

NWRPA Friday Evening Seminars

Reflective Writing and Side Glances

Alan Priest

Friday 13 November 2015, 6.30pm-8.30pm

Cost £7.50 or free to members. This includes light refreshments

In our second presentation this season on working with clients for whom verbalising presents difficulties, Alan describes research into the effectiveness of reflective writing as a means for clients to process and symbolise trauma. Illustrated by case studies - including his own research - Alan offers practical guidance on how reflective writing can become integrated into talking therapy.

Alan Priest is a UKCP Registered integrative psychotherapist and BACP Accredited counsellor. He teaches at the University of Salford and runs a private practice in Yorkshire.

Three More Words in Therapy

Friday 11 December 2015, 6.30pm-8.30pm

Cost £7.50 or free to members. This includes light refreshments

Venue: The Manchester Institute for Psychotherapy
454 Barlow Moor Road, Chorlton, Manchester M21 0BQ.

Information about the Association is also available on our website at: www.nwrpa.org.uk

Desire in Perversion

Mariel Barclay

Friday 9 October 2015

A double thank you to Mariel Barclay. She gave an enthusiastically and well received presentation on *Desire in Perversion*. She was also kind enough to write her own summary of this talk for our newsletter. Hence what follows is in her own words.

Is Perversion a deviated behaviour from the norm? An immoral or criminal act? A way of life, of enjoying? An illness that can be cured?

According to the DSM V, a paraphilic disorder occurs "when an atypical sexual interest causes distress or impairment to the individual or harm to others." Atypical means "not representative of a type, a group, or class, abnormal". For Lacan there is no "normal" space to occupy. In fact normality as a concept, or standard is absent from Lacan's theory.

According to Judith Feher Gurewich, "for Lacan perversion is not a symptom but a specific mode of desiring and making sense of the world. It is a way of thinking or desiring to stay psychically alive. Both for Freud and for Lacan human desire is as such perverse as in so far as it puts into question the laws of adaptation and survival that characterize the animal world".

Humans, being immersed in a world of language and symbols, have lost that adjustment with nature and the natural object of satisfaction. Perversion as other structures, organizes the psychic position of a subject in relation to others. Humans have to be constantly "negotiating the thin line between the need to attain erotic gratification and the fear of losing the ability to want" says Judith Feher Gurewich.

So where does desire come from? What Freud came to tell us is that the unconscious is sexually determined. The unconscious is the result of a rejection of sexual contents that constitute the subject.

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Our members have a lot to offer.**

**You can read about their professional life and contact them through the members section.
As members or regular seminar attendees you are welcome to have your own profile.**

Please email this to me at nwrpa2010@ntlworld.com with a photo.

Desire in Perversion

Freud's Oedipus complex

In order to understand how desire is shaped we have to look at Freud's theory on the Oedipus Complex, on castration and their consequences on neurosis. The destiny of the Oedipus complex tells us the story of a subject's desire. Freud describes a series of stages in sexual development: the oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital stages.

According to Lacan, psychopathological structures are not linked to development phases. Otherwise all subjects would start being psychotic and would evolve towards normality.

Going back to Freud, the phallic stage is key, since the phallus is what articulates the Oedipus complex and an important signifier with regards to desire. In the phallic stage, the child is confronted with the universal premise of a penis. However, when the boy is confronted with the empiric reality of anatomical sexual difference, the castration complex kicks in. In a nutshell, faced with the threat of being castrated, the boy resigns his love for the mother, represses it and identifies with the father. The super ego appears.

For Freud, women and men the sexual development are neither parallel nor symmetric. Unlike boys, girls know they are castrated from the word go but initially think only they are castrated, believing that other women do have a penis, that it will grow, etc. However, once deception sinks in and the girl realises that she is castrated and that all women are, she rebels against the mother that made her incomplete and turns to the father.

Let us note that the first object for both boys and girls is the mother. For boys, the mother remains the object of desire. Women not only need to make a shift of erogenous zone but also from the mother to the father.

And what is the girl looking for in the father? The father becomes interesting because she can project in him the fantasy of having a child. What girls looks for in the father is a baby to compensate for the phallic disappointment. At the end of the woman's development the equivalence penis= child is produced.

So this equivalence is what precedes the birth of all human beings. In his psychic birth, all humans have a woman inside them that has produced that equivalence child=phallus. This means that if a woman's first desire is a desire of phallus, the son/daughter is what fulfils that desire. All subjects are initially the phallus of their mothers and the child's first desire is to fulfil that desire.

His majesty the baby

Mother and child relationship then is mediated by the phallus. This zone where their two desires meet and fulfil each other reciprocally is what Freud called narcissism. It is that instance where the baby is perfect for the mother and vice versa, It is the narcissism-phallic mother dual cell. This is an ideal because in reality desire can never be fulfilled completely. This lack or difference will be the drive to move on and grow. The subject will have to extricate himself from that dual narcissist cell of archaic perfection.

How? What happens with that narcissism—phallic mother cell?. The history of the destiny of that cell tells us the history of the emergence of desire. Freud gives different answers: The principle of reality opposes that narcissistic expansion. Later in his theory of drives, Freud conceptualises death drive, the possibility that that convergence of both desires and narcissism becomes lethal. If both desires were mutually fulfilling it would mean the suffocation of the child as a desiring subject. So how does the subject come out of that primary relationship?

Law and desire: The father's role

The possibility of having a perennial desire, to continue to desire depends on a prohibition, of the father. The intervention of the father not only introduces a prohibition but also the possibility to desire. A desire that is satisfied in fantasy since the object is lost.

Castration is about the threat of losing the penis but also it is also the possibility for the subject of giving himself other objects outside of the mother, to transcend the incestuous object. It is the moment in which the child is separated from the mother to access an object outside of the family group.

The origin of anxiety, which is one of the most important affections in psychoanalysis can be found in this intersection of relations that defines the castration complex. Anxiety is constituted by a double fear: fear of the father's gesture of castration and fear of not being able to getaway, to separate from the mother, of not being able to be abandoned by her. The paradox of the castration complex is that the subject will only be able to access other objects if he is capable of cutting himself off from that place where he got all his libido from.

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And how can a father exercise castration? For a father to be able to separate a child from his mother, he has to be the one that has the authority.

One thing is the castration that a child fears and another one that he needs, if the father can exert the castration the child needs. Anxiety revolves around this paradox. The father's function has to operate to liberate the subject from his illusion of being the mother's absolute object of desire. What gives the father the power to operate in that way? The mother's desire. Castration complex also means that the mother is castrated. And if the mother does not have a phallus then the child is not his mother's phallus. This has as a consequence: the collapse of infantile narcissism.

Anxiety is the possibility of the impossibility of separation from the mother, the cut that the father has to introduce between the mother and the child. The origin of anxiety resides in the possibility of remaining trapped in the phallic cell of this narcissism, of not being able to escape the devouring mother.

But the function of the father is not only to sustain the prohibition of jouissance, he is not just there to represent the law, the role of the father is to unite desire with the law. As a consequence, for the neurotic there is always a conflict between desire and the law. The neurotic's symptoms talk about a desire that cannot be expressed in other ways because it is not within the limits that the law imposes.

For Freud a well resolved Oedipus complex completely dissolves once the subject is faced with the castration threat. Whereas if the incestuous desires are just repressed, the satisfaction comes back under the form of symptoms. Repression and anxiety are linked to castration.

The pervert's problem is not repressed desire. For him there is no discordance between desire and law. The pervert resolves the conflict by making desire the law of his acts. The neurotic jokes and symptoms are acceptable ways of saying what is forbidden, a compromise in that conflict between desire and law. The neurotic only knows how to enjoy through symptoms. The pervert must always challenge that law, it is compulsive. That is his law.

Perversion's defence against castration

This tells us that repression is not the only possibility when the subject is confronted with the anxiety of realising that women don't have a penis. Faced with castration there are 3 possible attitudes. The castration of the mother, of the primordial Other can either be repressed, disavowed or foreclosed. Disavowal is the mechanism present in perversion and foreclosure in psychosis.

Disavowal, perversion's mechanism, means that when the subject notices the mother's castration he affirms it and he denies it at the same time. In other words, the pervert is not outside of Oedipus. He knows of castration but denies it.

Boys protect themselves of the threat of castration denying the absence of a penis in girls, but especially in the mother. For the child, all women are castrated except for the mother. As we have said, she is complete, phallic. That is why disavowal comes into place, especially with a mother that presents herself as complete, as lacking nothing.

In the perverse structure (which is predominantly masculine because men are the ones that have a penis and fear losing it, suffering castration anxiety), we will always find the imaginary phallus nearby to protect him from the anxiety of castration. This is the role of the fetish in the early interpretation of Lacan, who sees it as a substitute of the mother's lack of penis. Later on Lacan will say that the fetish is the object a, the condition for desire. The fetish has to be present for the subject to be able to desire. What is disavowed is the absence of a penis in women.

We have said that Perversion is not outside of Oedipus. Oedipus means that the desire of the father and law are the same thing in as much as the law forbids the mother as the object of jouissance that desiring her imposes.

By jouissance we understand Freud's notion of what is beyond the principle of pleasure, that excess of pleasure that becomes painful or displeasure, For example the use of drugs, where a pleasure carries an excess that is lethal. Lacan says "there is a jouissance which compels the subject to constantly attempt to transgress the prohibitions imposed on his enjoyment, to go beyond the pleasure principle". Yet the result of transgressing the pleasure principle, according to Lacan, is not more pleasure but pain, since there is only a certain amount of pleasure that the subject can bear. Beyond this limit, pleasure becomes pain, and this "painful principle" is what Lacan calls jouissance.

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Castration for Lacan is the castration of the mother, the elimination of the phallic mother. The pervert does not accept the notion of the mother being castrated and aspires to take that place of the phallus she lacks. According to Freud, the fetish is a symbolic substitute of the penis that the mother lacks, it is a defence against accepting sexual difference, against the recognition of the mother's castration. Through the fetish the subject confirms, ratifies his narcissistic position.

Fetishism and Transvestism are the forms most linked to the phallic mother and the penis whereas sadism masochism are more linked to the father, the agent of castration, to punishment and guilt.

Transvestism is not so much an ambition to become a true woman but to show itself as a fake woman. It is not a desire to deceive, it is rather the desire to expose the deceit in the same instant it deceives, in an attempt to isolate the truth of jouissance. In the first instance the transvesti attempts to represent the mother with a penis. Both in the fetishist and the transvesti we see a constant reference to narcissism and the phallic mother.

In neurosis, fantasy supports desire. In perversion the fantasy is put on stage as a way to recover jouissance.

Is treatment possible?

The difficulty of treating perversion has taken many analysts to say that they don't have the conditions necessary to undertake an analysis.

However, Lacan tells us that it is possible to interpret and analyse perversion and that the direction of the cure has to be considered from the point of view of the disavowal of castration rather than repression. Perverts usually arrive to the consulting room obliged by their partners or a judge that threatens them with excluding them from their family life. Other times they come seeking some transgressive form of jouissance at the expense of the analyst and in the best of cases because they are suffering, because they are depressed or suffer from anxiety.

We know that it is hard for them to feel anxiety because that is what they offer to the Other. However, this sometimes happens when the pervert has difficulties to put the fantasy in practice or when the fantasy is not enough to cover the castration of the Other with the object a. They consult when the lack appears, when they can't fulfil the lack of the Other and they might consult an analyst asking for an answer that they temporarily lack. This division sometimes appears when there is a loss, bereavement, the death of a close relative or for some reason they are limited in their capacity to transgress.

If they consult, diagnosis is fundamental to adjust the reply to the structure.

We have said that the pervert is not pre oedipal, he has gone through castration. The problem is what he does with it. He disavows it. The neurotic does not want to know about it whereas disavowal means to belie what has been seen.

To diagnose perversion it is very useful what Lacan says in his Seminar X: what the pervert is looking for is to provoke anxiety. Neurotics and psychotics can also anguish the analyst. However, when they do so it is not out of wanting, they are not looking to provoke anxiety. The pervert looks for the anxiety of the Other.

The analyst is often called by the pervert to be in the place of anxiety, victim or accomplice of some transgression.

How should the analyst operate with disavowal? Freud says there is a division of the ego, there are two judgements, two arguments that are contradictory. Two irreconcilable positions coexist "the mother has a penis and the mother does not have a penis". That is why when the analyst gives an interpretation it is immediately known.

How does transference work? The pervert is not a desiring subject that is fooled by an object that pretends to be the cause of desire. In the scene he is the object of the other's jouissance, there is no love, only will to jouir. How can the analyst install transference love?

I love that who I suppose a knowledge to, I love the one that seems to be (semblant in French) the object of my fantasy, the one that sustains my lack. For that one has to be in the position of a Subject not in the position of object "a" which is the pervert's position.

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What are the consequences? That the pervert will try to find out the analysts points of anxiety, weaknesses, his ideological and moral prejudices, what he likes and dislikes to present him the object "a" in a sadist, masochistic, exhibitionist or voyeuristic way.

This might take the analyst to react mistreating the subject, which sterilises the possibility of an analysis.

Perversion requires listening and intervening differently from neurosis. Perverts present few unconscious formations and it is better not to become too enthusiastic about interpreting them because disavowal is the predominant mechanism, not repression and the return of the repressed. Disavowal means that he can deny the facts, the past, the circumstances.

It is also important not to be blinded by disavowing statements such as "I knew that I did not have to steal/kill/defraud...however, I still did it." If we believe that, there is no exit. The question to make is: "If you knew it, why did you do it?"

The key is to thwart the disavowal inside and outside of the consulting room. Lacanian analysis gives us the possibility to use different tools: we will have to think in each situation which one is best: if to charge him in advance, if to cut the session as soon as we do an interpretation to prevent the analysand to disavow instantly, etc.

However, when one does not allow the pervert to renege, they react with hate and anxiety. If the subject does not abandon analysis when his and the Other's castration is interpreted, there is some chance of a change of his subjective position. However, we have to be aware that their threshold of tolerance is much lower than the neurotic's.

And finally, sometimes it is the analyst who has to interrupt the cure for example when the analysand tries to involve him in delinquent situations. Otherwise his word will have lost value.

**If you would like a CPD certificate for any of the NWRPA seminars
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