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Jarosław JAGIEŁA

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5025-076X>

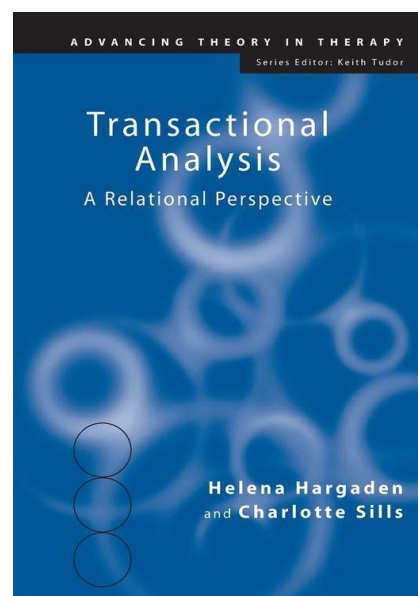
Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa

e-mail: jaroslaw.jagiela@ujd.edu.pl

**Book Review: Helena Hargaden and Charlotte Sills (2010).
Transactional Analysis: A Relational Perspective.
London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group**

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The relational approach constitutes one of the most compelling and promising currents in contemporary Transactional Analysis. Although several years have passed since its inception, it continues to attract considerable interest, as evidenced by the successive reprints of the book under review, which attest to the timeliness and enduring appeal of this subject. Similarly, the reviewed work itself, although published years ago and now freely available online, warrants revisiting, particularly as it closely aligns with the educational applications of TA. In the foreword, Keith Tudor, who needs no introduction to anyone interested in Transactional Analysis, recommends the book as offering a fresh perspective on TA and a new model for understanding ego states. The authors, Tudor writes, emphasising the significance of the therapeutic relationship, demonstrate how the therapist can utilise their own self in this process, which serves to recover and develop relationality – the very essence of the theory and practice of this approach. He further states: ‘Hargaden and Sills embody what Schön termed the "reflective practitioner": namely, the author's capacity to reflect upon their intuitive knowledge derived from clinical practice through the extensive use of case study material and subjecting it to critical reflection for the development of theory.’ Indeed, it requires no persuasion to acknowledge that the essence and nature of interpersonal relationships constitute the most crucial factor determining numerous aspects of the quality of life for every individual. This was highlighted by diverse thinkers such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Rogers, who placed the relationship at the very centre of human existence, emphasising that entrenched and dysfunctional relational patterns underlie many psychological problems. Modifying these patterns brings hope for transformation across various



spheres of human life, and positive outcomes can only be achieved through the mutual engagement of the interacting partners. This entails moving away from the role of a passive and neutral observer in the context of mutual interactions. It should also be noted that relationships manifest in various forms. This includes the relationship with oneself – that is, how I think and feel about myself – as well as relating to others, which encompasses how I think about and feel towards the people around me. Finally, there is the significance of relationships as interactions within a broader interpersonal perspective, namely situations where people, as a group or collective, come together. In the process of communication, this may manifest as closeness, understanding, and cooperation, but also as conflicts and challenges that are difficult for both parties to resolve.

Thus, the relational approach (Relational Transactional Analysis, RTA) places at its core the dynamic interaction that occurs between the client and the therapist, or other participants in the therapeutic relationship. An interesting observation was made by Tony White on one of his blogs, noting that references to psychoanalysis in traditional TA schools were made hesitantly, 'only in very hushed tones and behind closed doors'¹. Citing psychoanalytic inspirations for Transactional Analysis was frowned upon, even though in some works Berne's concept was described as a branch of psychoanalysis (McWilliams, 2009, p. 61) or a 'new psychoanalytic school' (Grzesiuk, 2005, p. 28). In the relational approach, however – as White writes – concepts borrowed from psychoanalysis begin to be actively and openly embraced. Concepts such as the unconscious, transference and countertransference, empathy, and a host of others, have found their way back into the analysis of how interpersonal relationships are co-created. Although the focus on relationships in the psychotherapeutic process is reflected in many currents and approaches, and the relationship itself is considered a key factor in successful therapy (e.g., humanistic, existential, Gestalt therapies), this stance has sometimes been questioned. This is the case, for instance, in short-term solution-focused therapies, as well as in some strategic family therapy approaches, or indeed in single-session therapy concepts, which essentially overlook the relational aspect (Leśniak, 1996).

This 'relational turn', as it is sometimes termed, focuses on moving away from the purely cognitive insight that previously dominated TA and was treated as the central vehicle for change. The emphasis was primarily on strengthening the Adult ego state, viewing this process as an opportunity to gain mastery over the patient's situation, their thinking, feeling, and acting. The relational approach, conversely, focuses on the structure of the Child ego state, its largely unconscious nature, and preverbal states. This process is referred to as the deconfusion of the Child (Hargaden & Sills, 2001; White, 2020, 2021). It is worth mentioning that for at least two decades, numerous articles and authors have heralded the emergence of a new orientation in Transactional Analysis, to name but a few: J. Barr, R.G. Erskine, D. Shmukler, J.R. Allen, W.F. Cornell, F. Bonds-White, K. Tudor, and many others. It is impossible not to note the fundamental monographs in this field (Cornell, Hargaden & Allen, 2005; Fowlie & Sills, 2011). This soon led to the establishment in 2009, by a group of transactional analysts, of the International Association of Relational Transactional Analysis (IARTA), affiliated with the European Association for Transactional Analysis (EATA)². They formulated their core guiding principles, repeatedly emphasising the central place of relationships in interpersonal dynamics. They highlight the significance of conscious and unconscious relationships, which shape not only ourselves and our experiences but also our interactions with others. The unconscious, in particular, can engender uncertainty in these interactions, yet a sense of certainty constitutes an essential need in the search for meaning in life. Another principle concerns the significance of context in relationships, whereby those observing them recognise and interpret personal experiences embedded in broad real-world circumstances, thereby gaining the awareness that these may be potential sources of their psychological difficulties. A further principle relates to the role of, and changes in, personal relational experience, rather than mere cognitive insight into one's problems. The importance of curiosity, critique, and creativity within the therapeutic relationship is also emphasised, alongside the freedom to learn and consequently acquire new experiences.

¹ T. White. <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10159096597684637&set=p.10159096597684637&type=3> (access: 18.02.2021).

² International Association of Relational Transactional Analysis (IARTA). <https://www.relationalta.com/about-us> (access: 10.09.2021).

Let us return, however, to the book itself and its structure. The publication reflects a developmental relationship – both in child development and in the evolution and transformation of the relationship itself. Hence, successive stages emerge, mirroring the therapeutic process. These phases overlap, intertwine, and alter in sequence depending on the client, the issue, or the contract established. The book includes case examples and a series of diagrams illustrating the discussed phenomena. Thus, the first stage encompasses the development of the self and the establishment of the therapeutic contract, based on the case of Beatrice. The figure of this client will accompany us throughout the book. The second stage depicts the dynamics of the relationship, transference, countertransference, erotic transference, as well as the cultural context present in transference. The third stage concerns transactions themselves, including empathic transactions and those occurring in group therapy, along with reflections on the Parent ego state. In the fourth stage, we find generalised reflections on various dimensions of Transactional Analysis. The final section conventionally contains a subject index and an author index. The work thus possesses a cohesive and logical structure, which is certainly to be appreciated. I shall leave the cultural and political threads associated with the aforementioned current and contained within the book without comment, as addressing them would require a broad and exhaustive critical commentary.

On the pages of the book, we read: ‘We believe that much of what happens between people happens outside of awareness – in short, is unconscious,’ the authors write in the introduction, consistently adhering to this principle throughout their work. Such thinking has obvious consequences. They align themselves with those therapists for whom a purely cognitive style of work is insufficient. Hence, the aim of the publication has become to provide a coherent theoretical map that would facilitate the exploration, within the psychotherapeutic process, of feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, disorientation, confusion, or chaos in the client – the client whose problematic profile has changed in the twenty-first century. They thus write: ‘We both felt that our client population often seemed to have disturbances in their sense of self, often with some features of borderline and/or narcissistic disorders; that the basic aetiology of these disorders reflected a schizoid process relating to hidden, isolated areas of the self. Clients who presented with such symptoms needed a certain resolution and/or a certain repair within the Child ego state structure.’ The authors also believe that the most appropriate place to locate the ‘self’ is precisely in the Child, including the ‘self’ utilised by the therapist to effect change. This altered profile of disorders in contemporary clients is corroborated by many Polish therapists, as well as by the present writer's own practice.

Helena Hargaden and Charlotte Sills also make an important caveat. While essentially regarding Berne's legacy as a cognitive concept, they do not intend to redefine Transactional Analysis itself; rather, they treat their proposals as merely one more current within this approach. Transactional Analysis, in the authors' view, remains a comprehensive and integrated approach that enables the understanding of, and intervention in, human behaviour, as well as the assumption of responsibility for one's own life. They treat their solutions as one of many possible options within the multitude of TA achievements, which simultaneously testify to the flexibility and integrative potential of Transactional Analysis.

As is evident, the book itself, as well as the entire relational current, focuses on psychotherapeutic theory and practice, without addressing educational aspects. Yet, can such contexts exist? Does what transpires in the relationship between teacher and student also hold deeper, unconscious significance? This issue is worth noting and reflecting upon. Allow me to draw on personal experience. In the book *Psychopedagogika relacji. Analiza transakcyjna dla nauczycieli i wychowawców* [Relational Psychopedagogy: Transactional Analysis for Teachers and Educators], I addressed the topic of transference and countertransference that may occur in transactions between student and teacher (Jagięła, 2023). The reviewer of the monograph kindly encouraged me to omit this section of the text, suggesting that it might be incomprehensible to readers and that it was ‘from a completely different domain’ [a Polish idiom meaning off-topic]. However, I chose not to do so, believing that the aforementioned issue was worth raising. And although little is yet known on this subject from a research perspective, this sphere awaits its scholars, and similar educational themes can be recommended to educational transactional analysts. Thus, the authors do not take up the thread of relationships in education, even when

considering the broader implications of their concept. Nevertheless, somewhat provocatively, they leave blank pages in this part of the book, suggesting in this way that they require completion. Perhaps it is precisely the educational implications that are meant here?

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