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Nothing Beyond the Name

Towards an Eclipse of Listening in the Psychotherapeutic Enterprise

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ABSTRACT: What are the different kinds of reduction that take place in a psychotherapeutic discipline? This article looks at the agonistic relations between the two types of reduction that fundamentally constitute a psychotherapeutic paradigm: naming and listening. At any given moment in the history of psychological theory, various schools and theories are in contention with each other over an institutional and state legitimation that will only be granted to one or some of them. It is argued that these disciplinary contentions for a dominant status subordinate the names and concepts that populate a particular psychotherapeutic paradigm to a property regime, thereby obscuring or compromising the attention paid to forms of listening that occur on the edge of naming and meaning.

KEYWORDS: Naming; Listening; Medical humanities; Reduction; Reductionism; Psychotherapy; Psychoanalysis

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A theory, in its quest to name, disclose, explain, resolve, or reduce, is suspended between a wish and a promise. The wishes, desires, and dreams that anticipate a particular theory are neither made fully explicit at its outset nor do they need to bear an agreeable relation with what that theoretical enterprise promises in terms of the visions that are conjured, or the consequences that are enabled. This disjunction, between the wishes that give rise to a particular theoretical reduction and the horizons of wish-fulfilment they chart out, anticipates other disjunctions to come. When these reductions and narratives participate in their milieus, their fate becomes uncertain as they are often appropriated, misappropriated, reappropriated, or even de-appropriated in ways that could never be fully anticipated. In their attempts to defend themselves, whether in disputes with the interrogators that surround them, or the ever-looming possibility of obsolescence, most theoretical projects are haunted by dreams for an enduring relevance, for posterity, a need for either permanence, objectivity, invulnerability, or inscrutability. This haunting is all the more the case for theories that lay claim to being sciences of the will, of fear, of dreams or desires.

FREUD'S TABLET, RUMPELSTILTSKIN'S BARTER: DREAMING
SENSE, NAMING NONSENSE

In a letter dated 16 August 1895 to Wilhelm Fliess, Sigmund Freud recalls with amusement his son Oliver's trait for 'concentrating on what is immediately ahead.'¹ Freud recounts: 'An enthusiastic aunt asked him, "Oli, what do you want to become?" He replied, "Aunt, five years, in February."' ² Oli's aspirations might be said to carry the unwitting humility of tautology, an ambition with neither project nor object, a satisfaction with being itself. In that very year, however, Freud the father harboured theories and ambitions of a very different sort. In another letter to Fliess dated 12 June 1900, Freud shares this dream:

Do you suppose that someday one will read on a marble tablet
on this house:

Here, on July 24, 1895,
the secret of the dream
revealed itself to Dr. Sigm. Freud³

Five years after the epiphany regarding the nature of dreams had first visited him, Freud was dreaming grand visions of the reputation and legacy that would be attached to his theories. He had a strong sense that through his insight into dreams, he would be able to formulate a theory that would address questions fundamental to all of psychology such as the nature of defences, wishes, needs, memory, repetition, symptoms, etc. But the intensities that set in motion the elaboration of his theory of dreams were not merely governed by the wish to discover and explain that which had not yet been named. His professional and social location, the status that might accrue to the victor who furnishes explanations to certain concerns, and the contests that framed such a quest played important roles in brewing the dreams that in turn fuelled Freud's theory of dreams.

1 Sigmund Freud, 'Letter to Wilhelm Fliess, Bellevue, August 16, 1895', in *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904*, ed. and trans. by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (London: Belknap Press, 1985), p. 136.

2 Ibid.

3 Freud, 'Letter to Wilhelm Fliess, June 12, 1900', in *The Complete Letters*, p. 417.

The atmosphere of competition, collaboration (and condescension) can be sensed in an earlier letter to Fliess dated 16 May 1897, in which Freud admits:

After all, we do not want to be the only intelligent people in the world; what makes sense to us must also be to the liking of a few capable fellows [...] I spared myself informing you of two miserable critiques that have come to my knowledge since Nuremberg — one of them by an assistant of Chrobak. You can calmly put up with it.⁴

In both this letter and the one written three years later — when he imagines being commemorated in a tablet — Freud can barely contain his excitement over the novelty and certainty of his conclusions on dreams, especially in contrast with the existing psychological literature. In both letters, Freud expresses his glee for possessing the secrets of the psyche, of knowing that which no else knows, by equating himself with another bearer of secrets from German folklore, the imp Rumpelstiltskin.

In the 1897 letter, Freud writes: ‘Now I have finished and am thinking about the dream [book] again. I have been looking into the literature and feel like the Celtic imp: “Oh, how glad I am that no one, no one knows ...” No one even suspects that the dream is not nonsense but wish fulfillment.’⁵ In the 1900 letter, Freud is concerned about not having enough cases for the elaboration and proof of his theory, but remains excited over the main thesis regarding dreams and the process of wish fulfilment, repeating his allusion to the gleeful imp while specifying the existing literature on dreams, over which his own theory would be a definite improvement:

So far there is little prospect of it. But when I read the more recent psychological books (Mach’s *Analyse der Empfindungen*, 2nd ed., Kroell’s *Aufbau der Seele*, and the likes), all of which have a direction similar to my work, and see what they have to say about the dream, I am indeed pleased, like the dwarf in the fairy tale, because ‘the princess does not know’.⁶

4 Freud, ‘Letter to Wilhelm Fliess, May 16, 1897’, in *The Complete Letters*, p. 243.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., p. 417.

The value of revealing ‘the secret of the dream’ would command the attention it did precisely because dreams are ambivalent interlopers that trouble any assumption of transparency that might accompany wakeful memory and knowledge. Dreams are perennially tantalizing in the depths they generate but never fully disclose. It is only fitting then that accompanying Freud’s attempt to map dreamwork, to name and make sense of what the prevailing science considered nonsense, are allusions to the ambivalence and tensions that are native to theoretical ambitions. Like Rumpelstiltskin who had the secret talent to spin straw into gold, Freud pursued his talents to spin the nonsense of dreams into sense. Like the imp he references, he too seeks a reward in order to make sense of his own work, in this case imagining a marble tablet as symbolic recompense.

One of the ironic aspects of dreams is that in their very momentariness, they sometimes present a *total* clarity or resolution. A similar irony can be said to haunt Freud’s case of dreaming a tablet, in which he imagines a horizon of permanence for his theory of dreams — phenomena that are dynamic, ambivalent, and unpredictable. Inscribed in the imaginary tablet, the labour of Freud’s thought was underwritten as a property that was to be attached to the reputation accompanying his proper name. In this proprietary impulse — seeking for oneself that which belongs to no one else — we see other resonances between the wish for property that undergirds Freud’s theoretical impulse and Rumpelstiltskin’s mischievous barter.

Rumpelstiltskin’s barter involves the secrecy of his name, which ‘the princess does not know’. If the princess were able to discover and state his name, she would not have to give her child up to the imp’s ownership. Rumpelstiltskin delights in his anonymity and sets up a game through which he exercises his obscurity as a form of power over the other more sovereign forms of power, such as that represented by the princess. Freud too delights in the obscure status of his insights, only grudgingly allowing for the possibility that others too were worthy enough to participate in his commerce of ideas, that Fliess and he were not ‘the only intelligent people in the world’, that ‘what makes sense to us must also be to the liking of a few capable fellows’. Here we can sense a fundamental ambiguity involved in protecting (or producing) a secret whose value was tied to its transactions with

the larger world. Disclosing the secret, it seems, could simultaneously increase one's weight or position in the world (this weight and location in the guise of a tablet) and do away with the secret's exclusivity — thus the anxiety around one's symbolic property becoming common knowledge. It's perhaps this volatility entailed in keeping secrets that leads Rumpelstiltskin, leaping and hopping on one leg, to cry:

Still no one knows it just the same,
That Rumpelstiltskin is my name.⁷

The imp is singing and dancing outside his home in the back of beyond, between the far end of a forest and a mountain, delighting in having released his secret aloud, safe in the assumption that there is no one to overhear it. But unknown to him, his rhyme is overheard by a name-seeking informant dispatched by the princess. Enraged that he has lost the game and the reward, Rumpelstiltskin, in a violent tantrum, stamps himself deep into the earth, seizing one of his feet to tear himself right down the middle into two. This act of splitting is the consequence of the whimsical risk to announce an unascertained name and the unanticipated listening that renders its secrecy untenable. Can we take this split that concludes the tale as being about the mutually constitutive yet agonistic relation between naming and listening? If Freud associated this tale with his own theoretical ambitions, can this casual reference also be revealing of a more fundamental, disagreeable yet generative tension between two modes of reduction — naming and listening — that frame the practice and theory of psychotherapy as a whole? In its trafficking of names, a psychology wishes to listen to and reveal the workings of the mind and its location in the social world, to trace the origins of mental disorders while promising programs for the recovery of mental and social health. To what extent then does a psychology's reductive regime of naming impinge upon or distance itself from a listening defined by neither wish nor project, a listening intrinsic to psychotherapeutic praxis, which might even need to actively subtract, unname, de-educate, or decreate from the proprietorial impulse of naming?

7 Brothers Grimm, 'The Fairytale of Rumpelstiltskin', *Guardian*, trans. by Joyce Crick, 13 October 2009 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/oct/13/fairytales-rumpelstiltskin-brothers-grimm>> [accessed 12 Jan 2022].

CRYSTALS, PRECIPITATES, FLAMES: POWERS OF NAMING AND LISTENING

Fania Pascal recounts an episode in which Ludwig Wittgenstein, picking up a volume of Grimm's fairy tales, reads out

with awe in his voice: 'Ach, wie gut ist dass niemand weiss | Dass ich Rumpelstilzchen heiss.' [Oh, how good it is that nobody knows | That I am called Rumpelstiltskin] 'Profound. Profound,' he said. I liked 'Rumpelstiltskin', understood that the strength of the dwarf lay in his name being unknown to humans.⁸

If Pascal understood the imp's strength to reside in his name not being known, what might these powers be? Since the subject of such a question is negative in character, perhaps it is better addressed by an inverse query, by first asking what underlies the power of naming. Do the powers of naming or listening consist in the different types of reduction that are peculiar to them? In *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Gaston Bachelard writes: 'In the field of psychoanalysis the naming of things is often sufficient to cause a precipitate; before the name, there was only an amorphous, troubled, disturbed solution; after the name, crystals are seen at the bottom of the liquid.'⁹ For Bachelard, psychoanalytic naming is imagined as a process of reduction, the forming of a precipitate where before there was only a troubled medium. Adding elements of symmetry, clarity, and reflectivity to the gravitational pull of the name, he further specifies the psychoanalytic name as reducing amorphous matter into crystals. In the related images of the precipitate and the crystal, a transaction is carried out where something that is 'amorphous, troubled, disturbed' is transformed into a thing with gravity and clarity, the latter seeming to be a more desirable good than the former.¹⁰ But are there hidden costs to such a transaction? Does the sovereign act of naming displace or violate the obscure powers of the imp?

8 Fania Pascal, 'Wittgenstein: A Personal Memoir', in *Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, ed. by Norman Malcolm and Rush Rhees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 12–50 (pp. 19–20).

9 Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, trans. by Alan C. M. Ross (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), pp. 39–40.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

In his 'Introduction' to *Language and Learning: The Debate Between Jean Piaget and Noam Chomsky*, Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini visualizes the two prevailing ontological commitments to how biological life emerges, as 'the *crystal* on the one side (invariance of specific structures) and the *flame* on the other (constancy of external forms in spite of relentless internal agitation)'.¹¹ Piattelli-Palmarini identifies the drive for 'invariance' as stemming from a crystal ontology in the history of science (and its related extrapolations as they carry over to the psychological and social sciences). If we were to restrict ourselves to the crystallization or reduction involved in naming as necessarily involving invariance, even if only in the preliminary act of the assignation of a specific symbol, it would be adequate to understand how naming tends towards the foreclosure of listening. Here, the different senses of the word precipitate — such as the act of transforming what Bachelard terms 'amorphous, troubled, disturbed' into the crystals that gather in the bottom of the solution — can illuminate the hidden costs of naming's intolerance to variance.¹² If to name is to precipitate, and to precipitate is to 'cause (an event or series of events) to happen quickly, suddenly, or unexpectedly', 'to plunge; to descend steeply or vertically', or 'to fall suddenly or violently *into* a particular state or condition', then naming is an event which contains within it violence, haste, and the violence of haste.¹³ How does the name engage in violent haste? Naming's invariance need not refer to what Piattelli-Palmarini identifies as the microscopic crystalline underworld 'that dictates its laws to the macroscopic' nor need it be an unchanging referent or meaning, given the flux and transformations that define the fate of a name.¹⁴ In the names instituted by a discipline like psychology that seeks to preserve its expertise, invariance is to be seen in the desire for property relations, the desire to foreclose in advance who gets to interpret and operate upon a certain set of concerns.

11 Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini, 'Introduction', in *Language and Learning: The Debate between Jean Piaget and Noam Chomsky*, ed. by Piattelli-Palmarini (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 1–20 (p. 6).

12 Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, p. 40.

13 'Precipitate, v', in *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/149643>> [accessed 2 January 2022].

14 Piattelli-Palmarini, 'Introduction', p. 7.

In the institutionalization of a psychology, its shield-bearers enter into a contract by which what is 'amorphous, troubled, disturbed' is prone to being plunged violently into the rules that govern the keeping of its names. Naming's invariance then is not so much a matter of meaning but one of sovereignty.

THE DOUBLE-EDGED MAGIC OF NAMING AND THE FATE OF LISTENING

In his *Brown Book* Wittgenstein remarks that 'one could almost imagine that naming was done by a sacramental act and that this produced some magic relation between the name and the thing'.¹⁵ The magic of the name is in line with the magic that characterizes the instituting powers of the law or of property, an announcement of control that comes to fundamentally determine or create our social worlds.

Another aspect of naming's magic consists in providing visibility, form, and consistency to what previously was either non-existent or only fleetingly and obscurely registered, a basin of attraction around which the surrounding realities it invokes can congregate and interact. In this act of focusing, naming provides affordances for listening, an initial step in the concatenating or patterning of sequences, of bringing crystalline order to what might have seemed chaotic. Naming as an act of theorization could also be viewed as an interstitial event which in turn was precipitated by acts of patient observation and listening.

Describing the process of arriving at descriptions of the basic fixed action patterns — or IRMs (Innate Releasing Mechanisms) — that constitute instinctive behaviour in the discipline of ethology, the neuroscientist John Duncan tells us that,

As we watch bees humming in the flowers, seagulls squabbling over scraps, or clouds of fish over a reef, the chaos of our first, casual impression is replaced by the new ethologists' vision. Now we see stable structures of behaviour elicited by consistent sensory events, and complex, ever-changing wholes built up through assembly of these fixed, constantly recurring fragments.¹⁶

15 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 172.

16 John Duncan, *How Intelligence Happens* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 5.

Naming's agonistic relation with listening consists in privileging certain forms of listening while obscuring or actively excluding or destroying others. Carefully observing and watching insects and animals to draw conclusions about their essential character might involve simultaneously participating in a larger paradigm whose confidence and commitment to identifying fundamental patterns help create technologies, industries, and economies that are involved in the elimination of insect and animal populations.

How are we to reckon then with the double-edged power of naming and the challenges it presents to listening? It might be useful to consider here the epistemology of early Chinese thought that takes pains to avoid a thorough commitment to naming's relation to a referential reality. In his careful elaboration of coherence (or *Li*) in *Ironies of Oneness and Difference*, Brook Ziporyn observes that early Chinese philosophy invoked an epistemology that 'functions on the basis of only names and stuffs; no other entities, such as properties, attributes, essences, ideas, universals, or particulars, are necessary'.¹⁷ What Ziporyn indicates through the term 'stuffs' is the manner in which the coherence conveyed by a name emerges simultaneously in the backdrop of its incoherence, of that which is nameless. As he explains:

The valued and disvalued, the intelligible and its own undermining, emerge simultaneously, come forth together (同出 *tongchu*): when we name something, we implicitly also name with the name 'namelessness' that to which it is contrasted, from which it emerges, against which it is nameable. The positing of any valued coherence is also the positing of its own prior and surrounding incoherence (its indiscernibility prior to its emergence, and its undiscoverability in the contrasted background around it), which is what grounds it and makes its presence possible. The emergence of the coherence and the incoherence, these opposites, are aspects of a single event. Every coherence (name, value) has a double meaning: it names both the coherence and the ultimate incoherence with which it is coherent, and it is this coherence (togetherness) of the coherence and the incoherence that alone makes any coherence coherent (intelligible).¹⁸

17 Brook Ziporyn, *Ironies of Oneness and Difference: Coherence in Early Chinese Thought; Prolegomena to the Study of Li* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), p. 51.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 145.

Of value in an epistemological attitude that practises according primacy to the simultaneous emergence of names *and* the namelessness that serves as its backdrop, is the constant tending to the *ways* in which the former produces the latter and the ironic recognition that the latter is prefigured in the former.

It can be argued that the label 'namelessness' itself is a name, subject to all the problems associated with naming. Ziporyn explains that the horizons indicated by the Daoist notions of namelessness, incoherence, and the disvalued 'are simultaneously both within and without the system of names, simultaneously named and unnamed'.¹⁹ As he elaborates:

They are surds, which, in attempting to mean what is no part of the whole system of names, actually end up meaning both (a) 'the unvalued part' of the whole, the background that is left over after the named part has been picked out, and also (b) 'the entire whole, which is subsequently divided into named and unnamed'.²⁰

Were it to be merely an abstract concern, then the named namelessness could be seen as an act of bracketing away a noise, or an inconvenience that interrupts the coherence being sought. In the context of a psychotherapeutic paradigm, however, it could indicate a realm of suspense that is to be actively embraced and nurtured in the various dimensions of living praxis that come to define it. In his lecture 'Psychoanalysis and Cybernetics, or on the Nature of Language', Jacques Lacan is alive to these ironies involved in naming and meaning, and to their intimations for the directions of psychoanalytic technique. For Lacan the backdrop of the symbolic is not one of incoherence, rather it is one of repression. He concludes his lecture by stating:

No doubt something which isn't expressed doesn't exist. But the repressed is always there, insisting, and demanding to be. The fundamental relation of man to this symbolic order is very precisely what founds the symbolic order itself — the relation of non-being to being.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

What insists on being satisfied can only be satisfied in recognition. The end of the symbolic process is that non-being come to be, because it has spoken.²¹

For Lacan, the ironic suspense that comes to bear between the expressed and the repressed, between the symbolic and non-being, is an attempt to answer a question he poses earlier on in the lecture: 'What is the meaning of meaning?'.²² Such a meaning is not enclosed in a pre-determined circuit where 'whatever doesn't come on time simply falls by the wayside and makes no claim on anything. This is not true for man, the scansion is alive, and whatever doesn't come on time remains in suspense. That is what is involved in repression.'²³ By foregrounding this suspense, Lacan conceives the psychoanalytic enterprise not as consisting in the imaginary horizons of 'coaptation', 'normalisation', or 'rectification' but as invested in 'following' the 'here and now'.²⁴ The meaning of psychoanalytic work then is not prefigured in advance, rather it's a scansion in suspense, a liveliness that is yet to arrive. If scansion here indicates a step or stress that is yet to happen, it also indicates an encounter that necessitates listening, a listening that is far from beholden to what is familiar, learnt, named, or prescribed. Listening is an organ characterized by limits and openings, at once an instrument for hearing that which is named or remembered and for seeking to reach beyond.

THE IRONIC DISCIPLINE OF LISTENING: FREUD'S
EVENLY-SUSPENDED ATTENTION, THE DRONE IN
HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC

In his meditation, *Listening*, Jean-Luc Nancy makes a distinction between hearing and listening:

If 'to hear' is to understand the sense (either in the so-called figurative sense, or in the so-called proper sense: to hear a siren,

21 Jacques Lacan, 'Psychoanalysis and Cybernetics, or on the Nature of Language', in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1988-), II: *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, trans. by Sylvana Tomaselli (1988), pp. 294-308 (p. 308).

22 Ibid., p. 307.

23 Ibid., pp. 307-08.

24 Ibid., p. 307.

a bird, or a drum is already each time to understand at least the rough outline of a situation, a context if not a text), to listen is to be straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible.²⁵

Listening recedes where a regime of hearing dominates. The manner in which hearing for names comes to dominate a praxis of listening would in turn depend on the extent to which a paradigm of naming seeks to totalize or eclipse the backdrop of namelessness from which it issues. Listening is an ironic discipline in that it values, anticipates, and awaits what lies outside its disciplinary bounds. Regimes of expertise on the other hand are oriented towards exclusion and erasure, disciplines that either bracket away what lies outside them or are in a haste to incorporate encounters with novelty within the names that have been designated to signal its boundaries. Can we read Freud's practical recommendation of the dyadic relation between the analysand's free association and the analyst's evenly-suspended attention in the light of the struggle between naming and listening? In Freud's plain outline of the technique of evenly-suspended attention, he cautions against the dangers of what we can redescribe here as the reductive aspect of deliberate attention as might be exercised by a listener or an analyst:

It consists simply in not directing one's notice to anything in particular and in maintaining the same 'evenly-suspended attention' (as I have called it) in the face of all that one hears. In this way we spare ourselves a strain on our attention which could not in any case be kept up for several hours daily, and we avoid a danger which is inseparable from the exercise of deliberate attention. For as soon as anyone deliberately concentrates his attention to a certain degree, he begins to select from the material before him; one point will be fixed in his mind with particular clearness and some other will be correspondingly disregarded, and in making this selection he will be following his expectations or inclinations. This, however, is precisely what must not be done. In making the selection, if he follows his expectations he is in danger of never finding anything but

25 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. by Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 6.

what he already knows; and if he follows his inclinations he will certainly falsify what he may perceive.²⁶

Freud identifies two dangers: First, in this narrowing that characterizes listening via deliberate attention, the absorption and movement that comes with tracking one object, pursuing one line of enquiry over others, leads to the occlusion of other details and paths which we are then not in a position to evaluate. Second, if we were to keenly follow only what we deliberately attend to, we might be occupying ourselves mainly with our reflexes, or what we started out knowing or assuming, as opposed to the possibilities that lie outside our immediate reflexes and expectations.

The reduction involved in following a name then is to be supplemented or breached by another kind of reduction, the holding space of free association and evenly-suspended attention. Here, the moment of suspended attention seems to pose the question: What would it mean to listen beyond knowledge or certainty, to listen without actively assuming separability, without actively seeking to name? In this temporal imperative of psychoanalytic technique, listening becomes a mode of attunement, deconditioning, or deindividuation. The hum of awareness maintained by the analyst is conceived as not being monopolized by directed attention. Such a conception shares some of the concerns that shape the drone as conceived and encountered in Hindustani classical music. In Hindustani classical music, an instrument such as a tanpura is tasked solely with the purpose of continuously sounding a drone. Music theorists usually relate the place and function of the drone to sonic concerns in Indian philosophy. In *Music and Musical Thought in Early India*, Lewis Rowell states that the continuous drone is 'a symbolic representation of the continuum of unmanifest sound' as well as a 'subconscious attempt to externalise the universal continuum of unmanifest sound' — and to imply thereby that each individual performance arises from, and returns to, the substratum of

26 Sigmund Freud, 'Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psychoanalysis (1912)'; in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey and others, 24 vols (London: Hogarth, 1953-74), xviii (1955), pp. 109-20 (pp. 111-12).

undifferentiated vital sound'.²⁷ By carrying over this sonic image to the psychoanalytic setting, we can regard Freud's recommendations to analysts as concerned with attending to manifest, conscious content as it arises without departing from the substratum of undifferentiated unconscious content. The dangers and tensions of directed attention do not merely involve the limits of the bodies that participate in a psychotherapy session, they also involve the social and cultural limits imposed by the names and practices of psychotherapeutic disciplines at large.

The theories, cases, and names of psychoanalytic theory (and psychology more generally) thus occupy a perverse status by restricting the lines of inquiry it sought to open. In this perverse preoccupation with finitude, disciplinary naming strains to perpetually summon itself with a commitment to exhaust the unthought at some future point. Michel Foucault sees the convoluted role of finitude in the sciences of the psyche as consisting in the Icarian relation between the cogito and the unthought. Hubert Dreyfus brings together Foucault's insight in the following manner:

Since he is an opaque object in the world, man's own mental content is foreign and obscure to him, yet, as source of all meaning, he is 'perpetually summoned towards self-knowledge'. If man is to be intelligible to himself, the unthought must ultimately be accessible to thought and dominated in action, yet insofar as this unthought, in its obscurity, is precisely the condition of possibility of thought and action it can never be fully absorbed into the cogito.²⁸

Here naming takes on an impossible responsibility, a ceaseless obligation to summon into finitude, to keep naming so that no remainder remains. Foucault locates this relentlessness in the Kantian injunction for the 'limits of knowledge to provide a positive foundation for the possibility of knowing'.²⁹ If naming is obsessed with the possibility of

27 Lewis Rowell, *Music and Musical Thought in Early India* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 53.

28 Hubert Dreyfus, 'Foreword to the California Edition', in Michel Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. vii-xliii (p. xvii).

29 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [trans. by Alan Sheridan?] (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 345.

knowing, listening seeks the limits and effects of knowledge to provide a foundation for exploring the possibilities of not knowing. For Nancy, to listen:

[i]s always to be on the edge of meaning, or in an edgy meaning of extremity, and as if the sound were precisely nothing else than this edge, this fringe, this margin — at least the sound that is musically listened to, that is gathered and scrutinized for itself, not, however, as an acoustic phenomenon (or not merely as one) but as a resonant meaning, a meaning whose sense is supposed to be found in resonance, and only in resonance.³⁰

The dangers of reduction in disciplinary naming consist not merely in its finite character, rather its violence is contained in the desire to *totalize* its finitude. This totalizing impulse moves beyond the mere construction and elaboration of psychological theories and extends to the practices and institutions that govern a discipline at large.

LISTENING: THE UNREMARKABLE CASUALTY OF CONSILIENCE

If Freud inaugurated his work on dreams with the dream of a tablet that would cement his legacy, his wish was posthumously fulfilled. A plaque was placed in the very location he desired on 6 May 1977. By the time the tablet was installed, Aaron T. Beck had already developed the therapeutic protocol of evidence-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, the paradigm that would over the following decades supplant psychoanalysis as the most extensively recognized therapeutic method. A new series of names and theories now bearing the tag of science even more insistently would contend for validation, authority, and legal exclusivity. In the modern psychological sciences, a positive pursuit of finitude is set up to enact what Viktor Frankl terms a ‘nothing-butness.’³¹ The exclusionary conditions such as ‘nothing-but-psychiatric drugs might be legally permitted’ or ‘nothing-but-empirical evidence might guide an expert diagnosis’, while not being stated in such stark terms, visit those seeking relief from mental health services with stark regularity. Therapists belonging to different disciplines recognize

30 Nancy, *Listening*, p. 7.

31 Viktor Frankl, *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy* (New York: Penguin, 1988), p. 21.

these ravages of naming and have to work out idiosyncratic strategies for a listening that avoids the glare of disciplinary projects. The ravages of naming are especially seen in the pressure to arrive at a quick diagnosis. In a chapter titled 'Avoid Diagnosis (Except for Insurance Companies)', Irvin Yalom notes the current over-emphasis on diagnostic efficiency, in which 'managed-care administrators demand that therapists arrive quickly at a precise diagnosis and then proceed upon a course of brief, focused therapy that matches that particular diagnosis'.³² As Yalom notes, diagnosis — as with any naming — often becomes a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'.³³ Yalom questions this perplexing haste, going onto wonder: 'and what therapist has not been struck by how much easier it is to make a DSM-IV diagnosis following the first interview than much later, let us say, after the tenth session, when we know a great deal more about the individual? Is this not a strange kind of science?'.³⁴

What is the larger backdrop in which names are allowed to proliferate but the radical task of listening is orphaned? Could we venture a speculation into the ways in which contemporary regimes of psychological naming exile listening? These horizons are of course constructed and performed differently for the various disciplines and subdisciplines that come to identify with the name of psychology and psychotherapy. The present-day economies of interaction between the different psychological sciences are so complex that it would be difficult to construct a synthesis. Yet, the different disciplines are united in certain fundamental assumptions which may or may not be made explicit. Aside from shared methodological assumptions, such as the belief that objective psychological facts can be obtained through evidence-gathering and verification techniques, there are shared visions about how the different disciplines are related to each other as they participate in the advancement of knowledge about psychological truths, and reinforce a commitment to progress and the promise of social betterment coded in it.

32 Irvin D. Yalom, *The Gift of Therapy: An Open Letter to a New Generation of Therapists and their Patients* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 4. Ebook.

33 Ibid., p. 5

34 Ibid.

We can find definitive statements of such shared visions in the scientific polemic of Steven Pinker. In *The Blank Slate*, Pinker counters views critical of the inherently reductionist nature of the psychological sciences by stating that a distinction needs to be made between good and bad (or as he terms it, 'greedy') forms of psychological reductionism. For Pinker, 'greedy' or 'destructive' reductionism consists in 'trying to explain a phenomenon in terms of its smallest or simplest constituents', such as the beliefs or narratives served to research grant agencies that 'breakthroughs in education, conflict resolution, and other social concerns' can be obtained 'by studying the biophysics of neural membranes or the molecular structure of the synapse'.³⁵ To be insisted on and defended is the good or 'hierarchical' reductionism which 'consists not of replacing one field of knowledge with another but of *connecting* or *unifying* them. The building blocks used by one field are put under a microscope by another. The black boxes get opened; the promissory notes get cashed'.³⁶ Pinker provides examples from geography and linguistics to evoke this grand vision of consilience where 'an isolated geographer would have to invoke magic to move the continents, and an isolated physicist could not have predicted the shape of South America'.³⁷ For Pinker, mental life, given its location between the realms of culture and biology, also 'has to be understood at several levels of analysis, not just the lowest one'.³⁸ The insights from various levels of psychology — neural, evolutionary, cultural, social, and clinical — are imagined for the most part as mutually coherent, comprehensible, and cooperative. Pinker's view of cooperative and coordinating scientific knowledge systems is a utopian vision that foregrounds consilience. Such a view is better understood as a desire for a total resolution that sustains the purposiveness of scientific actors rather than an account of the way in which psychological and scientific disciplines have come to operate.

In an interview for a science magazine, the neuroscientist Eve Marder provides a more credible articulation of the ways in which the

35 Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin, 2003), pp. 69–70.

36 Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, p. 70.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

various levels and sub-disciplines of psychological enquiry are placed in relation to each other. Marder's account of the relations between different scientific levels emphasizes ambiguity and opacity rather than the transparency that might be promised by the ambitions of a panoramic view. Unlike Pinker, who sees the hierarchies of various levels of psychological reduction as based on connection and unification, Marder conceives of the multiple levels as arranged on an 'ambiguity hierarchy' where each level forms around 'how much ambiguity you can tolerate in the data, or the kind of data, or the kind of questions you can ask.'³⁹ For Marder, the total picture of psychology is imagined as one where 'individual sciences layer themselves into that increasing web of ambiguity, as you get further from the structure with single ion channels and closer to human language.'⁴⁰ Scientific actors employ different versions of these visions of scientific totality depending on what makes for good research practice or what gives their activities a sense of larger social purpose. Deftly handling ambiguity is a necessity for crafting and adapting to the intricacies of an experiment while certitude and juridical rectitude allows one to maintain either a sense of a higher purpose or a position of epistemic authority.

In this fog between opacity and transparency, the burgeoning names and explanations that make up the various psychological sciences are allowed to expand unfettered, maintaining flexibility where the cyclical production of the research industry is concerned but developing rigidity at the legal, vocational, and scientific gates of states and corporations. If scientific-psychological authority is amassed around exclusionary mechanisms that act as gatekeepers for what counts as a legitimate psychotherapeutic insight or intervention, then the radical unknowing and waiting that is listening is either neglected or domesticated. The dominance of the psychological sciences in determining what counts for therapeutic care are mainly guaranteed by the concrescence of contradictions rather than a total consensus regarding consilience. Funding bodies, national health systems, and insurance companies are incentivized to

39 Steven Strogatz, Interview, 'Eve Marder on the Crucial Resilience of Neurons', *Quanta Magazine*, 17 May 2021 <<https://www.quantamagazine.org/eve-marder-on-the-crucial-resilience-of-neurons-20210517/>> [accessed 13 April 2022].

40 Ibid.

prefer therapeutic models that emphasize quantitative proof and outcomes. Meanwhile the psychological scientific establishments are able to regard their dominance as being due not so much to the diktats of administrative managerialism as to the objective rigour of their truths. In this crescent wound that is opened up by bureaucratic indifference and psychology's physics-envy, listening lingers unnurtured. Listening in the psychotherapeutic enterprise is in many respects a subterranean activity, one that has to carry on despite the evidentiary injunctions of a particular disciplinary assemblage. Listening occupies a condition of exile and like any exilic condition is allowed to continue obscurely, timidly, until even this interstitial dwelling is threatened with further violence.

Sarath Jakka, 'Nothing Beyond the Name: Towards an Eclipse of Listening in the Psychotherapeutic Enterprise', in *The Case for Reduction*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Jakob Schillinger, *Cultural Inquiry*, 25 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2022), pp. 155–73 <https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-25_08>

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