WHY ANALYSIS ISN'T THERAPY, OR THE PERILS OF HEALING

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When, some time during the mid-1890s, Sigmund Freud resolved to abandon the hypno-cathartic method of treatment he had developed and implemented collaboratively with Josef Breuer, and which had relied primarily on the cathartic (purifying) effects induced by the doctor's suggestive influence upon the mind of the hypnotized patient, in favour of a less directive approach that bypasses the need for hypnosis, he could have chosen to call his new clinical technique 'analytic psychotherapy', 'psychoanalytic therapy' or, perhaps more presumptuously, 'Freudian psychotherapy'. The word 'psychotherapy' had been in circulation since at least the mid-nineteenth century, and is generally credited to the now largely forgotten English surgeon Walter Cooper Dendy [1794-1871], who first employed it in the title of a short paper presented to the Medical Society of London in 1853 (Dendy 1853; Jackson 1999: 9). The influential English 'mind-doctor' Daniel Hack Tuke [1827-1895] subsequently referred to psychotherapy in his 1872 volume *Illustrations of the Influence of the Mind upon the Body in Health and Disease* (Tuke 1872), and the famous French neurologist Hippolyte Bernheim [1840-1919] - to whom Freud paid a visit in 1889, after having translated Bernheim's 1886 treatise *De la suggestion et de son application à la thérapeutique* - greatly helped to popularise the notion, by virtue of his widely publicised hypnotic experiments at the University of Nancy (Bernheim 1886; 1888-89; Gay 1988: 51).

First thesis: if Freud avoided all references to 'therapy' in his newly minted treatment paradigm, this decision was not just driven by his ardent desire to set his clinical approach apart from the predominant hypnotic models of psychological healing, with which the term 'therapy' was almost exclusively associated at the time and to which he himself had adhered for a good number of years, but also conditioned by his particular conception of the (neurotic) human mind and, more specifically, by his understanding of the organisation of the (neurotic) mental layers of thought around a pathogenic nucleus. It is worth recalling, here, that in the last chapter of his co-authored 1895 volume *Studies on Hysteria* (Breuer and Freud

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1955[1895*d*]: 255-305), Freud did refer to the 'psychotherapy of hysteria', yet this book constituted very much both a prolonged critical reflection upon a specific historical period in his and Breuer's clinical work, and the tentative foundation of a new conceptual framework for the explanation of neurotic illness. In other words, there is a palpable tension running through the entire book between the hypno-cathartic (suggestive) pillars supporting the clinical materials, and the post-hypnotic scaffolding buttressing the theoretical account of the neuroses. In terms of the former, Breuer and Freud were looking backward to what they had achieved; as regards the latter, Freud was already looking forward towards an innovative perspective on the aetiology of his patients' troubles. In addition, it is perhaps also worth recalling that Freud's word 'psycho-analysis' appeared for the first time in print in a March 1896 paper on heredity and the aetiology of the neuroses (Freud 1962[1896*a*]: 151), which was originally published in French in the prestigious *Revue Neurologique*.

Freud's conception of the (neurotic) human mind and, by extension, of its pathological manifestations, during the mid-1890s - and thus some years before his introduction of the so-called first topography (the distinction between the Unconscious, the Pre-Conscious, and Consciousness), and long before his articulation of the second topography (the structural differences between the Id, the Ego and the Superego) - is embedded in a highly evocative passage from the last chapter of *Studies on Hysteria*. Attempting to capture the typical, dynamic organisation of the unconscious representations in the neurotic mental sphere, Freud proposed a threefold stratification of the psychic materials around a central nucleus of (traumatic, pathogenic or repressed) memories, whereby the third arrangement is generally the most important one, insofar as it tends to overrule and subdue the two other layerings - its dynamic concatenation of reminiscences taking precedence, both in the way a patient presents her symptoms and in her subsequent analysis of them. Whereas the first type of organisation entails a strictly linear, chronological sequence of mental representations, starting from the nucleus and moving forwards in the patient's developmental history (or vice versa), and the second type represents a thematic or concentric arrangement, every mental representation being linked by a common quantum of resistance vis-à-vis the nucleus, the third (and most important) stratification is entirely conditioned by an overdetermined, yet highly individual logic. 'What I have in mind', Freud wrote, 'is an arrangement according to thought-content, the linkage made by a logical thread which reaches as far as the nucleus and tends to take an irregular and twisting path, different in every case...The logical chain corresponds not only to a zig-zag twisted line, but rather to a ramifying system of lines and more particularly to a converging one. It contains nodal points at which two or more threads meet and thereafter

proceed as one; and as a rule several threads which run independently, or which are connected at various points by side-paths, debouch into the nucleus' (Breuer and Freud 1955[1895*d*]: 289-90). The principal implication of this third arrangement is that conventional (chronological or thematic) narration in the patient's free associative discourse is replaced with a proto-modernist stream of (un)consciousness. Within this stream, (variations on) thematically linked subjects and topics are juxtaposed with chronologically connected representations, in such a way that both temporal and spatial logics are superseded by a complex network of loosely related sensory impressions whose meaning, if there is one, cannot be reduced to one or the other type of organisation, and thus gives way to a 'violent', multi-faceted experience of direct sensation.

As in all paradigms of curing or healing, Freud's postulated technique for treating this peculiar state of affairs followed his description and explanation of it. In this sense, my first thesis merely rehearses an already well-known fact: in general, the nature of the treatment is a function of the clinician's understanding of the disorder. In Freud's case, however, this idiosyncratic outlook on the neurotic mind did not warrant a type of treatment based on therapy at all, at least not if this word is held to index direct strategies of curing or healing. During the mid-1910s, when he composed a series of technical papers designed to help physicians applying the principles of psychoanalysis in their clinical practice, he even went so far as to dismiss all therapeutic approaches controlled by the therapist's desire to heal as futile or superfluous. '[W]hen all is said', Freud proclaimed, 'human society has no more use for the *furor sanandi* [literally, the 'fury to heal'] than for any other fanaticism…[T]o believe that the psychoneuroses are to be conquered by operating with harmless little remedies is grossly to under-estimate those disorders both as to their origin and their practical importance' (Freud 1958[1915*a*]: 171).[2]

If Freud's understanding of the specific organisation of the neurotic mind did not justify a clinical approach that is directed by the clinician's desire to heal, i.e. by an intention to deliver therapy, then what would be the alternative, more appropriate method or procedure? The answer is, of course, analysis, in the chemical meaning of the term as a process of 'loosening up', 'taking apart', 'separating', 'disentangling' and 'unravelling'. Yet insofar as it is relatively

[2] In his 1955 essay 'Variations on the Standard Treatment', Lacan implicitly drew on Freud's paper in order to launch a principle that would come to haunt him, and the doctrine of Lacanian psychoanalysis, until this day: "Clearly advised by Freud to closely examine the effects in his experience of the danger sufficiently announced by the term *furor sanandi*, he does not, in the end, wish to be motivated by it. While he thus views cure as an added benefit [*la guérison comme bénéfice de surcroît*] of psychoanalytic treatment, he is wary of any misuse of the desire to cure" (Lacan, 2006[1955]: 270).

straightforward to come up with definitions of what this 'analysis of the psyche' involves, in practice it proved exceptionally hard for Freud (and others) to operationalise it and to bring it to fruition, even after it had been ascertained (to some extent on the basis of trial and error) that it required a certain type of transference between the patient and the analyst (an 'emotional tie' or relationship in Freud's lingo, the attribution of a 'supposed subject of knowing' in Lacan's idiom), the patient's sustained free associations, the analyst's interpretations and constructions, and the latter's position of evenly suspended attention.

Second thesis: psychoanalysis constitutes an intensive labour of creative destruction on the side of the patient, a repetitive act of mental making that always entails a constant re-making, which is not a cumulative process, but rather a battle of continuous rejection, a struggle towards creative excoriation. The words (signifiers, acoustic images) an analysand generates during a psychoanalytic session have to be taken up in a process of what Freud once designated as 'working-through' (*durcharbeiten*), and which he described as 'the work which effects the greatest changes in the patient and which distinguishes analytic treatment from any kind of treatment by suggestion' (Freud 1958[1914*g*]: 155-6). Perhaps inevitably, Freud was again better at underscoring the significance of this working-through than at providing a proper definition of it. In their seminal volume *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, Laplanche and Pontalis remained equally vague: 'Working-through is taken to be a sort of psychical work which allows the subject to accept certain repressed elements and to free himself from the grip of mechanisms of repetition' (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973[1967]: 488). As to Lacan, at the very end of his 1964 seminar *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* he rekindled Freud's notion in the context of a discussion of the 'traversal of the fantasy'. Working-through appeared, here, as the process whereby an analysand would mentally travel through his or her signifying structures a sufficient number of times for the drive to be liberated from its fantasmatic setting (Lacan 1994[1973]: 273-4). As such, the process involves neither a radical disintegration of the fantasy nor a de-activation of the drive, but rather a cutting and removal of the umbilical cord that binds them together, which would bring about a greater degree of freedom to the analysand and a certain 'cleansing' of the psychic window onto the world.

What is at stake, here, is not the reintegration of the patient's life-history (as Lacan had presumed earlier on in his career), much less the induction of subjective autonomy in those places where alienation would have formerly reigned supreme, or even the facilitation of the patient's renewed sense of authenticity, but rather a de-activation of nodal (master) signifiers, the re-calibration of the patient's subjective experience against the ineluctable flow of the

symbolic register in which he or she is embedded. Put succinctly, what patients stand to gain from the psychoanalytic experience is directly proportional with what they are prepared to lose. The patients' free associative speech acts, as punctuated by the analyst's interventions, do not lead to more truthful (self-)knowledge or a more accurate battery of meanings, but to a dismantling of the pathogenic meanings that had already been manufactured around their suffering (and indeed their entire life-history), so that the words can acquire new sonorities and new affective qualities. As such, psychoanalysis is an iterative cycle of mental construction and re-construction, whereby the most important elements are those that fall out of the process, as irrecoverable and indivisible remainders.

Third thesis: the labour of creative destruction that is known as psychoanalysis is in itself governed by a psycho-geographical model or metaphor of the human mind, and is *de facto* never completed. Just because Lacan claimed, in a 1971 paper entitled 'Lituraterre', that James Joyce's 'littering of the letter', i.e. his creative destruction of the English language, in *Finnegans Wake*, had allowed him to accomplish, by means of writing, the best one may expect from the end of a psychoanalytic process, does not mean that this work is ever complete, ever reaches a definitive end, ever coincides with a spatio-temporal point one might term 'the finish line' (Lacan 2013[1971]: 327; Joyce, 1939).

On numerous occasions, Freud described the human mind as a home, a house and a city - a complex space containing various interdependent locations, organised in a seemingly hierarchical fashion, with some quarters readily accessible and others firmly sealed off. The image already featured in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where he compared the dreamwork's withdrawal of psychical value from the most powerful thoughts in the mind, thus distorting their actual significance, to the way in which the heads of a ruling family would be sent into exile after the sacking of their cities, and only their impoverished or remote dependants would be permitted to stay (Freud 1958[1900*a*]: 516). In the first of his five lectures at Clark University, delivered in September 1909, he went so far as to describe the (neurotic) mind as a multi-layered urban environment, in which interconnected present-day movements and activities take place around all kinds of monuments, statues and memorials that often serve the purpose of commemorating historical traumatic events. In developing the allegory, Freud did not conjure up his hometown of Vienna, but the city of London, to which he himself would be exiled almost thirty years later (Freud 1957[1910*a*] 16-7). The most famous of Freud's geographical mindscapes is undoubtedly his elaborate exposition in *Civilization and Its Discontents* of the city of Rome as the external, urban equivalent of a human psychical entity,

whereby the chequered history of the eternal city was chosen to illustrate how what belongs to the past is not necessarily destroyed, and may continue to exist alongside more recent constructions, often in one and the same location (Freud 1964[1930*a*]: 69-71).

What stands out in all of Freud's representations of the human mind as a city is that human beings build their mental space not as a safe, secure and comfortable dwelling, but rather as a chaotic, disorganised and troubled environment - or at least that, despite all best efforts, the human mindhouse always remains in a state of disarray. Indeed, Freud was of the opinion that psychoanalysis had crucially contributed to the recognition of the mind's own home as a haunted house, to which one cannot really come home in order to be and feel 'at home'. The most poignant formulation of this idea appeared in a short paper entitled 'A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis' (Freud 1955[1917*a*]), which was written around the same time as 'The "Uncanny"', in which various instances of 'un-homeliness' are notably defined as the unexpected return of what should have remained hidden (Freud 1955[1919*h*]: 227-33). In the former text, Freud identified three key narcissistic blows that scientific research had delivered to humanity. The first, cosmological blow had occurred with the Copernican revolution, which had forced humanity to accept that it did not inhabit the centre of the universe. For the second, biological blow Freud attributed responsibility to Darwin, who had persuasively demonstrated that human beings have no reason to believe that they are divine creations who are vastly superior to other, non-human creatures. The third, most wounding blow was psychological, and had been delivered by none other than Professor Sigmund Freud himself:

> Although thus humbled in his external relations, man feels himself to be supreme within his own mind . . . [But] this mind is not a simple thing; on the contrary, it is a hierarchy of superordinated and subordinated agencies, a labyrinth of impulses striving independently of one another towards action...The ego feels uneasy; it comes up against limits to its power in its own house, the mind. Thoughts emerge suddenly without one's knowing where they come from, nor can one do anything to drive them away. These alien guests [*fremden Gäste*] even seem to be more powerful than those which are at the ego's command
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> Freud 1955[1917*a*]: 141

Whereas mental uneasiness was at first restricted, here, to what happens in certain (neurotic) disturbances, Freud soon took away any hope on the part of his readership that psychoanalysis had at least left the mind intact in its 'normal' state of health. After having delivered his own

personal blow to the psychiatric establishment, he went on to conclude that the human mind is intrinsically incapable of taming the instinctual forces, and that a large swathe of a human being's mental processes remains unconscious, in short that 'the ego is not master in its own house' (*daß das Ich nicht Herr sei in seinem eigenen Haus*), both in sickness and in health (Freud 1955[1917*a*]: 143). Hence, un-homeliness is the prevailing sensation in Freud's account of the human mind. The mind is not a very good host to its own main inhabitant; the ego, which aspires to be the proprietor and protector of mental space, sees its hegemony imperilled and its sphere of influence reduced by the constant onslaught of alien, spectral forces. The fact that the ego's *own* house is under siege, rather than that in which it might live as a visitor, evidently makes matters worse, because it implies that the ego is forced to admit that it is being attacked in its most intimate and familiar surroundings, and potentially exiled from the only place it could ever recognise as home.

By analogy with the well-known archaeological metaphor in Freud's work, this is what I would designate as the 'psychogeographical metaphor'[3]. For Freud, the human mind is the primordial setting for the haunted, unhomely, inhospitable house and the persistently besieged, relentlessly beleaguered city. The human mind constitutes the first foundation for the construction of the inescapable, labyrinthine and embattled palace in which we, as human beings, are forced to live our lives in the company of the excessive, demonic assailants that escape our control, challenge our comfort, and undermine our sense of reason and reality. Constantly at risk of being thrown off guard by the dark figures that loom in each and every corner of its waking consciousness, the self-proclaimed master of this psychic city tries to hold on to whatever strength it can muster, in order to ward off the incessant assaults on its sovereignty, yet there is little or no guarantee that it will maintain a viable degree of control. And when the ego finally succumbs, partially or *in toto*, to the invasion of its own ghosts, it is only to see its predicament exchanged for an even more painful fate, since from now on it will spend most of its days in the service of the petrified memory-traces of its own traumatising spectres.

The labour of psychoanalysis is crucially geared towards the revelation of the patient's unconscious desire, as a desire to come home to and be at home within one's own familiar mindhouse, yet this desire never reaches its fulfilment (and an associated level of unblemished

[3] Whereas 'psychogeography' was defined by Guy Debord as 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals' (Debord 2006[1955]: 8), I am using the term in a much narrower sense, as the description and explanation of the human psychic sphere as a geographical environment.

satisfaction) in what could be designated as a definitive, final homecoming. A psychoanalyst acts as the instrument and the catalyst of speech, which crystallizes in myriad tales of hardship and endurance, whose content invariably elicits a persistent desire to return home, '*chez soi*' - as if home would be synonymous with order and tranquillity, and being at peace with oneself could be a lasting state of mind. Yet psychoanalysis is a never-ending journey, whose tortuous trajectory is far more important than its final destination, and whose projected point of arrival is only ever the time of a new beginning, in a perennial cycle of waiting for the definitive homecoming to come.

In 1917, when he argued that the ego is not the master in his own house, Freud still believed that psychoanalysis had somehow sought to educate the ego (*So wollte die Psychoanalyse das Ich belehren*) (Freud 1955[1917*a*]: 143), yet twenty years later, in 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable', his message was as clear as it was pessimistic, as decisive as it was despondent (Freud 1964[1937*c*]). When all is said and done, the change that psychoanalysis can bring about in the mental life of patients is altogether negligible, at least if what might be expected is a radical alteration in the sorrowful state of the human condition, leading to persistent happiness, prolonged satisfaction, or indeed a definitive homecoming, *chez soi*. If mental changes do occur as a result of psychoanalytic interventions, Freud averred towards the end of his own life, they are generally short-lived and rarely deeply transformative. Psychoanalysis is simply not powerful enough an instrument to eradicate the pathogenic forces of the human mind for once and for all, nor does it have the tools at its disposal to prevent these forces from intermittently unleashing their wrath when the mind is in a state of relative equilibrium. Some may see Freud's position, here, to be the tragic reflection of his own physical and emotional state. Maybe it is more accurate to say that under the veil of Freud's clinical pessimism, we need to be prepared to accept the reality of the human condition.

Of the six 'revisionary ratios' Harold Bloom distinguished in his hugely influential book *The Anxiety of Influence*, the most advanced one (in a temporal rather than hierarchical sense), is the strategy of apophrades, named after the Ancient Greek designation for the days when the deceased return to the dwellings in which they once lived (Bloom 1997[1973]: 141). Having reached the end of his or her life, the poet and, by extension all the writers who wish to be remembered for the originality of their creative imagination and the way in which they have given shape to it, opens the door to the feared predecessors and allows them to roam freely in their follower's home, up to the point where their spirits are given the keys to each and every room, as benign revenants and newly acquired spectral friends. Whereas the writer's house

had previously been kept shut, it now becomes a hospitable space, in which the ghosts of the past are not only free to take shelter, but also at liberty to share their creative strengths with their follower. In his presentation of this 'late' revisionary ratio, Bloom argued that it invariably generates an uncanny sensation (Bloom 1997[1973]: 16), in the writer as well as the reader, because the net result of the apophrades is that the 'later writer' appears to have been the author of the precursor's 'earlier writings'.

The human mindhouse is doomed, and it is doomed to stay that way, irrespective of what the psychoanalytic act may accomplish by way of channelling desire towards peace and reconciliation. At best, the psychoanalyst may invoke the muse of speech, operate as the catalyst and the rhapsode of painful stories of displacement and misrecognition, and try to facilitate a liveable and workable, yet unavoidably transient truce between the owner of the house and its unwelcome inhabitants, an evanescent armistice between the well-meaning occupiers of the present and the evil revenants from the past, in short some sort of (temporary) apophrades, which may be neither painful nor resigned, neither hurried nor reconciliatory, neither soothing nor uncanny, but forward-looking, sharp-witted and self-questioning. More than anything else, these apophrades may very well be gay (in the Nietzschean sense of playful and light-hearted, without therefore lacking in seriousness) in their clear opposition to whatever life has produced by way of firmly established knowledge. Yet if there is room at all in the city for this agreement of a ceasefire between the antagonistic psychic localities, and perhaps even for a practical cessation of conflicting operations and a gay apophrades, definitive peace and quiet will never reign. As Homer's Odysseus conceded: πλαγκτοσύνης δ᾽ούκ ἔστι κακώτερον ἄλλο βροτοῖσιν (Hom. Od. 15, 343). In his new English translation of *The Odyssey*, Peter Green has rendered the word πλαγκτοσύνης as 'vagrancy' (2018: 239), but it could equally well be translated as 'roaming', 'rambling', 'roving' or indeed as 'homelessness'.[4] In essence, like any beggar sleeping rough and living off whatever spare change or small leftovers people are willing to part with, Odysseus complains that of all the ills that may befall humankind, homelessness is by far the worst evil, which is as much a valid reflection upon Odysseus' new status as a beggar in his own home, as it is an acute observation about what has been happening to the Lord of Ithaca since he left the shores of Troy. However, it is also a particularly poignant assessment of the sorry state in which the Homeric epic has left its main character, at a point when the homecoming should have finally

[4] 'Homelessness' is how Emily Wilson has translated Homer's term (Homer, 2018*b*: 362) and this option is also that chosen by A. T. Murray in his 1919 translation for the Loeb Classical Library.

taken place—after all, Odysseus is now back in Ithaca—but has once again been delayed, and will continue to be postponed, for another nine books and a couple of thousand verses no less. What Odysseus conveys, here, is that his story, *The Odyssey*, is a story about ineluctable homelessness, inasmuch as home is forever escaping, endlessly receding into the distance, even when it is physically present in all its tangibly familiar qualities. For human mortals, 'homelessness is the worst of all evils', says the Lord of Ithaca. In the psychoanalytic take on humanity, the homeless mind is unfortunately a pure tautology, and so therapy must remain inherently futile, analysis being the only process that may bring some form of temporary consolation.

Abbreviations

Hom. Od. Homer. *Odyssey. Volume II. Books 13-24*. (trans.) A. T. Murray, revised by G. E. Dimock. Corrected Edition. Loeb Classical Library 105. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998. English versions (1) *The Odyssey* (trans.) P. Green. Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2018a; (2) *The Odyssey* (trans.) E. Wilson. New York NY-London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2018b.

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