

Freud's Utopia revisited: The International Psychoanalytic University Berlin

Lilli Gast

To cite this article: Lilli Gast (2018) Freud's Utopia revisited: The International Psychoanalytic University Berlin, *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, 27:1, 35-39, DOI: [10.1080/0803706X.2016.1141234](https://doi.org/10.1080/0803706X.2016.1141234)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0803706X.2016.1141234>



Published online: 26 May 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



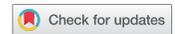
Article views: 53



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Freud's Utopia revisited: The International Psychoanalytic University Berlin

LILLI GAST

Abstract

The International Psychoanalytic University was founded in 2009. This article provides an outline of its core tasks, study programs, research activities, and infrastructure.

Key words: *psychoanalysis, university*

If – which may sound fantastic today – one had to found a college of psycho-analysis, much would have to be taught in it which is also taught by the medical faculty: alongside depth-psychology, which would always remain the principal subject, there would be an introduction to biology, as much as possible of the science of sexual life, and familiarity with the symptomatology of psychiatry. On the other hand, analytic instruction would include branches of knowledge which are remote from medicine and which the doctor does not come across in his practice: the history of civilization, mythology, the psychology of religion and the science of literature. Unless he is well at home in these subjects, an analyst can make nothing of a large amount of his material. (Freud, 1926, p 246)

In October 2009, 83 years after Freud penned his utopian vision of a psychoanalytic university, the International Psychoanalytic University (IPU) opened its portals with the commencement of its Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology/Psychoanalysis study course, with 75 students enrolled. Today, five years later, it has some 600 students studying in five study programs.

The IPU is a private university established by means of a legally recognized foundation initiated and financed by Prof. Christa Rohde-Dachser, Professor Emeritus of Psychoanalysis within the psychology department of the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt, and fellow member of the German Psychoanalytical Society (DPG) and the International Psychoanalytical Association. Together with Prof. Jürgen Körner, founding and now Honorary President of the IPU, she achieved the goal of

inaugurating a psychoanalytic university in Germany, which, given the absence of a private education tradition in Germany, undoubtedly has to be considered a unique and bold endeavor.

The idea

As psychoanalysts and professors, Prof. Rohde-Dachser and Prof. Körner were reacting to the ongoing removal of psychoanalysis from German state universities due to the prevailing focus on nomothetic and behavioral approaches in the humanities, including departments of psychology. By establishing the Foundation to Promote University Psychoanalysis, a nonprofit body founded under German law, and, providing financial support for the IPU, the idea was to close this gap that had arisen in the one-sided focus on natural sciences in academic psychology.

The general principal of the IPU, one that underlies its research activities as well as all its study courses, is to convey psychoanalysis as a science that maps the human as a biological, social, and culturally imprinted being, and that seeks to understand the individual against the background of their history and the influence of their unconscious. All the study courses at the IPU are, without exception, research-related and provide close contact with clinical practice from the very beginning in the psychology-based fields of study. Fundamentally, we are dedicated to a multiperspective and multifaceted approach to psychoanalytic thinking in its

clinical and theoretical objectives, by linking clinical, cultural, and social expertise. Accordingly, the IPU fosters a (self) reflective attitude in research and teaching, as well as an inter- and transdisciplinary and thus indeed international dialogue.

The IPU is financed solely from the nonprofit foundation's resources and the students' tuition fees, in addition to third-party funding for its research activities. It does not receive any grants or contributions from the public purse, and while the IPU is a private university (a third-level academic institution with university status), all its study courses and degrees are recognized by the state. The IPU as an universitarian institution has been examined thoroughly with a specific focus on its research and teaching capacities, as well as the quality of the infrastructure provided, and since 2014 has been fully accredited by the German Council of Science and Humanities.

The professors of the International Psychoanalytic University

From the very beginning, the IPU benefitted from internationally renowned professors of excellent repute, who in their senior years put their profound experience in the fields of research and teaching at the disposal of this major project. First and foremost to be mentioned are Prof. Dr. Dr. Horst Kaechele and Prof. Dr. Rainer Krause, whose contributions greatly supported the IPU and yielded recognition for the IPU from the very start. Apart from the senior colleagues, a number of highly qualified professors were won over, and since the early days the staff has constantly expanded, reflecting the multiple facets, teaching subjects, and research areas of the IPU – both clinical and nonclinical.

As of spring 2016, the professorial staff consists of 19 full professors, and three more are about to come within the next six months. They represent the broad range of different specific core areas the IPU has managed to establish. Their respective expertise covers psychoanalysis in its clinical and non-clinical discourses as well as psychological topics and cultural issues.

In March 2016, the professorate consists of Prof. Dr. Dr. Michael B. Buchholz, Prof. Dr. Lilli Gast, Prof. Dr. Benigna Gerisch, Prof. Dr. Dorothea von Haebler (Psychosis Therapy), Prof. Dr. Andreas Hamburger, Prof. Dr. Insa Härtel (Cultural Studies), Prof. Dr. Éva Hédervári-Heller, Prof. Dr. Dr. Dorothea Huber, Prof. Dr. Dr. Horst Kaechele, Prof. Dr. Christine Kirchhoff (tenure track, Cultural Studies), Prof. Dr. Rainer Krause (emeritus), Prof. Dr. Lars Kuchinke, Prof. Dr. Elfriede Löchel, Prof. Dr. Christiane Ludwig-Körner, Prof. Dr. Konrad

Schnabel, Prof. Dr. Christine Stelzel, Prof. Dr. Annette Streeck-Fischer, Prof. Dr. Birigt Stürmer, and Prof. Dr. Lutz Wittmann.

The study programs and degrees of the International Psychoanalytic University

In 2009, we started with an MA in Clinical Psychology advanced degree program, with two separate study routes – either full time for residential students or part-time for nonresidential students and working professionals. The course imparts the content in the field of psychological competencies across a wide spectrum of expertise. In doing so, it presents psychoanalysis as a clinical theory, a theory of human development, a method of counseling and therapeutic treatment, as well as a cultural theory and a theory of the subject in the threshold field of philosophical and ethical discourse. The intention of the MA in Psychology is to enable students to work independently as clinical psychologists, to further their scientific or academic studies, and to pursue a university or higher education career as the case may be. Graduates can apply to train as psychological psychotherapists in accordance with the German Psychotherapy Act.

Only one year later, we launched our Bachelor of Arts in Psychology study program, a basic undergraduate study course intended for young people. It is a Bachelor of *Arts*, and not the more usual Bachelor of Science, because we attach great importance to the idea that psychology is, after all, a social science that maps the human as a social and cultural being. Nevertheless, the syllabus covers the “classic” subjects of psychology, such as general psychology, developmental psychology, social psychology, and empirical research methods, as well as biopsychology and neurocognitive psychology, in addition to organizational psychology. The “clinical” subjects with differential psychology and diagnostics, as well as theories and methods of psychological intervention, form one focus of this study course, because experience has shown that most graduates from psychology courses work in various fields of counseling. To meet this goal even more closely, the Bachelor of Arts program at the IPU also includes specific training in psychological interviewing and conversational skills.

In addition to these two psychology degree programs, the IPU hosts a part-time MA study course entitled Psychoanalytical Cultural Studies, of which we are very proud. What makes this degree program unique is the double approach it takes in that the psychoanalysis/culture interface is studied from both sides. On the one hand, cultural issues are an original element of psychoanalytic theory and thinking, while on the other hand, psychoanalytic approaches are an

essential component of cultural studies. It is a highly innovative MA program, concerned with both classic and current cutting-edge discourses along the trans-disciplinary borderline between cultural sciences, philosophy, literature, and psychoanalysis. One emphasis here is on the psychoanalysis of cultural productions, structures and situations – above and beyond the borders between “high culture” and “everyday culture.”

A further part-time MA program is dedicated to the topic of Integrated Care of Psychotically Ill Persons (Psychosis Therapy). This was designed as a mutual degree offered jointly by the IPU (primary responsibility, guided by Prof. Dr. Dorothea von Haebler) and three further universities, the Charité University Medical Department in Berlin, the Catholic University for Applied Sciences Berlin, and the UKE Hamburg Eppendorf University Hospital. The cooperative effort of these four universities has allowed the integration in a unique manner of four different professional competencies, all of which are required when working with psychotically ill people: psychodynamic competency, medical and pharmacological competency, social work, and social psychiatric competency.

In spring 2015, a new MA in Organisational Studies program was launched, intended to convey scientific knowledge and skills for leadership and consultation requirements in (profit and nonprofit) organizations and companies. This provides access to a profound understanding of the unconscious dynamics and conflicts that influence organizations and teams beyond rational steering intentions and plans, and fosters change management and corporate culture.

In addition to its study courses, the IPU provides a framework and structure for doctoral dissertations (Postgraduate Study Programme to Accompany Individual Doctoral Dissertations), conducted by Prof. Dr. Dr. Michael B. Buchholz and supported by Prof. Dr. Dr. Horst Kächele. For this purpose, the IPU has concluded a formal cooperative agreement with Humboldt University in order to jointly accompany and support suitable scientists during their doctoral studies in the fields of psychodynamic psychotherapy, clinical psychology, and psychoanalytic theory. This program is run in English as the participants come from several countries.

In summer term 2015, approximately 600 students were enrolled at the IPU, all of whom had undergone an individual selection process. The IPU conducts a personal interview with each applicant who fulfills its formal acceptance requirements. These interviews aim to ensure that the students are able to take and complete the program they apply for in terms of their intellectual, personal, and social capabilities.

As expected, the student-to-staff ratio is above average when compared with state universities. At present, the scientific staff consists of 19 professors and 20 research associates (with some of the latter also teaching), depending on the number of research projects. The number of professorships is constantly increasing. The permanent staff is supported by (international) visiting professors and a varying number of study course lecturers, all of whom are clinical professionals and/or experts in their respective fields.

Psychotherapeutic University Outpatient Service

Parallel to our study courses in the fields outlined, the IPU maintains a Psychotherapeutic University Outpatient Service, authorized with regard to its teaching and research work by the German Association of Statutory Health Insurance Companies and under the direction initiated by Prof. Dr. Heinrich Deserno (emeritus) and now under the direction of Prof. Dr. Lutz Wittmann. The diagnosis and treatment of personality disorders (based on the insurance companies' directive) form one focus of the University Outpatient Service. The service includes initial interviews and case history sessions, as well as psychological testing. When required, psychotherapeutic crisis intervention and further treatment options are provided through counseling.

Research activities

From the very beginning, much effort has been made to establish a research profile and matching infrastructure for the IPU, in order to fulfill the highest university standards of research. To accomplish this, we are reliant on third-party funding in addition to our own more moderate means. Over the last few years, we have succeeded in raising an increasing amount of third-party resources, permitting us to widen the spectrum of research projects even more.

Most of the clinical research projects are in one way or another linked to the IPU's University Outpatient Service. The IPU's research profile is subject to constant differentiation and refinement. The main references and common denominator in all our research work are, of course, the effects of unconscious processes within the subject, the group, organizations, societies, and cultural phenomena of all kinds. Apart from the analysis of unconscious processes in various fields, another common denominator of major importance to us is critical reflection on an epistemological level of the methodology used for psychoanalytic research. We think that ultimately this critical impact may foster the development of

new methods and boost our creativity in terms of our scientific obligations and concerns.

At present, we are conducting more than 20 research projects, including a number of long-term studies, such as the APS Study, which is dedicated to the Effectiveness, Sustainability and Efficiency of the Treatment of Anxiety and Personality Disorders (project heads Prof. Dr. Dorothea Huber and Prof. Dr. Heinrich Deserno), and the Anxiety Study for Children (ASC; project head Prof. Dr. Annette Streeck-Fischer), in cooperation with the University Medical Center Göttingen and the University Hospital Heidelberg. Also to be mentioned is the interdisciplinary project “Aporias of Perfection in Accelerated Societies,” conducted by Prof. Dr. Benigna Gerisch in collaboration with the universities of Hamburg (Prof. Dr. Vera King) and Jena (Prof. Dr. Hartmut Rosa).

The current focus of research at the IPU, in which the various research projects from the scientists at the IPU are arranged and organized, is related to the following: psychotherapy research (process/outcome research) (Prof. Dr. Dorothea Huber, Prof. Dr. Heinrich Deserno, Dr. Wolfram Keller, Dr. Melanie Ratzek, and others), supervision and training research (Prof. Dr. Andreas Hamburger), parent, infant, and toddler psychotherapy (Prof. Dr. Christiane Ludwig-Körner), emotion research (Prof. Dr. Birigt Stürmer, Prof. Dr. Konrad Schnabel), trauma and violence (Prof. Dr. Andreas Hamburger, Prof. Dr. Lutz Wittmann), critical discourse analysis and concept analysis (Prof. Dr. Lilli Gast, Prof. Insa Härtel, Prof. Christine Kirchhoff), conversational analysis (Prof. Dr. Michael B. Buchholz, Prof. Dr. Horst Kächele), virtuality and new media (Prof. Dr. Elfriede Löchel), and cultural theory (Prof. Insa Härtel). The exchange processes between the scientists are fostered by means of overlapping areas of content, as well as through the utilization of similar methodical approaches. The quantitative psychotherapy research methods are applied from a methodical perspective, as indeed are the qualitative methods, especially conversation analysis, grounded theory, and metaphor analysis.

International Office

The IPU maintains an International Office, which serves all our students and scientific staff. It is tasked with arranging international cooperations and coordinating all non-German activities at the IPU. Its main assignment consists of arranging internships abroad or scholarships for our students, as well as for students and visiting scholars from abroad intending to stay at the IPU for study or scientific research. It also provides information on specific

third-party funds for our staff. The IPU has been granted access to the Erasmus, Promos, and Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) funding programs, and awarded the Extended Erasmus University Charter (EUC). The receipt of the EUC obliges the IPU Berlin to comply with its internationally set principles on international mobility for students and scientists. Recently, the IPU has become one of only a few German universities to be accorded membership of the Scholars at Risk international network.

Public activities

In addition to these core tasks, such as lecturing, researching and providing outpatient services, the IPU organizes public events related to current issues and topics in the psychoanalytic field. We hold regular public lectures, which compete successfully with all the other academic events that a city like Berlin has to offer. A further, more informal format the IPU provides consists of its Library Talks: in the context of these events, readings are held in the university’s library at various times during the year, rounds of discussions are initiated between members of the IPU and external guests, and open debates on subjects currently relevant to society are broached.

Supporters

In all of our efforts to establish a solid basis for future psychoanalysis in an academic world, we have gained valuable support from the national and international psychoanalytic community. In this regard, the IPU’s international board, as well as its scientific committee, reads like a “who’s who” from today’s world of psychoanalysis. Board members are Prof. Massimo Ammaniti, Prof. Stefano Bolognini, Prof. Brigitte Boothe, Prof. Heinz Böker, Prof. Franco Borgogno, Prof. Dieter Bürgin, Prof. Jos de Backer, Prof. Mattias Desmet, Prof. Claudio Eizirik, Prof. Robert Emde, Prof. Peter Fonagy, Prof. Stephan Hau, Prof. Igor Kadyrov, Prof. Gunnar Karlsson, Prof. Otto Kernberg, Prof. Mykhaylo Pustovoyt, Prof. Bent Rosenbaum, Prof. Frances Thomson Salo, Prof. Rolf Sandell, Prof. Daniel Schechter, Prof. Mark Solms, Prof. Mary Target, Prof. David Tuckett, and Prof. Sverre Varvin.

Furthermore, the IPU Sponsors and Fundraisers Association has succeeded in attracting an increasing number of members and is highly active in raising money to support IPU students with small grants and subsidies for their international outreach in terms of internships abroad.

Utopia revisited

Freud's utopian vision seems to have now arrived in the reality of the twenty-first century. At the IPU, a fundamental understanding of psychoanalysis underscores all our teaching and research. Our core task is, in addition to promoting and developing the science of psychoanalysis and its specific insights and epistemological methods, to train, qualify, and foster young scientists and scholars in the field of psychoanalysis. The aim here is that ultimately they will become sufficiently competitive in the academic world to be appointed to professorships at state universities. In pursuing this major objective, the IPU has devoted itself to providing a solid grounding and reliable home for psychoanalysis in terms of all its scientific and scholarly potential.

"If – which may sound fantastic today – one had to found a college of psycho-analysis," it seems as if Freud's vision has become reality and his

demand for a psychoanalytic university has been rendered into a state-of-the-art institution of modern psychoanalysis in all its multiple perspectives and facets. That this endeavor was to be accomplished is due to the ongoing commitment and devotion of the foundress and all staff members of the IPU.

Reference

Freud, S. (1926). *The question of lay analysis*. SE 20: 183–250.

Author

Prof. Dr. Lilli Gast is vice-president of the International Psychoanalytic University, Berlin, and professor for theoretical psychoanalysis and subject theory. Her profile can be found at <http://www.ipu-berlin.de/en/university/scientists/profile/gast-lilli.html>.