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In addition to being the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud was also a furtive parapsychologist and a card-carrying member of both the British and American Associations of Psychical Research (Oring, 1984, p. 87). For Freud and his moment, these two theories of mind posed no obvious contradiction. Freud was intimately involved in theorizing the workings of telepathy, and his first student, Wilhelm Stekel, wrote an entire monograph on telepathic dreams; two of his closest confidants—Sándor Ferenczi and Carl Jung—wrote their dissertations on telepathy as “thought transference” and worked to substantiate empirical evidence for the occult. Freud went so far as to host a medium who conducted a séance in his own home. In a letter to Hereward Carrington, the director of the American Psychical Institute, Freud wrote, “If I were at the beginning of a scientific career, instead of, as now, at its end I would perhaps choose no other field of work, in spite of all its difficulties” (Oring, 1984, p. 87). Séances, mind reading, and telepathy all insisted that thoughts could be communicated immediately and without speech, including through objects, and that such communication could occur not only between the living but also across the beyond. For the nascent science of psychoanalysis and its founder, the immediacy of this type of communication presented both a tantalizing ideal and a mortal threat. If in his living room Freud privately showed interest in the possible existence and actual nature of occult phenomena, in public forums he defended his new science by performing a responsible skepticism about mediums and their unproven communication practices. Psychoanalysts and, subsequently, scholars of Freud and his circle addressed themselves to the difficult and slightly more palpable work of recovering and understanding the inaccessible dimensions of the subject through another kind of “thought transference,” while telepathy and

séances promised to put practitioners in instantaneous touch with subjects who should not be accessible at all.

Whereas Freud's interest in telepathy has been connected to his understandings of transference, I argue that we can also look to Freud's ambivalence toward telepathy in relation to his feelings concerning communication and media. Freud's public negation of telepathy and its pure, unmediated transference would prove entirely continuous with his discipline's anxiety surrounding another supposed impurity: mediated communication in the psychoanalytic scenario. To ignore the varied means by which communication occurs (if not via telepathy) may seem paradoxical since psychoanalysis is understood as the "talking cure." The "talking cure" refers to a verbal therapy that works to address somatoform disorders and other symptoms through speaking about them. This form of treatment relies on a specific kind of relationality (clinician-patient) and communication technique (speech, utterances, and their interpretation) for its clinical impact. And yet, when Freud discusses this relational communication in theory—to elucidate specific claims and models in psychoanalysis—media (from the post, mystic writing pad, and newspaper to the gramophone and telephone) frequently appear as metaphor, as external phenomena rather than as an intrinsic feature of embodied treatment. It is *as if* some expression is mediated; it is never actually understood to be so.

Freud was keenly aware that psychoanalysis and mediation had something to do with one another. Although early psychoanalysis did not foster wide discussion of literal mediation or communication technology, Freud specifically emphasized media in his theory of the functioning of the psychic apparatus and in his transformation of clinical method. Freud's conception of psychoanalysis is, at its core, a theory of spoken communication on the scale of person-to-person exchange. The one-to-one relationship of analyst and patient is fundamental; through the process of unconscious transference and countertransference the analyst facilitates, or mediates, the patient's access to his or her own unconscious. This access is premised on the passing back and forth of freely associated speech and interpretation, underpinned by the relationship entailed in transference. We

understand these communications to be spoken, carried by the voice (including its silences, faltering, timbre, and volume), which in turn can also be carried by various media, including the telephone.

Freud thus saw his science as situated between two tantalizing mediums—the voiceless spirit of telepathy and the spirit-voice of recording, broadcast, and peer-to-peer media—while at risk of contagion from both. His moment was even capable of seeing the one *as* the other. Telepathy and séances were often described in terms of emerging communicative media, as though the mental processes of one subject are transferred to another along channels, in the mode of a “mental radio” or along a dematerialized telephone wire (see Sconce 2000, p. 76).¹ Freud’s plan for establishing his science had therefore to deal with this dual threat of the supernaturally media-less and the over-mediatised, as well as his own fascination with both methods of communication. His solution would be to deny or defer the occult form while displacing the voice to the communicative media that had begun to carry it (telephone, phonograph, and radio). Put another way, psychoanalysis needed to appear free of mediation, like telepathy, but avoid being identified with the occult.

In the fall of 1921, Freud gathered a group of his most loyal followers—Karl Abraham, Max Eitingon, Sándor Ferenczi, Otto Rank, Hanns Sachs, and Ernest Jones—for a private meeting in the Harz Mountains. There, Freud delivered a paper, never published in his lifetime, on “Psychoanalysis and Telepathy” (1941[1921]). Without completely denying or devaluing the phenomenon of telepathy, Freud warned this cohort in the strongest language of the “peril” of an “occult phenomenon” becoming associated with the work of psychoanalysis. Freud wanted no analyst to give public credence to pseudo-sciences like telepathy while his own fledgling discipline was still under suspicion by the established medical sciences and vulnerable to charges of charlatanism and quackery. He stressed that if spiritualism were to rise above science, it would be “a vain hope to suppose that analytic work, precisely because it relates to the mysterious unconscious, will be able to escape such a collapse in values as this” (p. 180). Freud then went on to discuss three

cases—pertaining to the supernatural, astrology, and fortune telling—with the aim of examining “thought transference.” Freud confessed that he could neither confirm nor deny these predictions and beliefs. Making use of moments where his own patients reported encountering the occult, Freud demonstrated that at the center of such spontaneous forecasting by mediums there resided something similar to what occurred during an analytic session. The medium interprets the client’s tells in the form of identifications, wishes, and powerful fantasies. Freud went so far in one case as to wonder whether “[a]nalysis may actually be said to have created the occult fact” (p. 189).

Perhaps Freud suggested that psychoanalysis had created this occult fact because the inverse was at least as true. Freud’s work on the “talking cure” emerged from a moment at which both the psychological sciences and occult practices were deemed capable of treating the mind. Freud, a student of hypnotherapy pioneer Jean-Martin Charcot in the late 1890s, quickly abandoned this form of curative therapy due to its effect on a patient: she was unduly left open to suggestion (he also was not very good at it). Freud replaced Charcot’s hypnotism with a voluntary treatment premised on free association within a free exchange (see Freud, 1914). As has been elaborated elsewhere, in developing theories of the unconscious, Freud was very anxious his work be received as science by the scientific establishment rather than embraced by occultists as a stage trick for the general public (Thurschwell, 1999). As Adam Phillips writes, “It was important to Freud that psychoanalysis should not become a cult of the irrational. The unconscious may be disreputable, but the psychoanalyst must not be” (1994, October 6, p. 3). Differentiating psychoanalysis from telepathy was crucial because this new science also theorized an impalpable transference between minds, if not in the magically unmediated mode that telepathy’s thought transference promised.

Freud returned to the topic after the First World War in a published paper, “Dreams and Telepathy” (1922). Once again he sought to safeguard psychoanalytic practice from its potential associations with telepathy by arguing that these two experiences “have little to do with each other,” adding that “if the existence of telepathic dreams were to be established

there would be no need to alter our conception of dreams in any way” (p. 197). Seven years later, with psychoanalysis better established as a discipline, the public Freud has grown more calm about the apparent similarities between his methods and more mystical forms of thought transference, which he describes as “mental processes in one person—ideas, emotional states, conative impulses—[that are] transferred to another person through empty space without employing the familiar methods of communication by means of words and signs” (1933[1932], p. 39). Freud’s description of telepathy (*Gedankenübertragung*) now sounds quite a bit like his own concepts of transference (*Übertragung*) and countertransference (*Gegenübertragung*). Lana Lin suggests that telepathy “might be considered an extreme, rebellious form of transference” (2014, March 20). Whereas Freud’s conception of psychoanalysis is explicitly situated within a room furnished with a couch, telepathic thought transference would be a placeless practice that could occur throughout the world along invisible channels. Freud’s theory removed the “thought” from telepathic transference, perhaps to remove the trace of telepathy’s impact on his own central clinical formulation, but also to draw attention to *all* that can be transferred: not just thoughts, but the psychic weight of previous relationships and experience.

While Freud waited to consider occult practice publicly until his own discipline was accepted, he and members of his circle had long sought to prove its plausibility in private—well before he published findings on telepathy (Thurschwell, 1999). In 1909, Ferenczi traveled to visit Frau Seidler, a medium who successfully “read” the contents of unopened letters while blindfolded; in a letter to Ferenczi on October 6 of that year, Freud commented that the reading appeared genuine and swore Ferenczi to secrecy (Brabant, Falzeder, & Giampieri-Deutsch, p. 79; Jones, 1957, p. 384).² In 1910, he went to see for himself. Given Freud’s fear of having it known that he was engaged with the occult, it is surprising that Freud later held séances in his home and at his institute; he was present for two such experiments within the space of a week in November 1913, but attended clandestinely. His secrecy surrounding these gatherings was nearly totally effective, proving the seriousness

with which his associates took his warnings, or their fear of the father's retaliation.

On November 23, 1913, Sigmund Freud paid for and hosted the second of these two séances in his flat, conducted by the medium "Professor" Alexander Roth and his wife. The audience for this occult performance included Freud's brother and children, and his fellow psychoanalysts Otto Rank, Hanns Sachs, Eduard Hitschmann, and their wives. Ferenczi had pre-authenticated the claims of the couple and arranged for them to appear at the Freuds' apartment and at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, while repeatedly urging Ernest Jones to host a similar event at the British Society. As Ferenczi had explained to Jones in a letter of October 25, 1913, the couple had promised Ferenczi that they were able to "signal to each other without any means of communication we are familiar with" (Erös, Szekacs-Weisz, & Robinson, p. 25). Writing to Ferenczi on the day of the séance, Freud recounted that when Roth arrived at the apartment, Freud gave him an envelope with money "to put him in a favorable mood" (Brabant et al., 1993, p. 523). The so-called séance was to work as follows: Professor Roth would think of something which he would tell to one of the audience members; that person would then write down the thought on a piece of paper, which in turn would be shown to a blindfolded Mrs. Roth, who would be fifteen meters away. The audience was supposed to be able to request any control they liked. Instead, Roth showed up with two demands of his own: that he be very near his wife and that the audience should maintain complete silence.

In his November 23 letter to Ferenczi, Freud reports, "It went very miserably, hardly any indication of success" (p. 523). His qualifying adverbs disclose a preexisting and still surviving optimism within his present dejection. He confesses that Roth was likely using "acoustic aids" to produce the few utterances the psychic made—a mediated medium. Four days earlier, the occult pair had demonstrated their dubious abilities in front of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society as part of Ferenczi's account of his "Experiments with Thought Transference" (Jones, 1957, pp. 388-389). All records of the day that the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society spent with the mediums are missing.

After these public and private séances, Freud went beyond simply alerting Ferenczi to the fact that the experiment had failed (probably for the second time that week). Freud issued a comprehensive warning to his colleague, writing, “I know, of course, that things aren’t connected with these people or the experiments with them. But I wouldn’t build anything at all on them...In the absence of the phenomenon, all our attempts at explanation were, of course, dropped; but I also ask you, who have had more success, to check your experiences with him and not make them the basis of your publication...We are all now in favor of reversing our thrust” (Brabant et al., 1993, p. 523). The father had spoken, consciously and unconsciously, describing the public stance psychoanalysis would have to take regarding telepathy as a withdrawal from sexual union. His words famously carried serious weight among his followers: two months earlier Freud and Jung had terminated their friendship, in part over a psychoanalytic theoretical disagreement, and this was by no means the first time Freud had broken with a dear friend over a difference of scientific opinion.

Freud wrote again on November 27 to scold Ferenczi even before receiving a reply: “We all have the worst impression of [Professor Roth] and don’t understand how you can be satisfied with his information. The fact that he can’t read and still undertakes such experiments makes him such an idiot that one wouldn’t think him capable of any other craftiness” (p. 524). On November 29, after delaying two days, Ferenczi replied to Freud. The body of the letter concedes the failure of the events and includes a promise to delay the publication of the paper presented before the Vienna Society. Ferenczi noted that he could do little about having already provided the couple with a positive testimony, and did not know what they would do with it (pp. 524-525). The Roths apparently did not make much use of it; there is no further record of the mediums beyond these appearances. Enclosed with Ferenczi’s letter is a third-person summary of the meeting, a communication intended for the *Zeitschrift für ärztliche Psychoanalyse*, and, at the same time, a kind of wishful summation on Ferenczi’s part:

On November 19, Dr. S. Ferenczi from Budapest gave a lecture in the Vienna Society on thought transference, in which he shared his experiences on the subject—which were gained by chance and collected in an experimental manner. He does not consider these experiences conclusive evidence, but he demonstrates a married couple, who, in his opinion, do seem to settle the question of telepathy in a positive sense...[Dr. Ferenczi] maintains that he has carried out a long series of successful experiments in which any possibility of deception has been eliminated. (p. 525)

Despite Freud's admonitions, Ferenczi still calls the experiment legitimate. Using a pronoun shift as a magic trick, Ferenczi self-reports that he has conclusively proved the existence of thought transference; he deploys a false third person as though his findings have been peer-reviewed and found credible. Ferenczi did not give up; he routinely bothered Ernest Jones in London for an international invitation for the Roths to present at the British Psychoanalytical Society. Jones had the foresight never to reply to the letters containing that demand.

Whereas Freud insisted on describing psychoanalysis and telepathy as at best two different, if possibly related, practices, Ferenczi dreamed of assimilating telepathy wholesale into the clinical treatment of patients, as reflected in his letter to Freud on November 22, 1910: "Interesting news in the transference story. Imagine, *I am a great soothsayer, that is to say, a reader of thoughts!* I am reading my patients' thoughts (in my free associations). The future methodology of psychoanalysis must make use of this" (p. 235). In his beseeching letter to Jones on October 25, Ferenczi had celebrated telepathy's ability to do "psychical long-distance" work—and thought the process in general "yielded interesting links to psychoanalysis" (Erös et al., 2013, p. 25). As Pamela Thurschwell writes, "Ferenczi was fascinated by the occult for the very reason that it might contribute to an understanding of psychoanalysis's own mysterious and intimate transmissions...For Ferenczi, thought transference made fantasy sharable, material, objective" (1999, p. 152). One can imagine how mind reading would serve as an exciting accel-

erant to analysis—allowing its action at a distance to take place anywhere at any time with anyone. It would fill the consulting room with patients, extend that room to enclose any location where patients happened to be, and dramatically alter—or foreclose—the concepts of resistance and self-censorship at work in those subjects (see Hindas, 2015, p. 209).

In his own career, Freud would come quite close to this occult ideal by treating patients beyond his consulting room, in space and even in time: those he had never met (Schreber), the deceased (Leonardo da Vinci), and living patients at a distance (Little Hans). Freud presented the psychoanalytic form of transference as a less immediate two-way exchange than telepathy, albeit one that goes beyond the projection of contemporary thoughts to a deeper history of feeling. It is only in 1932 that Freud publishes and publicly acknowledges his enduring understanding of telepathy as the more efficient, if disreputable, version of transference, understood to be occurring over any distance instantaneously and without interference or mediation. With his discipline on more solid ground, Freud can afford to exchange his former public antipathy for a quiet wonder at an ideal form of his own practice, still understood primarily, but only primarily, as fantasy:

The telepathic process is supposed to consist in a mental act in one person instigating the same mental act in another person. What lies between these two mental acts may easily be a physical process into which the mental one is transformed at one end and which is transformed back once more into the same mental one at the other end. The analogy with other transformations, such as occur in speaking and hearing by telephone, would then be unmistakable...If only one accustoms oneself to the idea of telepathy, one can accomplish a great deal with it—for the time being, it is true, only in imagination...All this is still uncertain and full of unsolved riddles; but there is no reason to be frightened by it. (1933[1932], p. 55)

Freud re-describes and redeems telepathy as a new two-way technology, one that serves as an aid or prosthesis to speaking

and hearing. Psychoanalysis suffers by comparison in all ways but one: it exists outside the imagination and therefore its effects can sometimes be substantiated. In likening *telepathy* to a technologized conversation occurring by *telephone*, Freud deploys the analogy he will use elsewhere for the psychoanalytic conversation, quietly linking the occult medium to psychoanalytic practice through emerging forms of mediation. New media (the wireless radio, telegraphy, and telephony) extend the distance across which minds are able to communicate; telepathy works similarly to access thoughts far away in external and internal space. It is no accident that those who claimed to communicate with spirits were called mediums or that séances were often described as celestial telegraphs (Massicotte, 2014, p. 90).

In early psychoanalytic theory and practice, Freud suppressed the *tele* and kept the *pathy*. He was not merely conflicted about occult communication, but about the specific effects of communication in any and all of its forms: speech, writing, and emerging electronic media like radio and telephony. Freud's experience of telepathy may have provided the stereotype for his wary relationship to the presence of any mediation of the embodied consultation. Freud's charged relationship to the telephone is a repetition of his earlier position on the telepath; both represent an ideal form of communication that triumphs over distance, exceeding what psychoanalysis could offer. Freud felt the pull of these enviable occult and new media and the necessity of policing their proximity to his emerging practice in order to preserve it as a medical science. Telepathy's communication via distance was not dismissed as fraudulent (though some of its practitioners were), but instead deemed inordinately difficult to prove. In the case of the telephone—however much Freud played with analogizing between that medium and psychoanalytic work—its lack of immediacy necessarily exiled it from the analytic scenario into mere metaphor. Yet the analytic scenario preserves a continuity with both the telephone and telepathy in its productive facelessness: in the consulting room the patient reclines—on a couch, itself a leftover from Freud's training in hypnotism—without being able to see the face of the analyst. There Freud hoped to establish a two-way technol-

ogy of his own, the disembodied action at a (micro) distance called transference and countertransference that would allow for the successful retrieval of something far away.

In the intervening course of its century-long history, psychoanalysis has codified into a clinical practice that generally either brackets any form of treatment via distance or marks it as suspicious, like telepathy, by keeping it on the margins of its method. Put another way, psychoanalysis is often uncomfortable with communication technologies and mediation. Like the labors of the conventional scientist and the powers of the telepath, fortune-teller, or medium, the work of the analyst is traditionally configured as never having been mediated, despite a simultaneous and constant metaphoric recourse to media objects like the telephone. This flexible bracketing of mediation works by tactically presenting its presence as metaphor (analysis *is like* the telephone or the phonograph) and ignoring that which is literally present and always at work in the analytic scenario: the transmission and reception of voice and the unconscious material it carries. Deploying analogies to communication technology, mediation is evoked as hypothetical, external, and alien when in fact it is internal and proper. Analytic listening is therefore not worked on as embodied *listening*, but relies on metaphors of listening. Mediation must be phrased through another, figurative body in order to hide itself in plain sight.

To acquire standing as a medical science, Freud and his loyal followers felt the understandable need to protect the theory against any number of external threats: a confusion with the occult, the unorthodoxy of analysts who broke away from Freud's teachings, misuse of its archive, and degradation into lay analysis; but the discipline also has had to deal with an internal interference, that thing in the room with clinician and patient, between them, which we can call the materiality of the voice and room, and which remains even when the room fades away and is replaced by written correspondence, telephone sessions, or the rapid-therapy chat platforms of today. Some of these safeguarding measures are still in place: practitioners remain loyal to the tradition of anxiety by only reluctantly extending the analytic scenario beyond the room, if at all, even in the age of phone and Skype sessions.

In the shift from Charcot's hypnosis to psychoanalysis, Freud was not only confronting the power and fallibility of suggestion, but also moving away from suggestion as an interference with the signal exchanged between clinician and patient. This was a doomed (though productive) project from the start—the voice may have been the most ancient and traditional (and thus “natural” and forgettable) carrier for spoken communication, but it was no longer the only one. Freud's use of the couch to diminish the visual in favor of the auditory only put a greater primacy on that repressed form of mediation. Of course, this provides a logical reason for not wanting to signal additional apparatuses of mediation where they are present: one is already too much. To admit that a technology influences the analytic scenario, or even supports it, is a regressive disciplinary betrayal in that it jeopardizes psychoanalysis' status as an objective science. It would require us to think constantly of a third thing in the analytic scenario: clinician, patient, and medium. Put another way, the analytic dyad is always an analytic triad. Freud's confusion about how to include and obscure mediation in analysis comes across in his panicked public dismissals and private envy of telepathy: thought transference does not even require speaking. Its immediacy trumps psychoanalysis and the necessary impurity of that discipline's working-through; telepathy therefore must not exist except as a beautiful fantasy or future. But it turns out that analysis relies on a particular kind of constructed and open communication. Psychoanalysis is not, and has never been exclusively, the talking cure—it is a *communication cure*. Media, far from getting in the way of treatment, first facilitate it, then, like spirits, disappear.

Notes

1. Originally self-published in 1930, Upton Sinclair's *Mental Radio* focused on testing the telepathic capabilities of his wife, Mary Craig Kimbrough Sinclair. Lana Lin (2014, March 20) has connected the work of the Sinclairs to Freud's writings on telepathy by framing telepathy as related to the invasiveness of the analytic relationship and to the transference proper to it.
2. For more on this set of interactions with Seidler, and a further account of Ferenczi and Freud's relationship both to the occult and to one another, see Thurschwell (1999).

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