

Reik: Yesterday & Today*

Jerry Gargiulo

Reading Reik's *Listening With The Third Ear* as a candidate, sitting in my analyst's quiet waiting room so many years ago, I remember feeling that the task of becoming a psychoanalyst was not only something I could do but also that it would fulfill a childhood dream. Maybe that is what Reik meant by his musing that psychoanalysts are born – not made. Recently, after many decades of practice, I read his *The Search Within*, an engrossing compilation from a number of his texts. I had studied with Reik when he gave his last class in technique at NPAP before he died – it was one of the highlights of my training.

I remember Reik's gentle manner and his occasional wanderings – he would interrupt the class and tell us an interesting incident about Freud or Princess Maria Bonaparte. (He once met Freud on the street – rushing – when he asked why – Freud explained that a patient was returning home after a trip and always brought him a present – Freud had to have a present, in return, for him.) I was too young then to appreciate many of his points – not theory but listening was emphasized. What kind of listening? Reik listened with his rich background in history, literature, philosophy, religion and with a linguistic mastery of German, French, Latin and English. Nothing pretentious in his writing or his speaking – just a wide cultural background by which to hear another human being. No wonder Freud considered him an ideal candidate. Psychoanalysis is one human being listening to another with knowledge, care and therapeutic love.

Reik wore a long white jacket; he would always be sitting in a large comfortable seat as we entered his office. His room was full of photos of Freud. He had no need to hide who he was and/or who he admired. No need to hold an ice cube as an dispassionate ego ideal for a psychoanalyst. At the termination of the course we students asked for pictures with him – to which he graciously agreed. He was always generous with his knowledge and his memories; he encouraged many of us to take individual pictures of his personal photos of Freud.

One of the many insights that I have learned from Reik is the conviction that theoretical formulations should *inform* our listening, not *form* our listening. All we have to do is to read the titles of his books to know that. I think what Reik was getting at is that it's 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 griefs and conflicts. That means trusting our inner images, feelings, thoughts and confusions as we sit with another. We experience and know our patients progressively, just as we experience and know ourselves. And, as I have found, many times over, we write our auto-biographies as we hear a patient's. Reik's cultural background is somewhat rare among psychoanalysts, at least the ones I know of in North America. Theories of diagnosis and treatment procedures have overshadowed such cultural masteries. Freud intended something close to what Reik brought to the field; as he made clear in his *The Question of Lay Analysis*.

The longer I practice the more I recognize something that Reik just assumed. We are psychoanalysts first before any adjectival designations, e.g., Ego, Self, Relational, Winnicottian, Freudian, Lacanian etc. We all know this and yet, all too often, we don't. Reik was particularly concerned that Otto Fenichel's

top down diagnostic approach would displace, at least initially, the un-knowing he felt was intrinsic to process. I am extending his thought when I say that he would be concerned that contemporary procedural observations might progressively displace the more primary one of experiencing oneself simply as an informed listener, one who is sharing the therapeutic space. Clinical theories, I believe, help the practitioner find her or his self. That is what resonates for them, more than define what one should or should not do. Reik's antidote to top down approaches was that analysts should be continually surprised by the process, by what is said or by what is not said. Always be open to a surprise, to not knowing. But a surprise that is well informed by a wide cultural and acknowledged humanistic background. Such a manner makes the unfolding of what a patient may have repressed, or just cursorily acknowledged, more a human exploration. What we hide from ourselves – hides ourselves. There is healing as an analyst helps a patient come out from hiding.

Reik's technique was subtle – I remember sensing such as he spoke to us. His cultural knowledge helped him understand the repetitive human patterns that define us. His curiosity about a patient, and simultaneously about himself, defined the bridge he taught us to walk on. His approach suggests a deceptively simple procedure and yet it demands, along with everything I have mentioned, an radical internal honesty and openness to another human being who just happens to be a patient, at this juncture in time.

I will always appreciate what a privilege and gift it was to know as well as to study with him.*

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