

Reik Today

Jerry Gargiulo

I would like to share some brief, perhaps self-evident reflections, about how Theodor Reik can inform our clinical practice today. I don't have the mastery of Reik's life that Mort Israel has so I stand in his shadow in offering these reflections.

Sitting in my analyst's waiting room, on 81st Street & Central Park West, now over forty years ago, I recall arriving early so I could read in a quiet place. The first of the many texts I read was *Listening with The Third Ear*. Delighted, surprised and informed, I sensed I was reading someone who knew both people and their hopes, dreams, dreads and goals ...intimately. The task of becoming a psychoanalyst or in allowing myself to be one, (Reik believed psychoanalysts were born) was made easier as I paged through his well written and focused reflections.

Of the many insights I recall, a few come to mind. One was his awareness that theoretical formulations should always just *inform* our listening but not *form* our listening. Of course. All we have to do is to read the titles of his books to know that. But what does that mean in our everyday self-awareness and practice? I think what Reik was getting at is that its enough to be a psychoanalyst – born with an internal sensitivity as well as curiosity – forged in childhood pain - to be able to learn from and hear another human being's grief and conflicts. That means trusting our inner images, feelings, thoughts and confusions as we sit with another. We

experience our patients – progressively – as we experience ourselves. We are writing our auto-biographies as we hear theirs.

We are psychoanalysts first before any adjectival secondary designations, e.g., Self, Relational, Winnicottian, Freudian, Lacanian etc. We all know this and yet, often, we don't. Reik was particularly concerned that Otto Fenichel's top down diagnostic approach would displace the un-knowing he felt was intrinsic to process. I am extending his thought when I say that he would be concerned that contemporary secondary designations might progressively displace the more primary one of experiencing oneself simply as a psychoanalyst. Clinical theories, I believe, help the practitioner find his or her self, what resonates for them, more than define what one should or should not do. Reik's antidote to top down approaches was that analysts be continually surprised by the process, by what is said, particularly by themselves. And, as we know, surprise is usually the seed-ground for creativity.