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## 'I am on annual leave': Why being on holiday is taboo.

Posted on 20/10/2014



**The use of the word 'holiday' in any work related electronic communication appears to have become taboo. Why might this have occurred?**

From our reading of Freud we know that a taboo signifies something sacred and yet at the same time something dangerous' and 'uncanny' – reflecting the exhilaration, giddiness of speed of fairground circularity – the childish joy in the visceral irrational but inevitable motion of the wheel.

In *Totem and Taboo* Freud wrote that “For us the meaning of taboo branches off into two opposite directions. On the one hand it means to us sacred, consecrated: but on the other hand it means, uncanny, dangerous, forbidden, and unclean. The opposite

for taboo is designated in Polynesian by the word *noa* and signifies something ordinary and generally accessible. Thus something like the concept of reserve inheres in taboo; taboo expresses itself essentially in prohibitions and restrictions. Our combination of 'holy dread' would often express the meaning of taboo.” [1].

The question arises as to why we harbour a 'holy dread' (as Freud would say) of the word '*haligdæg*' – or in modern English '*holiday*' – surely it cannot be for any half-remembered vestigial sense of the sacred – or, more worryingly, in our logical, machine and technology determined society have we become so anxious about our sense of the ordinary, the accessible sense of words that we have consigned '*holiday*' to the *oubliette*?

At some time or other, we have all received numerous automated e-mail responses from our various



correspondents informing us (or more accurately their machine informs, irrespective of the claimed truth of the alleged fact, has been configured to 'say') that they are on 'annual leave' and accordingly our respondent is unable to reply to our enquiry instantly. Most automated machine responses promise although often in vain, to reply as 'soon as possible' following the respondent's return from her period of 'annual leave'.

Furthermore, most of the machine messages, and assuming that the centrally programmed technology actually has metaphorical, or even the real space, for the ordinary word '*holiday*', will not quite simply and honestly say that K is on holiday.

Instead our technological systems appear externally (objectively) configured to deny the use of ordinary and plain senses of the words we use in human communication. Such colonising over-powering of our every-day usage of language by the homogenising dictatorial tendencies of technology, is well illustrated by the case of the ordinary word '*holiday*'. The plain meaning of the word is made uncanny, dirty, dangerous and becomes a

taboo.

The technological coloniser denies the ordinary plain language and insists on elaborate obfuscatory statements about the human being on 'annual leave', promising unrealistic but flowery performance based and quasi-measurable promises about 'access' and response to electronic messages. This anti-*noa* promise of instant gratification by technology, and we all know that such technological promises are rarely fulfilled, suggest, as is argued here, that the word 'holiday' when used technologically has become a taboo word.

But perhaps we can also see a political perspective underpinned by the dictatorship of technology. A brief reflection will tell us that 'holiday' designates a period of recreation, even a religious festival. Or as the story of Kaspar Hauser [2] suggests – the pure innocent soul driven by the spirit of self-sacrifice ends his life as degraded criminal – so 'holiday' now ends its pure innocent life as a depraved 'annual leave' criminal.

Yet thought the aperture of 'holiday' we may glimpse the possibility of becoming and not just escaping/transcending reality but actually confronting it at the moment of sacred madness. The period of suspension of the relentlessness of the actuality of the 'actual' (technological) reality and its temporary suspension by the consecrated in order to recuperate the human spirit.

Perhaps to the chagrin of the free marketeers, (re)creation is not just an opportunity to enhance one's financial indebtedness to a credit card, but is in fact an essential characteristic of human psyche and physiology – even a fundamental human right.

As recently as June 2014 in its Human Rights Council Report to the United Nations of 26 June 2014 the Secretary General recognised that a space for civil society was, if perhaps not a condition, most certainly a global reflection of society's respect for human rights. In relation to the right to 'civic space' construed as pauses to reflect, object, moments of 'recreation' and time to go on holiday, the Secretary General said that: "... that space for civil society was a reflection of an entire society's respect for human rights within its own borders and around the globe." [3]

Accordingly, holiday time, or (re)creation, is a time for reflection and recuperation the setting aside of space and time for the human spirit to repair itself, is also a basic human right as the recognition of a space for the civil society. Furthermore, 'holiday' is a personal sacred space for reflection.

Finally, one could argue the reflexive process amounts to a 'law of nature' – in analogy with the way human laws are made. After all, for any legitimate 'man-made' law to be acceptable and considered sound demands that legal Bills are critiqued, debated and considered on at least four stages in their journey through Parliament. The important point is that the time between each stage in Parliament offers a period of reflection, a 'holiday', a time for recuperation, before the Bill becomes the Law of the land binding all citizens.

It is puzzling that the consecrated word 'holiday' has been excised from our lexicon and replaced by the technical words 'annual leave', and how is it that the word 'holiday' has become taboo.

One possible explanation for the degradation of the word 'holiday', in the face of the strong recommendation of United Nations that civil space, which I would suggest includes the idea and practice of 'holiday', is a significant feature, if not a condition, of global human rights, (as well as Kasper Hauser's story) may indicate a condition of persistent and continuing reduction of civil relations to binary contractual obligations of exchange, trade and the market serviced by technology.

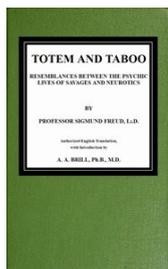
Thus the word 'annual' being a measure of time, signifies the legal obligation to manufacture quantifiable measurable and timely 'outputs' for the economic benefit of a third-party to the obvious detriment of civil

society and the well-being of individual producer. And, ironically the gazelle-like nature of modern technology seen as a rather unique ideo-politico-economic strand appears to be co-joined inexplicably by a rather old-fashioned notion of feudal violence. If this is so, we are left with images of invisible, irrational and yet overwhelmingly irrational, undemocratic and socially disruptive forces.

The phrase 'leave' suggests *laissez oblige* granted graciously by an indulgent but feudal employer at the irrational but extra-legal discretion to a loyal and obedient retainer, in contrast to the presumption of equality and fairness and principles of humanness contained in the word 'holiday'. In short, I seek to argue for the rapid rehabilitation of the word 'holiday' and its swift return to our general lexicon free of its econo-ideological cuffs.

## Notes

[1] Sigmund Freud *Totem and Taboo* Project Gutenberg, trans: A. A. Brill, 28 October 2012 at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/41214>



[2] Peter Tradowski *Kaspar Hauser oder das Ringen um den Geist* Verlag am Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland, 1980 Translated John M Wood *Kaspar Hauser. The Struggle for the Spirit*, Temple Lodge Publishing 1997.

[3] United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. A/HRC/27/33, 26 June 2014. Available at [A\\_HRC\\_27\\_33\\_ENG-1](#)

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