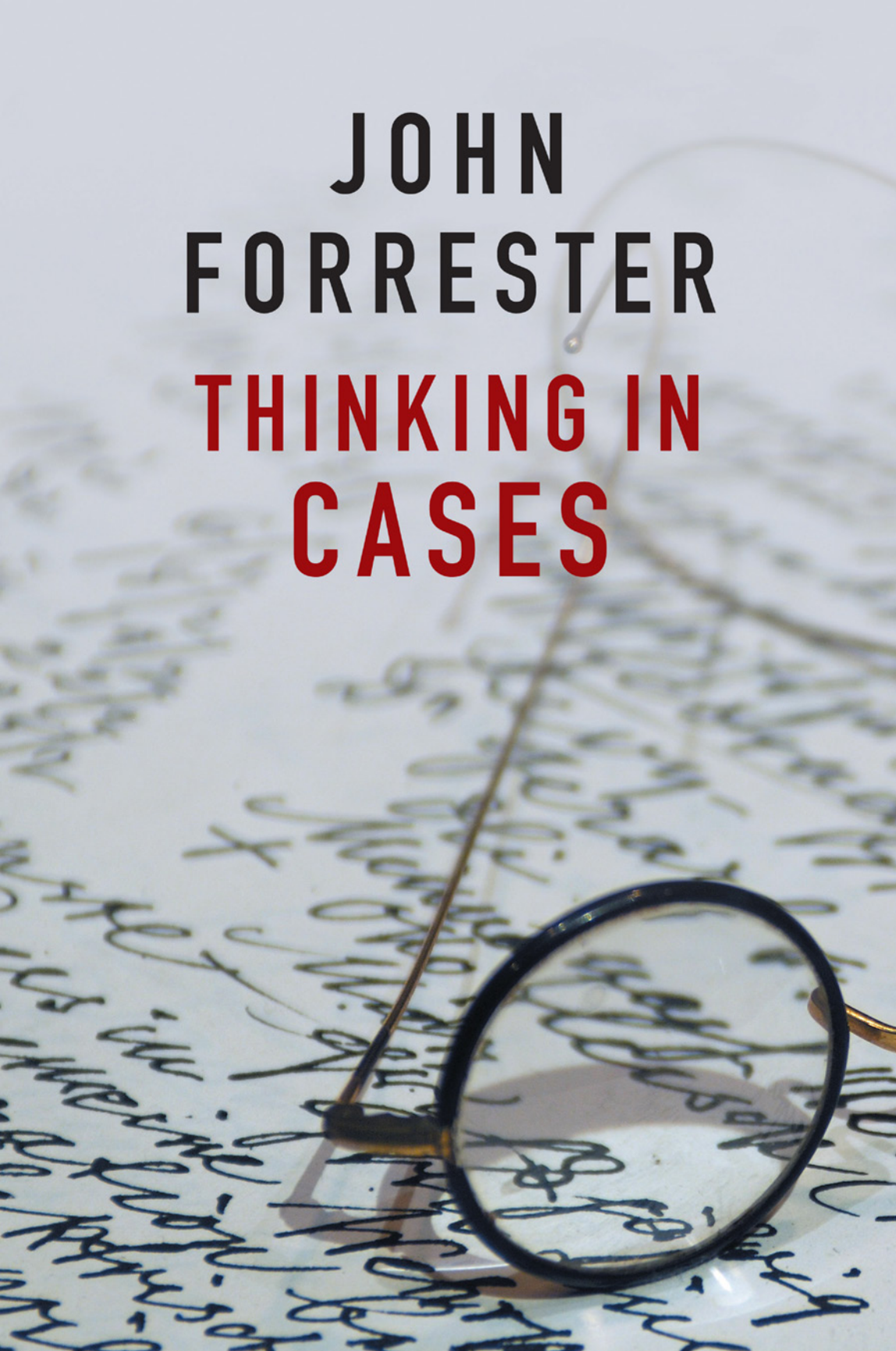


**JOHN
FORRESTER
THINKING IN
CASES**



Thinking in Cases

By the same author

Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis

The Seductions of Psychoanalysis

Freud's Women (with Lisa Appignanesi)

Dispatches from the Freud Wars: Psychoanalysis and its Passions

Truth Games: Lies, Money and Psychoanalysis

The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Freud's Papers on Technique
(translator)

Thinking in Cases

John Forrester

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PREFACE

John Forrester was working on this volume in the last months of a life he didn't know was about to be terminated quite so abruptly. It brings together in one place the strands of some of his most influential thinking. Bar the last chapter, the book was largely complete.

But John was a man for whom neither ideas nor books ever altogether stood still. Near the end, he talked to me at some length about rejigging the volume's order and making its final section over to the figure he teasingly liked to call the last or the latterday psychoanalyst, Robert Stoller. Stoller's work had long fascinated him: in his writing of cases Stoller had all the verve and panache of a great American novelist of his period, say a Norman Mailer. He was direct and blunt-speaking, yet he kept alive a subtle and radical version of Freud that many of his contemporaries were blind to. Stoller also dealt with subjects which retain their ability to provoke and destabilize, always in a way that paid little heed to conventional wisdom and a great deal to his patients. He was arguably the first to split apart what we understand by sex and gender, along the way giving us one of the first major psychoanalytic cases of a 'transsexual'. It was this material that John was pondering in his last months in relation to styles of reasoning and *Thinking in Cases*.

Although he and I once wrote a substantial book together, often enough edited each other and talked up many a storm in relation to our work, when it came to it, I didn't feel able to ventriloquize him on the page and tease out the fullness of his perceptions about 'the case of the last analyst and his cases'. Instead, I have left his section on Stoller's Belle where he initially placed it; and have 'constructed' a final chapter using a combination of his notes and a lecture delivered in Berlin. Anyone who worked with or was taught by or listened to

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John's interventions on any number of subjects knows that his was not a mind it is easy to imitate. The sources he brought to bear were always vast. Mimicking his agility in argument, let alone imagining a position he might arrive at, is a little like playing chess with a master when you barely know the rules of the game. Nonetheless, I have laid out the available signposts. They give an indication of the final adventure that thinking in cases took him on.

Lisa Appignanesi OBE FRSL
London, January 2016

INTRODUCTION

Adam Phillips

It was always John Forrester's gift not merely to put psychoanalysis – among other subjects in the history of science – in context, but to allow for the workings of the unconscious in the making of a sense of context. Since we contextualize in language, and with language, we are never free from a sense of dislocation. When we are trying to find a place for something, or are trying to put something in its place, something like psychoanalysis, say; when we recontextualize, or redescribe – which Forrester always does in his writing with such flair and panache – we are going to be at a loss, wherever else we are. It is not incidental that the epigraph to one of Forrester's most striking earlier essays, 'What the Psychoanalyst Does with Words', is a question from Lacan: 'Why is language most efficacious when it says one thing through saying another?' The lucid, informed, rational coherence that is everywhere in Forrester's writing is everywhere offset by his acute sense of what psychoanalysis brings to these Enlightenment ideals; of what Freud's account of the unconscious does to the informing principles of science, which was Forrester's first love (though not Freud's, which was classical antiquity, romance languages and literature). And of what this account might do to the informing principles, if there are any, of erotic life. Chemistry – perhaps in both its senses – was Forrester's first intellectual passion.

The calculated ambiguities of the titles of his books – *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis*, *Freud's Women*, *Lying on the Couch* – which became *Truth Games*, *Dispatches from the Freud Wars*, and now, after his too-early death, *Thinking in Cases* (soon to be followed by *Freud in Cambridge*) – remind us that we are always in at least two minds when we speak and read and write. The enigmatic ambitions of language, in which we can make sense and something other

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than sense, in which we can desire and formulate our desire, was where Forrester began. His first book, *Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis*, was an unusually subtle enquiry into what sense it made to describe language as the origin of psychoanalysis; and it was, initially, as a translator and reader of Lacan that he found his own distinctive voice. But language interested Forrester in a particular way; that is to say, gossip was a key word for him. 'The key notion', he writes in *Truth Games* – in a commentary on Lacan, Austin and Searle, that is a commentary on his own work – 'becomes circulation, rather than reciprocity or exchange' (p. 151). If you privilege circulation over reciprocity and exchange you are living in a very strange, more impersonal, world; how things get round or get through matters more than what they are, or what they are for (what they are for is circulation). Or things – knowledge, desire and language being the things for Forrester – are defined by how they circulate (so pedagogy and psychoanalysis are at the heart of everything Forrester writes). What contributes wittingly and unwittingly to the ways our truths circulate, to what Forrester called our truth games – social practices, so succinctly defined in his book of that title – and especially to the truth game that is psychoanalysis, was Forrester's abiding concern. What is in circulation in the name of psychoanalysis? What do we need to know to understand psychoanalysis? And what would it be to understand psychoanalysis? These were Forrester's questions. But it was also Forrester's gift to show us that questions about psychoanalysis could also illuminate the history and philosophy of science – that questions about psychoanalysis are questions about the history and philosophy of science – to which he devoted his professional life with such rigour and wit.

There was, then, always the more overt historical context, so thoroughly researched and so compellingly evoked in Forrester's work: an interest, for example, in the doctors who, Forrester writes in *Dispatches from the Freud Wars*, 'we find inhabiting the family dramas of Freud's near contemporaries, Ibsen, Chekov and Schnitzler (the last two of whom were practicing physicians)' (p. 201), and in the light this might shed on Freud's practice, in what Forrester calls, 'a crisis in the very idea of the doctor–patient relationship' (p. 201). And then there was Forrester's eye (and ear) for unexpected links; to the spoken and unspoken connections made but not always made explicit. And that psychoanalysis, of course, trades in. Forrester's texts are strangely conducive to odd associations and questions, to associations as questions. He was increasingly interested in cases and collaborations, and always interested in teaching, and in the

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transmission of knowledge. He also seemed to have read everything. What is it then for him to refer to Chekov in an earlier book but not in this one when there is the fact that Chekov wrote a story translated as 'The Man in a Case' (with the pun on 'case' in English, not in Russian)?

And it is a story, significantly enough, about a teacher of Greek so confined in his own character and prejudices that he is unable to marry or have relationships; a man incapable of change; a man unable to circulate. Chekov's Man in a Case is a man encased, constrained by the uniqueness of his character to be forbidding and censorious. To be a case – or even, in our sense, a man in a case – is to be at once unique but somehow exemplary, individual but representative. But of what is any case exemplary? What can any individual represent for others? These have become Forrester's questions in *Thinking in Cases*. Chekov, that is to say, may have turned out to be more far reaching in his influence than Forrester was aware (or perhaps not). Chekov, as Forrester was aware, was a doctor, trained in cases. A short story is not a case history because it doesn't deal in types; but we recognize the characters in short stories because they remind us of other people, including ourselves. Chekov's title, in its English translation, in the context of Forrester's book, does more than it says by saying more than it intends. Forrester's talent – conscious and unconscious, staged and unwitting – for the finding and following of leads is contagious.

'The Man in a Case' is, like many of the stories in Forrester's book (and Forrester's books), about the crisis in a relationship. In this case, the crisis of a man who is unable to have the kind of crisis that Forrester is interested in – the crisis that is transformative. Belikov, Chekov's anti-hero, can't allow himself to be changed by anyone; he can blame whatever upsets him, but he can't make anything of it, or transform it into anything useful to him. He can't find what Christopher Bollas calls a 'transformational object', and that Bollas defines, in his paper of that title, as an object that, 'is sought for its function as a signifier of transformation . . . pursued in order to surrender to it as a medium that alters the self' (the precursor of this object is, of course, the mother). Whether he is writing, in *Thinking in Cases*, about Thomas Kuhn, or Freud and Einstein, or Winnicott, or Stoller – and indeed about Winnicott's and Stoller's case histories – it is the transformational moments (and objects), or their failure, that Forrester is preoccupied with. And whatever else they are, these are moments in which something new begins to circulate because something unpredictable happens between two people. Moments in which it may be unclear who is doing what to whom (in psychoanalytic

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language, when we can't disentangle the patient's transference from the analyst's countertransference); but moments when we are, in Forrester's words, 'brought up short, by wondering at this moment' – this particular moment being a significant shift in Stoller's patient's daydream in the case history presented here – whether this 'is not also the moment when Stoller's extra-analytic interest in sexual excitement was born' (p. 80). We are invited by Forrester, in his engaged and engaging account, to wonder about, or even be slightly startled by, two overlapping moments in an analysis in which something also extra-analytic happens. The analyst's so-called theoretical curiosity is aroused by a significant shift in the patient's fantasy life (the idea of an 'extra-analytic' interest in 'sexual excitement' being 'born' keeps the humour in and out of the account, and is part of the artfulness of Forrester's writing). An analysis can be mutually beneficial in complementary and incommensurate ways (like any relationship). A case history can be similarly beneficial to its readers. This is what Forrester is showing us in his writing about the writing of cases.

Once you start thinking in cases, what Forrester calls here 'reasoning with shared examples' (p. 52), as opposed to thinking in theory – discursively, more abstractly, less evocatively – new kinds of comparisons can be made, invidious and otherwise; not least, in psychoanalytic case histories, as Forrester makes abundantly clear, comparisons can be made between the patient and the analyst. Where there was abstraction there can be human drama. You get, to quote Clifford Geertz, one of Forrester's intellectual touchstones, 'thick descriptions', descriptions both evocative and informative, rich in predictable and unpredictable context. Psychoanalytic cases then begin to sound more like short stories – they exceed and revise their genre – just as Freud feared his *Studies on Hysteria* did (this was Freud usefully wondering whose criteria he wanted to be judged by). Only if you look for family resemblances can you see the differences. Only by making categories can you see what doesn't fit into them. By making a case for cases, Forrester allows us to think about what may or may not be case material. Thinking in cases means writing and reading (and thinking) differently. A working practice has been circulated, and made available for comment, which can then be circulated. And, of course, in the case of psychoanalysis a working practice that is by definition private and confidential becomes public and confiding. Circulation, as Forrester can't help but intimate, can also enhance reciprocity and exchange.

Forrester's remarkable book *Thinking in Cases* then is, as the title suggests, looking at the kind of thinking that goes on in cases, and

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what it is like to use cases as a way of thinking. And what kinds of circulation cases make possible. A case holds, confines, protects and travels; it also categorizes and exemplifies. Cases can be used to teach and to train, for discussion and for proof. And yet we never quite know, as Forrester continually suggests in this book, what any given case is an example of. Or, to put it more pragmatically, what any given case can be used to do (cases may not be quite as instrumental as they seem). So Forrester is wondering in this book in what way cases may be good to think with; and what we might be wanting, in law, or medicine, or that strange hybrid of both, psychoanalysis, by thinking in cases; and what we might get by thinking in cases that we can't get by thinking in other ways. And this, Forrester knows, is all about reading and writing.

In 'The Psychoanalytic Case', the remarkable essay in this book, referred to earlier, on Robert Stoller's case history *Sexual Excitement*, Forrester gives us an important clue about how we should read him, and about how we should read:

Psychoanalytic writing is not just writing *about* psychoanalysis; it is writing subject to the same laws and processes as the psychoanalytic situation itself. In this way psychoanalysis can never free itself of the forces it attempts to describe. As a result, from one point of view, all psychoanalytic writing is exemplary of a failure. Psychoanalytic writing fails to transmit psychoanalytic knowledge because it is always simultaneously a symptom. (pp. 65–6)

Psychoanalytic writing is a failure – as is all writing, from a psychoanalytic point of view – in the sense that it is always saying something other than it intends to. Its intentions are only a small part of its intention. There is a limit as to how much writing can know what it is about because it is subject to unconscious 'forces'. Psychoanalytic writing fails to transmit psychoanalytic knowledge only because it succeeds in doing so much more, and so much less, than it wants to. What writing is about cannot be circumscribed because, as Forrester also knows, the writer and his or her writing can no more free themselves of unconscious forces than the reader can. What writing evokes can be at odds with what it is informing us of. What a writer brings to bear on his or her subject is his or her knowledge, and is beyond his or her knowledge. A collaboration, like a psychoanalysis or the writing of a case history, or the reading of a book – and *Thinking in Cases* is a book about collaboration, if it is a book about anything – is at once a shared project and an unconscious medium. 'The aim of analysis', Forrester writes in this book, 'is to restore to metaphors

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their metaphoricity: their ability to carry' (p. 104). And that means to restore language, and what Forrester calls its 'strange epistemic status'. *Thinking in Cases* does no more and no less than this in its wondering what cases can carry for us.