

The Call to the Word

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Freud writes in *The Question of Lay Analysis* (1926): “Do not let us despise the word”.¹ His imagined interlocutor, whom he calls “The Impartial Person”, questions him. Is the key ingredient of psychoanalysis then, derived from the ancient magic of the word? Or does the analytic relationship function in the same way as the absolution of the confessional? Or are its effects those of hypnosis derived from “suggestive attachment”?² “Yes and no” answers Freud. “Analysis is a procedure... something novel and special”,³ by which the analysand gains a knowledge “of a thought of his own being kept secret from himself.”⁴

How does this hold up today? Of what contemporary relevance is this notion that an analysis produces this knowledge, this thought of one’s own being hitherto kept secret from oneself? What would my life be without Freud, without this calling to the word of the psychoanalytic vocation? I can tell you the answer is blissful or perhaps not so blissful ignorance. Psychoanalysis has been an irritant, a scourge, and the bane of my existence, bringing a plague on all my houses.

Yet it is Freud’s truthfulness, and the access to truth through psychoanalysis, that has provided me with a compass for living. But the directionality this compass brings has come at a cost. And the price is a code of ethics which does not always sit easily. In my workplace I can no longer comfortably say I am a psychologist when to be a psychologist these days means one is a technician running after the evidence based approach. I cannot support that mental illness is to be understood primarily as disease. I cannot psycho-educate the patients that come to our psychiatric services about their brain functioning, the requirement to take medication, the importance of early warning signs and so on. Freud transports me to another realm which consists of the paradox of not assuming to know, but thereby providing a means to access knowledge. In following Freud I continue to be “out of step”.

So **do not despise the word**. This catchcry remains a call to arms for the psychoanalyst. It is a calling of the word, a calling to the word. It is a calling to take up words. This is not an easy task when we are surrounded by and contribute to the army speak that is so prevalent in institutional life. Words are also anathema because at times they are “too much”. In psychosis particularly you see the effects of this, and one can observe how the shorthand is protective. Freud continues to challenge us to see what is compressed in the shorthand. He returns us to the long hand of the *Interpretation of Dreams*, the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and *Jokes and their relation to the Unconscious*. More than ever this remains radical. To make an offer to the patient, of a dialectical space in which he or she can speak without following a prescription. We hear the moment of pause in which something other than all the familiar junk of a life

¹ Freud, S. (1926) *The Question of Lay Analysis* in “Two short accounts of psycho-analysis”, p.96

² Ibid. p. 98

³ Ibid. p. 98

⁴ Ibid. p. 97

emerges: the unconscious. And we hear the analysand who says “I didn’t know I had these things to say until I said them”.

References

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