

The Case of the Disappearing Profession*

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Have you noticed, for some time now, that few people speak about that's going on in their analysis? I exclude, of course, the unending analysis of Woody Allen. For many years, reaching a high in the nineteen fifties and sixties, psychoanalysis was a rage (strange way to describe a profession, but true nevertheless). It was a time when many texts poured from analyst's pens, including one of the most influential and informative, Theodor Reik's *Listening With the Third Ear*. It brought home the best that analysis could offer people in search of themselves -- a search that involved a commitment of time and finances for thousands of people the world over, who sought psychoanalysis. And then, gradually -- puzzling to many, perhaps not so puzzling to others -- the whole profession seemed to slip, almost unnoticed, out of cultural awareness. By the nineteen nineties people spoke of seeing their therapists or analysts, but it was usually on a once or twice a week basis, and sometimes group therapy was a substitute for the second session. Individuals no longer had the time or the inclination for an unhurried three-, four- or even five-time a week

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treatment. Psychoanalysis came to be seen as quaint, perhaps archaic, a treatment that did not fit into the busy, high tech, exercise-conscious world in which we now live.

Today, many psychoanalysts see their patients on this abbreviated once- or twice-a-week schedule, calling the therapy psychoanalytic psychotherapy. There are positive results to such treatment, but there are losses, also.

Of course there were shortcomings within the theory of psychoanalysis itself. One has only to think of the pervasiveness with which many analysts spoke of penis envy for women, or the condescending pathologizing of homosexuality – with all the attendant pain such dogmatic positions entailed -- to see some rather serious errors this therapeutic discipline perpetuated. Such shortcomings, although acknowledged and slowly corrected, have contributed to the eclipse of this profession. Perhaps, too, psychoanalysis was held too high and exalted as a cure-all for psychological conflicts when, in fact, its primary benefits lay elsewhere.

For many years troubled individuals came to quiet, somewhat darkened rooms, and spoke in confidence to a psychoanalyst and told the story of their pain and their hopes. Some analysts said little, some spoke openly; some were overly rigid in the application of their technique, others responded with more flexibility. But they all offered the possibility for individuals to experience what I would like to call a *sensitivity to interiority*. Sensitivity to one's personal insides is the ground place for any resolution of conflict and the easing of psychological pain -- it is the soil where our sense of dignity grows.

Sensitivity to interiority is an experience not of our specialness (we generally call that narcissism), but of our uniqueness: a uniqueness that reflects a quiet internal place where we come to terms with our personal history and try to resolve the leftover pain it may entail; a quiet place where we can look at ourselves, unhurriedly, in order to find what is real, and what we want to be real, in our lives. “Unhurriedly” was the rationale for a four or five-time a week treatment. “Unhurriedly,” in order to find the values we can make our own, the creativity that life asks of us, the awareness of the utter gift of life and the obligation, so to speak, we owe it. This is the best that psychoanalysis offers – along with the relieving of painful symptoms that usually propel a person to seek treatment initially.

Why would such a profession slip from our cultural awareness? Is it the result of “do-it-yourself” help books? Is it the result of other more goal-oriented, time-efficient therapies that offer answers and solutions for specific problems, which offer quicker solutions? I have no problem with quick solutions for problems that can be solved quickly, nor for self-help (ultimately there is *only* self-help! . . . that is a most basic premise of psychoanalysis). I am, however, questioning the disappearance not just of a profession but of the opportunity to experience self-presence and self-awareness in a setting that is unhurried, so that such experiences can take deep root within us.

We humans are complicated creatures. Would we not be suspicious of anyone who offered us the possibility of completing four years of college in two? Would we not wonder if, perhaps, something important might be missing in our education? The goal of a

humanistic education, as we know, is not geared to promoting the immediate job prospects of a graduate. Rather, it is to sensitize individuals to the human enterprise, to human complexity, so that they will bring a certain fund of knowledge to whatever they learn. (There is a reason why totalitarian regimes outlaw psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is profoundly democratic; its goal is for each person to find his or her own voice.)

It was Norman Mailer, not too many years ago, who bemoaned the fact that people were being taught to think in five to ten minute segments -- that television, with its constant interrupting advertisements, was affecting our thinking abilities, was limiting our capacity to stay with any thought for more than the periodic sound bites allowed. I believe he was right. We live in a world of computers and television that bombard us with words and avalanche us with images; we live in a world of portable CDs, walk-about radios and the omnipresent cell phone. We benefit greatly from such conveniences, but we pay a price.

At a recent conference I attended a well-known psychoanalyst, Dr. Peter Giovacchini, remarked that if psychoanalysis disappeared from our culture, an essential aspect of our civilization would be gone. This may be a dramatic way of saying what I have tried to indicate in this short article: if psychoanalysis goes then we had better find another way for people to explore who they are and where they find themselves on the road of life. Unending busyness, continuous anxiety over money, excessive use of drugs

(therapeutic and otherwise), and constant stimulations increase the shadows we walk through. Human beings are made to live in the light.

No one knows if psychoanalysis has just momentarily gone from our cultural awareness or not. If we abandon the search within we will be left in a world of things and facts, where we would be sane but nevertheless poor. The great literary masters of the West remind us that we are made of our dreams. Psychoanalysis is one discipline, one profession, which understands that it takes time to know our dreams, and more time to hold them as one's own.