

Nothing Takes Place Between Them Except That They Talk to Each Other

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'Nothing takes place between them except that they talk to each other' [\[1\]](#)

'Language serves as a substitute for action; by its help, an affect can be abreacted' almost as effectively.' Freud writes in *Studies on Hysteria* [\[2\]](#). He repeats this a bit differently thirty years later in *The Question of Lay Analysis*: words, these powerful instruments that both allow us to influence our fellows and to signify our feelings to them, must be considered as moderate actions [\[3\]](#).

One can consider that the analytic practice was built on this discovery, coming from a double break: one with psychiatrists who want to reduce the psyche to the state of the physical brain, and the other with romantic medicine and its reliance on the supernatural. Against the former, Freud asserted that psychic activity cannot be conceived only in terms of cerebral activity. And against the 'magic' of the therapies of *Naturphilosophie*, he affirmed that, since one takes psychic operations into account, one will not find anything there that would be likely to exceed human understanding. Certainly, magic plays its part, but in the form of the 'slow magic of the word' [\[4\]](#).

In this way, at the crossroad of these paths, in the clash of these approaches – embracing the romantic exploration of *Witz* (Jokes) and of the incidental idea, but staying faithful to the 'physicalist oath' of his masters – Freud develops a practice of treatment supported by a theory of language whereby the process of the giving of feeling and a perlocutionary act of speech intermingle, capable of satisfying the repressed libidinal devices between the partners of the analytic scenario.

Nevertheless, let's keep in mind that, when Freud defined the analytic therapy as 'talk therapy,' transference is still absent from his horizon. The speech is envisioned as an act relating to, on one hand, the force of action of the traumatic event, and on the other hand, the force of action of the tool that the doctor uses if the doctor does not resort to hypnosis and if the doctor uses language for the abreaction of the trauma. The multifaceted relationship between the unconscious and language is nevertheless placed at once at the heart of analytic practice and theory.

However, if in his eyes the power of speech goes way beyond the feeling that it is supposed to convey, Freud does not however elevate language to the rank of essential foundation of the unconscious structure, nor does he grant the prevalence of feelings as tools of an immediate understanding of the psychic part that rejects the conscious.

Discovering the extent of the role of hallucinatory realization in the psychic life in general led Freud to conceive of language as the essential protagonist of the devices of wish fulfilment and censure strategies, no matter the terrain on which their confrontation plays around repression. Not only in the formation of symptoms, when Freud stated that hysterical abasia and blindness scoff at anatomy and that these are the representations of which the common language bears on governing the severing of the somatic reach [\[5\]](#). But it is the same for the formation of dreams, where language appears as the accomplice of the unconscious intentionality: they both instigate the perversions that allow for repressed representations to reach the sleeping conscience without awakening censure or the sleeper.

But, perhaps, is it in this field of the transference that the acquaintance between what is said and what is done manifests its greatest productivity. At the heart of the analytic relationship, words, understood for that which they mean to say, are listened to for what they do not and above all cannot say. In truth, in spoken words, the transference and its force of repetition relieve the protagonists of the mastery of the course of psychic events. By these means the analyst is led to adjust their listening towards the unknown host who secretly stirs in the relationship: the 'Id' that clandestinely searches to obtain that which it is denied by the common rules of living in society, tied to the most private configuration of inhibitions.

Here, we are quite far from the dialogical dimension of the use of speech. If the tool of the analytic work is likened to staging or creating a plot, or to some semantization of the affect, it is provided that the establishment of language logic is added in. In fact, in the approach of the repressed unconscious, these are two language plans that are linked: one is semiotic, where meanings that are rejected by the conscious are deployed; the other is perlocutory or takes shape in the presence of the most hidden part of the psyche, that which makes itself known only by the mediation of the effects of the utterance of speech – effect whose intentionality escapes the consciousness of the patient, and at first, the analyst's consciousness as well. Only the working-through of repetition will allow for it to be understood.

The main question remains: which means does the analyst use to qualify with words this zone that rebels against awareness and remembering, which nevertheless acts via the mediation of words [6]? The trending movement these days that gives more importance to the 'sharing of emotions' in order to 'understand' the patient, is it not missing the complex knot between the unconscious and language? Surely the overvaluation of the role of the affect as 'lived experience' and the hermeneutic tentation of verbally translating it are important. But do they place too great of emphasis on the manifest experience and its strong preconscious component?

This position seems to me in any case to deny one of the strongest definitions of counter-transference given by Freud, namely the action carried out by the patient on 'the unconscious feelings' [7] of the analyst – a definition that really complicates the simplified models of 'taming' the counter-transference or the telephonic transmission. Freud knew it: the ability of the unconscious of the analyst to understand signals coming from the patient's unconscious by making use of some derivatives that achieve this. Such an ability cannot be exempted from the interference of the analyst's own investments and personal libidinal devices. This is perhaps the only way by which these non-verbal signals, coming from the expression of affects, can transform into a symbolizable structure. But is this such an intersubjective transaction? Does this symbolization reveal a narrative for two, constructed on the 'mutual' scene of the interactions? On the contrary, it seems to me that both functioning in primary processes and the regime of free association can be 'shared': floating attention, separation, defense, disorganization of the ordinary vigilance of the conscious, and regression function in a non-syntonic way between analyst and patient.

However, during the course of the session and on its own scene, the analyst imprints an extremely heterogeneous group of perceptions, which we have the hardest time realizing when they are relating to a session. Floating attention indeed propels an associative regime where discontinued fragments of the patient's speech, words which come back without one understanding what their insistence is rooted in, perceptual remains of the analyst's past, which belong completely to the analyst, meaning that they are private, fragments of dreams, unexpected bodily sensations, the reminiscence of a slip that one had with this patient... but perhaps it was with a different patient, and why is it coming back

now? Etc... etc. The analyst uses all of the above to reshape it into pertinent language formations, and ultimately into constructions that the patient can appropriate and develop.

But for that, it is still necessary that the analyst can pull away from these representation-intentions which throw off their listening – and among with it their lures of the identification. Let's imagine that it can be understood with the poignant story of the death of the grandmother of a certain patient, this story and the feelings that it brings up strongly remind the analyst of the death of their own grandmother, loved above all. If, in the grips of this emotional arrangement, compassion pushes it to quite simply approve the authenticity of what is felt, the subconscious implications of this story stay in the shadows: narcissistic implications tied to obtaining an identity of feelings between patient and analyst; implications of drive because it could be this grandmother in the transfer; implications of blame and ambivalence because these overt tears may reveal a virulent reproach addressed to the grandmother for having so obligingly taken the place of the mother; and lastly and above all, implications of pain and its use placed in the service of a masochism destined to obtain love in exchange for suffering, and this, since childhood. At the end of such a strongly moving session, the patient told me 'à merdi' (similar to 'to shit') instead of 'à mardi' ('see you on Tuesday'). All at once and under the effects of a word surges forth the strength of the hostile transference flow. Is it perhaps so that we must understand Freud's call for indifference – sometimes called *Indifférenz* or *Gleichgültigkeit* [8] – or the call for 'coldness' in a letter to Jung where he interprets the narcissistic quest of the analyst in return for the analyst's implication and good feelings. 'You give much more of your own self, and you expect something in return [9].'

In the same letter, Freud announces the publication of 'The Dynamics of Transference.' But it will be in 'Observations on Transference-Love' that he will prove the ethical and technical arguments which forbid the analyst from succumbing to some tendency of the affect towards their patients. Gratifying the patient with 'treats,' be they strictly verbal, would have as another affect the tempering of the transference regime and the intensity of affects, for the benefit of a movement towards the seductive core, of which the sad value would be to appease unconscious demands, transference conflicts, and hateful feelings [10]. As a helpful figure, the analyst thus risks becoming the object of an idealization that will certainly satisfy the patient's need for tenderness and the analyst's pride in the intersubjective plan, but which will arguably strengthen the repression of hateful movements. In actuality, repetition is thus fed by the analyst who only reproduced the infantile condition of obtaining parental love. Suggestion in psychoanalysis has more than one face.

A major point remains: such a conception of the action of words during transference and countertransference supposes that the hallucinatory mode of unconscious satisfaction be distinguished from hallucination, strictly speaking. Haunting thoughts of the Rat Man, coming from declinations and interlockings of a same acoustic form, a same signifier, who the rats (Ratten) to the payments (Raten) in passing by the raten of marriage (heiraten) lead to the revelation of the fantastic enjoyment of anal torment, these haunting thoughts are not symbolic formations. Certainly, language gives access to this infantile scenario, organized within a powerful homosexual relationship to the father, and extremely violent transference modalities, which Freud details in the 'Case of the Rat Man.' But it is indeed thanks to this same language that the silhouette of what the unconscious intentionality ultimately aims for can remain unrecognizable.

In some ways, this is the same crux of the confusion of Oedipus and his tragic undoing borne of the ambiguous richness of the Greek language. Tied up in folds of an extremely condensed language, the crime and the mistake of the hero are presented in a way that is both explicit and perfectly concealed thanks to the multiple double meanings, whether they be inherent to such a lexical unity or

the product of the syntax [11]. This, Freud first poses the relationship that so closely links murder and its repression and return, which take form in the tragic use of the double meanings of words. A horrific tragedy that touches the individual as much as the collective sphere, which Freud takes up piece by piece in his work, from *Totem and Taboo* to *Moses and Monotheism*. But it seems remarkable to me that in all cases, the first murder in its inaugural function is not a myth but an act. An act whose culture, the language of the culture, must come to develop the core: between repression, sublimation and displacement, the first impulse of civilization is traumatic.

Does our culture achieve this? Nothing is less certain, if one judges it by the ease with which the use of language can come back, leading to murderous lectures with no end. But this would engage another development on the relationship between the language and the unconscious in the collective sphere.

[1] Freud, S. (1925). *The Question of Lay Analysis*.

[2] Freud, S. (1893). 'On the Physical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication'.

[3] Freud, S. (1925). *The Question of Lay Analysis*.

[4] S. Freud (1905). *Psychical (Or Mental) Treatment*.

[5] Freud, S. (1893). 'Some Points for a Comparative Study of Organic and Hysterical Motor Paralyses'.

[6] S. Freud (1914). 'Repeating, Remembering, and Working-Through'.

[7] S. Freud (1912) 'The Future Chances of Psychoanalytic Therapy' in *Selected Papers on Hysteria and Other Psychoneuroses*.

[8] On this point, see A. Toffer 'Toward a Definition of Psychoanalytic Neutrality' *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, vol. 33/4, 1985, pp. 771-795.

[9] Letter from Freud to Jung, December 31, 1911.

[10] S. Freud (1915). 'Observations on Transference-Love'.

[11] It should be noted that Freud read and understood ancient Greek very well, to the point of translating a passage from *Oedipus Rex* for his final exam at the Gymnasium: letter to Emil Fluss from June 16, 1873.

Translated from the French by Benji Muskal