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On Interpretation

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Summary by Frank Kelley

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www.LacanianWorks.net & www.LacanianWorksExchange.net

I find Lacanian ideas are both unfamiliar, because they are grounded in French intellectual traditions, and familiar because they are rooted in Freudian Psychoanalysis. Hence Julia's talk was on a familiar topic but cast in an unfamiliar light. Hence my particular penny took some skilled help from Julia to drop.

In most psychoanalytic work interpretation is based on speech. The late work of the French Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan shifted the understanding of the use of interpretation. This shift from attention to speech to attention to pre-verbal and extra-verbal experience is controversial even among Lacanians.

The preverbal is part of the libidinal forces that are disavowed. It is part of every childhood and is beyond and before speech. At this early stage of development libidinal forces are unknowable. The preverbal is in a relationship of some sort with the mother.

In seminar 4 (*Seminar IV: The Object Relation & Freudian Structures* 1956-1957: Jacques Lacan) Lacan says there are four operations.

- The establishment of a primitive frustration in relation of child and mother. E.g. the child is crying because of hunger.
- The relation breaks down and the mother substitutes, for example by providing a dummy instead of food.
- Hence an absence is not filled in but covered.
- There is an interpretation by the mother of the meaning of the crying.

What is happening here is the point of insertion of the *symbolic order* which pre-exists the child and to which the child has to structure themselves.

Freud talked of the game of *fort/da* where the parents of an eighteen month old boy hunted for the toys he had thrown away. The child had different sounds for *fort*, disappearance and *da* the pleasure of return. This game relates to the symbolic order. The child is now not upset at the mother leaving and pleased at her coming back. Rather he is upset and pleased at the loss and return of the toy.

The toy gives meaning to the original libidinal frustration of the loss of the mother. It is in the same way that language substitutes for this original loss and to what is libidinally and unconsciously given up.

Interpretations can operate at the level of language, of repetitions and substitutions. In Lacan's late view anything formed by childhood libidinal forces is very easily disavowed and forgotten. The classic interpretation misses a point. Trying to put words onto something that has no words cannot be done.

The different kind of interpretation Julia is concerned with can retrieve the original libidinal frustration. The analyst needs interpretations to get to this layer of what Freud called *polymorphous perversity*. The analyst is acting as *the other* who was present when these events occurred (*the mother*).

The analyst is looking for what is driving from the deepest level. Clues come from hallucinations, anxiety events, body symptoms and day dreams. It takes a while for these things to come through and there will be a feeling of shame when they come to the surface. Modern life means that the layer that covers the more unconscious layer is not as well structured and protective as it used to be.

Julia used a telling phrase about the analysts work. She said the analyst accompanies the patient. Accompanying them to go down to places they do not want to go. The analyst cannot pretend to be separate in this but also needs to be directing the process.

In other forms of analysis the practitioner acts as a knowing subject for making interpretations based on speech and with some certainty. The Lacanians go within the transference. They have to be in the transference and out the transference. A lot of the analyst's communication is non-verbal. This includes gestures, facial expressions and can include shouting and crying.

For a Lacanian an interpretation can only be considered effective if it is reused by the patient and more so if the patient elaborates on the interpretation.

Thank you to Julia Evans for giving us a different way of thinking about the important therapeutic work of interpretation.