic patients to be applied in a systematic manner. For these patients, the goal of therapy is not so much the lifting of repression as the consolidation of the ego and its boundaries by addressing their damaged narcissistic envelope.

From this perspective, interpretation, as a tool or even as a goal, becomes secondary, the primary goal being the establishment of an object relation marked by empathy, and favoring idealization and intersubjective mirroring effects (Kohut 1984). This position nevertheless carries the underlying risk of pushing the resolution of psychic conflict into the background. However, thanks to its dual perspective---the elaboration of a specific therapeutic technique and an understanding of the language of action (Houssier 2008)---Aichhorn's work on delinquency represents the starting point of a theorization of adolescence.

Aichhorn's work was most influential in the United States, as well as in Switzerland and the German-speaking countries. Though the reasons for this remain unclear, they may be linked to the fact that these countries have encouraged scientific interest in educational questions. The progressive education movement in Switzerland, an interest in educational writing in the United States, and the desire on the part of public authorities to find alternative solutions to counter the rise of delinquency in Europe, prepared the ground for Aichhorn's work. Nevertheless, despite the support he received from Freud, his influence has remained limited in some areas, including

in France; indeed, he has been relegated to an intermediary realm in French psychoanalysis: neither psychoanalyst nor pedagogue, whereas---needless to say---he functioned effectively in both these roles.

## REFERENCES

- Aichhorn, A. (1925). *Wayward Youth*. New York: Viking, 1935.
- (1964). *Delinquency and Child Guidance: Selected Papers*, ed. O. Fleischmann, P. Kramer & H. Ross. New York: Int. Univ. Press.
- (unpublished). Letter to A. Freud, October 29, 1947. T. Aichhorn Archives, Vienna.
- Aichhorn, T. (2006). Abandonment: tenderness, transference and libido: an example of A. Aichhorn's work. Lecture given at the Colloquium "Adolescence and Education," organized by the Collège International de l'Adolescence (CILA) and the Clinical Psychology and Psychopathology Laboratory of the University of Paris-Descartes, December.
- Blos, P. (1962). *On Adolescence: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. New York: Free Press.
- Breuer, J. & Freud, S. (1895). *Studies on Hysteria*. *S. E.*, 2.
- Brusset, B. (2002). L'or et le cuivre. In *Le travail du psychanalyste en psychothérapie*, ed. F. Richard. Paris: Dunod, pp. 35-70.
- Bydlowski, R. (1974). A propos d'August Aichhorn. Entre l'éducation et la psychanalyse: une application à la délinquance. *Topique*, 14:87-108.
- Dupeu, J.-M. (2005). *L'intérêt du psychodrame analytique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Eissler, K., ed. (1949). *Searchlights on Delinquency*. New York: Int. Univ. Press.
- Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*. New York: Norton.
- (1974). Reminiscences. *Psychosocial Process*, 3(2):4-8.
- Ferenczi, S. (1909). Introjection and Transference. In *First Contributions to Psychoanalysis*. New York: Brunner/Mazel, pp. 35-93.
- Fraiberg, S. (1955). Some considerations in the introduction to therapy in puberty. *Psychoanal. Study Child*, 10:264-286.
- Freud, A. (1951). Obituary: August Aichhorn, July 27, 1878--October 17, 1949. *Int. J. Psychoanal.*, 32:51-56.
- (1958). Adolescence. *Psychoanal. Study Child*, 13:255-278.
- Freud, S. (1895). Project for a scientific psychology. *S. E.*, 1.
- (1905). *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. *S. E.*, 7.
- (1909). Analysis of a phobia in a five-year-old boy ("Little Hans"). *S. E.*, 10.
- (1910). The future prospects of psycho-analytic therapy. *S. E.*, 11.
- (1916). Some character types met with in psycho-analytical work. *S. E.*, 14.
- (1919a). Lines of advance in psycho-analytic therapy. *S. E.*, 17.
- (1919b). A child is being beaten. *S. E.*, 17.
- (1925). Preface to Aichhorn's wayward youth. *S. E.*, 19.
- (1932). *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. *S. E.*, 22.
- Geleerd, E. R. (1957). Some aspects of psychoanalytic technique in adolescence. *Psychoanal.*

- Study Child*, 12:263-282.
- Gitelson, M. (1948). Character synthesis: the psychotherapeutic problem in adolescence. *Amer. J. Orthopsychiatry*, 18:422-431.
- Godfrind-Haber, J. & Haber, M. (2002). L'expérience agie partagée. *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*, 66:1417-1460.
- Green, A. (1985). Réflexions libres sur la représentation de l'affect. *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*, 49:773-788.
- (1990). *La folie privée*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Grosskurth, P. (1986). *Melanie Klein: Her World and Her Work*. New York: Alfred K. Knopf.
- Gutton, P. (2000). *Psychothérapie et adolescence*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Houssier, F. (2003). L'adolescent, un sujet récalcitrant dans l'histoire de la pratique psychanalytique: L'originalité de l'approche d'A. Aichhorn. *Dialogue*, 162:35-45.
- (2007). La puberté psychique: premières esquisses. In *Le tourment adolescent*, ed. P. Givre & A. Tassel. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, pp. 53-81.
- (2008). Transgression et recours à l'acte à l'adolescence: une forme agie d'appel à l'objet. *Annales Médico-Psychologiques*. 166(9):711-716.
- (in press). L'adolescence dans le courant annafreudien de l'après-guerre (1945--1965): de la délinquance à la psychothérapie. In *Le tourment adolescent, Vol. II*, ed. P. Givre, A. Tassel A. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- (2010). *Anna Freud et son école. Créativité et controverses*. Paris, France : Campagne-Première Editions.
- Houssier, F. & Marty, F. (2007). *August Aichhorn: cliniques de la délinquance*. Nîmes, France: Champ Social Editions.
- Kestenberg, E. (1999). *L'adolescence à vif*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Kohut, H. (1984). *How Does Analysis Cure?* Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- Laufer, M. & Laufer, E. (1984). *Adolescence and Developmental Breakdown: A Psychoanalytic View*. New Haven, CT/London: Yale Univ. Press.
- Mâle, P. (1964). *Psychothérapie de l'adolescent*. Paris: Payot.
- Nunberg, H. & Federn, E., eds. (1967). *Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, Vol. II: 1908--1910*. New York: Int. Univ. Press.
- Parat, C. (1995). *L'affect partagé*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Perner, A. (1993). Man muss für die Jugendlichen interessant sein. Ein Interview mit Peter Blos über August Aichhorn. *Arbeitshefte Kinderpsychoanalyse*, 17:89-95.
- Richard, F. (2002). Le travail du psychanalyste en psychothérapie. In *Le travail du psychanalyste en psychothérapie*, ed. F. Richard. Paris: Dunod, pp. 93-140.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and Reality*. London: Tavistock.
- Young-Bruehl, E. *Anna Freud: A Biography*. New Haven, CT/London: Yale Univ. Press.

---

Florian Houssier  
76, rue des Plantes  
75014 Paris, France

e-mail: [florian.houssier@noos.fr](mailto:florian.houssier@noos.fr)

François Marty

*57, rue Vergniaud  
75014 Paris, France*

*e-mail: [fmarty2004@yahoo.fr](mailto:fmarty2004@yahoo.fr)*