

THE DESIRE OF FREUD IN HIS CORRESPONDENCE WITH FLIESS:  
FROM KNOWLEDGE TO TRUTH  
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Honor, power and the love of women: that is the classical Freudian answer to the question "What does a man want?" Men differ in the way they try to achieve this common goal, but as far as Freud is concerned, the path is always through knowledge. The ambition of the young Freud is well known: one has only to sample his pre-analytical writings to find some of the ambitious projects he hoped would bring him fame. He almost made it with the coca business. Some of his projects are really premonitory for his later work: he tried to develop a method for making visible the neuronal cell; at the same time, he tried to find an answer to the riddle of sexual difference with eels. *Making visible the riddle of sex!* In this respect, the Freud-Fliess correspondence can be read as a report on this search for knowledge, resulting in a nearly complete psychology and nevertheless ending with a very deep split with psychology.

As a report, the correspondence can be read in two different ways. On the one hand, we can read the letters looking for Freud as a classical scientist at the end of the previous century. As a scientist, he formulated hypotheses, put them to the test in his clinical practice, changed and reformulated them, and so on. It is, for example, really interesting to read how Freud developed his ideas on the relationship between real traumatic incidents and fantasmatic constructions. These ideas form, of course, the very kernel of the correspondence.

This first reading permits us to evaluate a classical growth of a classical knowledge. Besides this way of reading, there is another possibility. Throughout his search for knowledge about the other - namely, his patients - Freud was confronted time and again with himself. That is, he discovered a knowledge that concerned himself as a divided subject. The aspect of being divided shows in the impossibility of this knowledge to reach a final signifier. On the contrary, each acquisition of a new piece of knowledge refers one to yet another piece: the *Zuyderzee* seems endless. Moreover, there is a definite difficulty in the verbalization of such, even to the point of impossibility. In this respect, Freud used the word *dunkel* (dark) several times; at other times, he recurred to Latin (e.g. *mater nudam*), or to mere allusions (e.g. concerning birth control).

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This second reading demonstrates how man, through the confrontation with self-knowledge, reaches a point beyond knowledge - that is, the point of truth. Why do we call it "truth"; why does it differ from mere knowledge? One could answer that truth always concerns desire and *jouissance*, but the same goes for the Freudian knowledge from the very beginning: just think of his ideas about *Lust* (pleasure) and *Wunsch* (wish). The particular characteristic of truth is that it confronts us with the ultimate point where knowledge about desire and *jouissance* can no longer be put into words. Knowledge itself always remains within the realm of the signifier, truth starts within this realm but evokes a dimension beyond it. The ultimate dimension of desire and *jouissance* is the driving part of it, which is not only beyond our self-knowledge, but eventually opposed to it. In spite of the impossibility of putting this part into signifiers, there are two characteristics that keep on returning: they are as traumatic as they are sexual.

So, the Freud-Fliess correspondence contains, on the one hand, the development of a scientific body of knowledge, and, on the other hand, an ever increasing confrontation between Freud and *his* truth as a divided subject. The knowable part develops itself along classical lines, while the way in which Freud is confronted with the truth is completely new. It consists in a particular relationship that obliges a patient to produce signifiers in such a way that a confrontation with his truth becomes inevitable. In its rudimentary form, we find this relation exemplified with Freud and Fliess. Freud granted his partner the position of one who knows, and that is why he himself produced knowledge (that is, signifiers) for this Other who is "supposed to know." It is this specific relationship between subject and Other that impels the patient to speak or write - that is, to produce signifiers. Free association is only an implementation of this more fundamental precondition, and is in this respect merely instrumental.

The important thing to stress now is the fact that during the correspondence, and for a very long time afterwards, Freud focused exclusively on the knowable part. Even more so, knowledge and the expansion of knowledge become for Freud the almost exclusive goal of the psychoanalytic cure. It is only much later on that the typical relationship between the analyst and patient came into focus.

So, with a paradoxical expression, we can state that the pre-analytical analysis arises from a certain aspect of the Freud-Fliess letters. In this respect, the analytic cure is a search for lost knowledge, lost because it has become unconscious; the aim of the treatment is the reinscription of this unconscious knowledge into consciousness. The implicit expectation is that the therapeutical effects will follow almost automatically. The main obstacle is the patient himself who does not want to know: there is a resistance at work against this knowledge, presumably the same that was originally responsible for the disappearance of knowledge. All technical innovations in this period are meant to counter this resistance: the typical couch situation, the pressure on the head, free association, even the transference relationship. The task of the analyst seems strictly instrumental.

In view of this therapeutical aim, Freud's main problem concerns the correctness of the

knowledge gathered during the analysis. There is a twofold source of error. On the one hand, we have the overzealous patient, producing material in abundance - Freud will coin this the "compulsion to associate" - but this material could very well be of a fantasmatic nature - that is, not real. On the other hand, we have the overzealous analyst, which is even worse, overwhelming his patient with abundant explanations that could very well be wrong and induce the patient to the wrong knowledge. The technical term used by Freud for this situation is of course *suggestion*.

Now, I think it is very important to understand that this problem is an artifact of Freud's therapeutical aim during his pre-analytical period, that is: the correct acquisition of the lost knowledge. If one changes this therapeutical aim, the artifact will disappear. It is our thesis that Freud will keep the aim and the problem in spite of the fact that he will elaborate a whole theory that surpasses these ideas. The core of this theory is about transference: the new therapeutic aim will be the point beyond castration.

As long as one sticks to the pre-analytical theory and practice, there is always a problem with suggestion: either there is too much of it, or too little. In the beginning of the treatment, there is usually too much of it, the patient accepts everything from the analyst and reveals himself as an incarnation of the perfect analytical patient. Glover has written a classical paper on this topic with a very revealing title: "The Therapeutic Effect of Inexact Interpretations." At the end of the treatment, there is usually too little of it. Indeed, as the point of ultimate Freudian knowledge, the patient refuses to accept it from the analyst. Freud will coin this refusal in a gender specific way: castration anxiety for the man, penis envy for the woman. This is the exact opposite of Glover's paper, because it concerns the absence, even the refusal, of the therapeutic effect of an exact interpretation.

Now, there is something very specific about this point of Freudian despair. Freud wants to convince his patient with a knowledge about the non-knowable, what he calls the great riddle of sex. That is, he wants to impose knowledge upon the very point where the confrontation with truth goes beyond knowledge, that is, beyond the signifier. In this respect, Freud reveals himself as an inheritor of the Enlightenment, there where he believes that the mere transmission of knowledge will induce change. The failure of this hopeful idea led him to his well-known therapeutical despair about the impossible professions.

Nevertheless, in the Freud-Fliess correspondence there is already ample

evidence of the other factor at work beyond mere knowledge. The correspondence can be read as one continuous demonstration of this factor, of the relationship between a subject and an Other who is supposed to know, especially in matters of desire and *jouissance*. This relationship forms the kernel of the analytic practice and determines this practice in a twofold way. First of all, the relationship must be made productive so that the patient produces signifiers; secondly, the relationship itself must be worked on. The first relationship induces knowledge, the second concerns truth.

The productivity of the relationship consists in the fact that the patient ascribes to the analyst the position of one who knows, and that's why he himself produces knowledge - signifiers - for this Other who is supposed to know. At this stage, analysis can be understood in terms of a master discourse. Indeed, from the point of view of the patient, the analyst is a master, and that is why the patient himself produces signifiers at the place of the Other, and thus produces knowledge:

$$S_1 \quad \rightarrow \quad S_2$$

This first stage during an analysis results indeed in a considerable growth in knowledge. That's why Lacan considered psychoanalysis to be an effective remedy against ignorance. An appropriate name for this first stage could be a Socratic discourse: the analyst functions as Platonic midwife, enabling the patient to formulate a knowledge already there.

Inevitably - that is, structurally - the next step in this discourse is the production of the *objet petit a*, beyond the knowledge that can be expressed in signifiers:

$$S_1 \quad \rightarrow \quad S_2 \quad \downarrow \\ a$$

This second stage implies the limit of the master-discourse, which means that we are faced with two possibilities: either there is a regression or a progression from it.

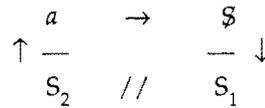
This regression brings us to the university discourse, where knowledge as such is staged as the agent.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \uparrow & S_2 & \rightarrow & a & \downarrow \\ & \text{---} & & \text{---} & \\ & S_1 & // & \S & \end{array}$$

The regression was the Freudian choice for a very long time, there where he hoped that knowledge as such would be sufficient to bridge the gap between the subject and its object of desire. The result is exactly the opposite of the expected one; namely, an ever increased division of the

subject:  $S_2 a$ . In this light, it is perfectly understandable that Freud's last paper was about a generalized splitting of the subject: *Die Ichspaltung im Abwehrvorgang*.

The progression, on the other hand, brings us to the paradoxes of the analytical discourse. There we find knowledge (i.e. the body of signifiers) at the position of truth.



This is the body of signifiers, produced during the first stage of analysis. By the way, this first and necessary stage does not consist in analytic discourse, but makes it possible by producing this ever increasing knowledge. With the analytic discourse, we find the confrontation with the object beyond this signifiable knowledge that is the other side of the truth, the part that cannot be put into words, the part that causes desire. That is why we find *objet petit a* at the position of the agent in this discourse as a radical determinant of the subject at the place of the Other.

The difference between these two possibilities - the regression and the progression - is very considerable. In the regressive solution, the analyst acts as knowledge, in the progression he's merely a support of *objet petit a*. The first solution is an attempt to keep the master discourse going on at a lower level, the second one is radically different in the sense that the relationship as such - between the one supposed to know and the one producing knowledge - ends in an exact reversal. Indeed, the analytic discourse is a reversed master discourse. The choice for a psychoanalytic solution requires this reversal of positions, the working through of the transference relationship at the point where the analyst is put into the position of the guarantor of the truth. The net and always unpredictable result of this working through resides in the way a subject is able to tolerate the existence of the fundamental lack in the Symbolic without a need either to fill it up, to disavow, or to reject it.

Now, back to the correspondence. The relationship between Freud and Fliess is a perfect illustration of what we have called the first stage, the production of knowledge up to the confrontation with the truth. The second part, in which the relationship as such has to be worked through, enabling the subject to take a stand against the fundamental lack without a guaranteeing

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Big Other, is lacking completely. The paradox is that while Freud succeeds in formulating the importance of the Big Other there where he writes about the *pre-historischen unvergesslichen Ander* - the "prehistoric, unforgettable Other," he does not succeed in taking the consequences of this knowledge for himself. Indeed, this is a brilliant illustration of the fact that knowledge and insight are not enough in order to induce change.

This is what Lacan had in mind when he wrote about Freud's original sin in his eleventh seminar. I think it is very important to look at the consequences, especially concerning the goal of psychoanalysis and the statute of psychoanalytic knowledge. One should keep in mind the saying about the sins of the father coming down on the shoulders of his sons.

It isn't very difficult to recognize the traces of it in post-Freudian analysis. Indeed, the stress laid on the importance of insight and resistance are the necessary, although not too dangerous, outshoots of it. We find the same problem with the gross caricature of the post-Lacanian analyst as the incarnation of a very difficult and extremely important knowledge, shared only by a small circle of insiders. Things become a bit more complicated and even dangerous there where one is confronted with the hidden precondition of this process - namely, that knowledge can only function as an agent of truth thanks to a guaranteeing instance, that is, thanks to a *divine* instance. Once this is installed, the world becomes divided into believers and non-believers, apostates and heretics, with a mission to convert the non-believers and, of course, to burn the heretics.

The two analysts who have focused on the gap between knowledge and truth beyond a guaranteeing instance are, without any doubt, Sandor Ferenczi and Jacques Lacan.

Ferenczi was the first one to stress the importance of the person of the analyst himself for the result of the analytic process, which led him to formulate the basic condition ever since: i.e. a self-analysis. He very soon came to the conclusion that insight and knowledge through interpretation did not suffice. In his search for alternatives, he invented on his own nearly the complete theoretic armory of our century, starting with the active technique (Gestalt!), the frustrating-forbidding one (abstinence), the permissive-accepting one (Rogers), up to the authentic therapist of the sixties. His final point, although a failure, is a very intriguing one. Indeed, when one reads his ideas on authenticity, it is not very difficult to see that this authentic position implies the acknowledgment of the fundamental lack on the part of the analyst. The hysterical style in which Ferenczi staged this acknowledgment obliterated the more fundamental issue at stake.

The issue will receive its proper name with Lacan: the confrontation with that part of desire and *jouissance* beyond the signifier is an *ethical* one. Ultimately, the analytical experience confronts the subject with ethical choices which he has to make by himself - eventually, after that, the analysis liberates him from the burden laid on him by the choices others have made in this respect. That is why Lacan could say that "*la psychanalyse est un remède contre l'ignorance; elle reste sans effet contre la connerie.*" Psychoanalysis is a remedy against ignorance, but remains powerless against crookery.