

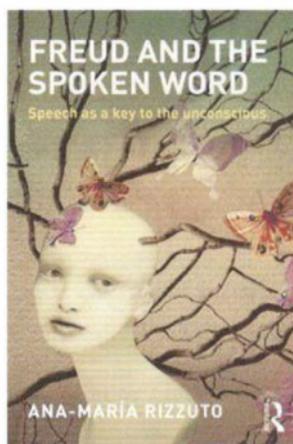
Freud and the spoken word: speech as a key to the unconscious

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Describing myself as a relational psychotherapist, and working with both explicit and implicit relational expectations, I found myself drawn to this book and its focus on the role of words in the therapeutic endeavour. The first thing to highlight is that, for many people, this book will be a very dense read, as it was for me. It presumes that the reader has a thorough working knowledge of Freudian material, and that, in reading this book, merely an appreciation of Freud's use of the spoken word could be gained, and an understanding of how it contributed to the evolution of his theory of psychoanalysis. Clearly, this may not be the case for all readers.

Yet, persevering with the book, I found it to be a very rewarding experience. It's illuminating on a number of different levels. Ana-Maria Rizzuto makes clear from the beginning that her task is to uncover in Freud's writings how the word was used 'in a therapeutically effective manner' and how words can access the unconscious and reveal what lies hidden and repressed there. With this task in mind, the reader is taken on a fascinating journey through Freud's writings, from *On Aphasia: A critical study* (1891), to *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and various other writings. Throughout, the assertion that nothing takes place between psychoanalyst and analysand, except that they talk to each other, holds sway.

For me, the fascination lies in the multiple layers of the book. In its examination of the role of words in psychoanalysis, the book reveals Freud's journey from doctor (using hypnosis) to psychoanalyst (using

conversation). It charts the trajectories of his theories, showing his dogmatism and his compassion, and provides ample illustration of his theories and practice with various case studies.

Overall, assuming the reader is willing to take time to grasp the theories, this book may have something to offer many counsellors or psychotherapists. Obviously, for those who describe themselves as psychodynamic, the thesis clearly fits well – that words can reveal the unconscious life of a person. Yet, as the book at times addresses the roles of empathy, encouragement, resistance and the therapeutic relationship, it may be useful for non-psychodynamic therapists too.

Yet it should also be noted that Freud's drive theory (life/death and ego/sex drives) features throughout the book. Furthermore, there's a persistent psychopathological frame of reference. So the book may hold less appeal for those therapists who resonate less with these theoretical perspectives. Nevertheless, the idea that between therapist and client there's nothing but words may, for many, trigger sufficient curiosity to make this book worth delving into.

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