
Reducing the Other to the Same/Sane

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'Our desire to find our origins is our desire to find the origins of our desire'

Lacan

'Both dying and philosophizing are a journey beyond'

Plato

Abstract

I have been intrigued by my very different responses to two uses of the word method. The first, commonplace and currently popular, suggests that psychotherapists should have a number of methods at their disposal. This could be called the ballast argument. The second, from a statement by Laplanche, is that what Freud predominantly gave us was a method. I am rather disturbed by the former, but take the latter very seriously in my own practice. My sense of intrigue comes from the belief that both examples contain radically different notions of what psychotherapists are engaged in. The ballast argument enlists a technological approach, the application of knowledge, where one is engaged in a particular kind of *behandlung* (treatment); a kind of violence. But Freud's method is also a technology, so why should I favour that? Perhaps, because it is a method that opens up and contains particular kinds of spaces. I wish to explore these ideas by sharing some of the ideas that have been helpful to me in feeling and thinking through this issue over the years; in order to wonder about what kind of spaces are being offered by psychotherapists in these differing positions. What are psychotherapist's responsibilities in such spaces?

Introduction

I am a foreigner, a stranger, an outsider. As a foreigner I am constantly in the business of translation. The task for translators is very difficult and much debated. According to Laplanche (1996), it involves registering the foreignness/strangeness of the text as opposed to providing an easily assimilable gloss; to be violently moved by the foreign language, instead of taking the contingent status of one's own language as fixed and solid. Some would say this is the job

of psychotherapy, where we can substitute text for the patient's material, and certainly involves the mourning of loss of the familiar. (Davey and Snell, 1997)

There is a game you may have come across at dinner parties that is used as an icebreaker. The idea is that each person should suggest three people who have had the biggest influences on humanity. For my purposes I suggest Copernicus, Darwin and Freud. According to Young (1997), these three were the messengers of the three great blows to human arrogance. Copernicus, in as much as the heavens do not revolve around us. Darwin, in that we are not the pinnacle of special creation. Freud, in that we learnt we do not even have direct access to the greater part of our own mental processes. These are narcissistic blows on a huge scale.

Without the solace of the beliefs exploded by these messengers humankind has turned more and more to technology to answer its questions, still reeling from its grief. As Nietzsche (1933) puts it through his character Zarathustra, "God is dead" and what follows is the attempt by man to make technology god, in his own image, and signifies the loss of the status of the special child, a loss that has not been adequately mourned. If this is one of the contexts for the birth of a profession of psychotherapy it leads to a question of whether we are a symptom or a cure. Particularly as Nietzsche suggests that the response to the death of God is the creation of Superman, the turning of grief into triumph.

If this is what we have been left to grapple with, our response has been strange. New psychotherapies have proliferated during this century as new generations have come to feel that previous theories and methods do not adequately represent them and therefore have produced their own, in their own image (or desired image). Liam Clarke (1990) writing in the *British Journal of Psychotherapy* suggests, "there is a lack of humility about these 'secular priests' with their proud and insular claims to dampen human misery" (Clarke 1990, 86). Clarke notes that there are suspicious commonalities between these new therapies such as disenchantment with psychoanalytic theory and practice, with a charismatic leader pronouncing a new way. They are like that most western and arrogant of creations, the self-made man. Chasseguet-Smirgel employs the notion of the *autonomous magic phallus*, which she sees as the rejection of the family line, an attempt to break generational links and to give oneself a new and crucially false identity (1974). It is only through the breaking of generational links that one is able to see one's own development, as the unfolding of new ideas where it is possible to be continually amazed by one's own discoveries, rather than grounding struggles in the context of other's past

struggles. To counterpoint this I am reminded of a friend saying that whilst he realised it was useful in keeping his narcissism balanced, he was always disappointed when he got to the pinnacle of some piece of understanding only to find the inscription, 'Lacan was here' scrawled at the top. What he seemed to me to be saying was at that point he is freed from what was in part a narcissistic endeavour, after which he can take up his place. Not a self created space. Of course it does not need to be Lacan. It is an acceptance of having therapeutic parents (of castration) or forebears, who came before and shaped the world for us in some ways, and through that developing an understanding of what is handed on to us. I now wonder if this is particularly a challenge in countries where the early developments took place on other continents and it feels difficult to know how much they are relevant. In the frontier countries the existential issues were more immediate and different, making it difficult to believe that those in the old countries had anything to offer (and maybe at the same time feel they were the only ones with anything to offer). What I am left wondering is, what happens to the mourning? My fear is that it is ditched in favour of a brave new world, superman/woman approach.

Methodological arguments normally make particular truth claims based on some version of the technology of the day or a politically valent ideology. Or one could say, hold up the kind of mirror that is desired by society. Of course there is always a counterculture for those who want other kinds of mirror. As we approach the end of the 20th century one way to map the desired mirror is by scanning the advertising hoardings, cinema and television. What kind of subjects do these images construct? One constructs a narcissistic subject. By narcissistic I mean one that is concerned with creating images of itself and therefore particularly concerned with surfaces, where questions of identity are located in external consumables and feeling good follows the constructing of an external self that is desirable. If you like, it is a movement from Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* to *I consume therefore I am*. Such a narcissistically challenged culture would try to construct psychotherapy in its image, as a product to be consumed in a user-friendly way, easily understandable and digested, a technology. Consumerism preys on people's desires, or to return to Lacan, the sense of lack that generates desire.

The closest we can get to our dream scenarios is through the yearning, pining and emptiness of desiring something that we can never hold onto: something we once saw in a mirror or in our mother's gaze, and searched for in adulthood in our counsellor's eyes; in endless quests for wholeness, fulfilment and achievement to become once again the Holy Child.

Lacan argues that our inability to make our selves whole in consciousness through keys to fulfilment such as self-image, work, or other people leave us permanently wanting: "This lack is beyond anything that can represent it. It is only ever represented as a reflection on a veil" (Lacan, 1988). At bottom we are constituted by lack and desire. No image, words, thoughts, action or position can represent that which we are not, and this, as the source of all our strivings, is the most important thing about us. Our sense of ourselves comes not from fulfilment but from unfulfilment, from castration not the phallus. (Loewenthal and Tame Wall, 1998)

It is the lack that defines us.

This raises fundamentally difficult questions for psychotherapists. What kind of mirror do we show our patients? Is it possible to be free of the culture we live in? It certainly points to the need for psychotherapy to be grounded in an understanding of the society in which it operates, to be able to map out the forces that operate on it.

One of the most popular mirrors for psychotherapists to use currently is the eclectic mirror (i.e. I have a number of methods at my disposal). The demand for eclecticism comes, at least in part, from the therapist's experience of the patient's demands. In the language that I have been using the patient's demand is something like, "You must hold up the kind of mirror that I can tolerate" At that point a technologically influenced profession turns its questions into a methodological debate rather than facing the demand of the patient. The history of psychotherapy in general shows a proliferation of answers. There are over four hundred differing forms of psychotherapy, a good indicator of a narcissistic profession (i.e. I do it my way).

To turn to my abstract, so as to approach these questions in a different way. My previous constructions have been from the outside, a kind of sociological approach. This is not how my struggle with these ideas started. It was much more a case of what we call an internal struggle, it took me a long time to contextualise it and maybe a change of country. As I said in my abstract, I have been intrigued by my very different responses to two uses of the word method. The first, commonplace and currently popular, suggests that psychotherapists should have a number of methods at their disposal. This I am calling the ballast argument. Because it seems to suggest that we need to be ballasted against the demands of patients. The second, from a statement by Laplanche (1996), is that what Freud predominantly gave us was a method. I am rather disturbed by the former, but take the latter very seriously in my own practice. My sense

of intrigue comes from the belief that both examples contain radically different notions of what psychotherapists are engaged in. The ballast argument enlists a technological approach, the application of knowledge, where one is engaged in a particular kind of *behandlung* (treatment); a kind of violence, a closing down of space. But Freud's method is also a technology, so why should I favour that? Perhaps, because it is a method that opens up and contains particular kinds of spaces.

In this view I am constructing psychotherapy as a continuum of response to the patient's demand to reconstruct the ego (*das ich*). The question for psychotherapists is how much we turn towards the anxieties that produce these demands and help people see the kinds of binds they are caught in, or do we find ever increasing technological responses for servicing such anxiety by fixing or building bigger and better egos. Is it possible to separate these demands so clearly? The ballast argument enlists a bulimic defence, where therapists take in, ingest their methods which at some point are regurgitated. It may be that it is necessary to be ballasted against the demands of the Other but the question for me is more, what do we need to feel inside us when under such demands? Therefore, an intimate understanding of the ways of defending against those demands. Of not feeling something that is too difficult. Otherwise methods become the tools of psychotherapist's hate. By that I mean that we give something to the client in the same way it can be tempting to give a child sweets when it is demanding, to shut it up. When putting my 3-year-old daughter to bed recently and putting her dummy in her mouth she asked me if I gave her a dummy to keep her quiet. Now, I would much rather she did not use one but at that moment I was shutting her up, I was too tired to do anything else and she was right. At that point I had little or no space for her and am left wondering how often this process happens in psychotherapy with all of the methods available to us now. I am reminded of Heidegger's warnings about what he termed 'technology', that particular attitude that allows our relational space in the world to be fixed in a certain manner which is for us, open to our use of the world, as if all that exists is but 'stuff' waiting to be consumed. (Spinelli, 1998)

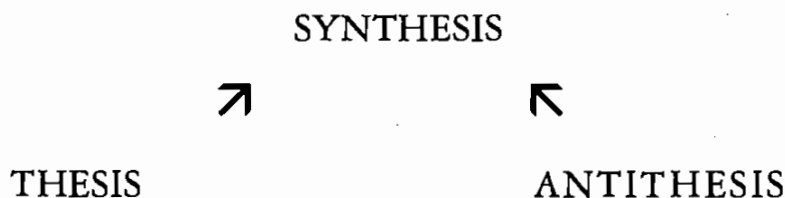
Space, Mental and Otherwise

As a child of the '60s. I cannot hear the word space without also hearing William Shatner's voice saying 'the final frontier'. Space holds the possibility of the infinite. Spaces between us and spaces inside us have possibility, infinite possibility, but only if they are maintained.

So what is space? It is the opening up of the lack to allow desire that cannot be satisfied. It is a methodological abstention, which frustrates the ego's demand to reduce anxiety, which allows the lack to come into view. For there to be space for the patient I have to abstain from accepting the client's demand that I be or do anything in particular and that was what Freud (1976), the Freud of Irma's injection, where there are 20 pages of the unbinding of associations, started with before all of the metapsychology closed him in. It is a refusal to treat the other as the same as us by fitting them into our view and a refusal to allow them to do so to us. In Bion's (1970) terms, "without memory and desire". This is to take up an ethical stance, without which methods close down space. If we are to offer space to others, it is necessary to regulate this abstention. The psychoanalytic answer has always been, it is only through the analysis of the countertransference, the working through of the countertransference, that we can be in any way sure of what we are offering. Therefore, it can only be done with hindsight. In the clinical situation methodological considerations are at least countertransferential.

Another way to have this conversation is to turn away from psychotherapy to philosophy.

One of the most popular views of the development of culture, society and ideas has been attributed to Hegel. It is so well known now it is often seen as common sense.



This is known as Hegel's dialectic and describes the development of knowledge as thesis combining with antithesis to produce synthesis, which then becomes a thesis and so on.

One of the things that Freud (1955) showed us is that the ego (das ich) is engaged in synthesis, the synthesis of competing unconscious desires into single actions. Hence all symptoms are overdetermined. Laplanche (1996) argues that this is also the case within the world of psychotherapy, that some psychotherapists are attempting to synthesise the differing therapies. This, he argues, would be a mistake because it is to go along with (act out) the defensive action of the 'I' (das ich), rather than an attempt to return to the original demands that produce the need for synthesis by tracing the dialectic: synthesis

versus analysis. Are we in the service of the ego or something more unconscious or unknown, such as the psyche or soul, which Bettelheim (1982) argues Freud was originally writing about? Is it possible to separate things that clearly? Here are a few contexts to develop these ideas:

Synthesis and Analysis

If synthesis is always in the service of speaking with a single voice, then it is repressive. Discourses of power always silence the kind of associations through which it is possible to have multiple meanings (Laplanche, 1996). The binary myth being described is of the synthesising force of the ego (*das ich*) versus an analysing force, which separates out competing aspects allowing multiplicity, possibility and space within and between people. Synthesis silences associations.

Autonomy and Heteronomy

Frank Sinatra's song 'My Way' has been a joke in my family for a long time, coming to signify a particular kind of egocentric disregard for the Other. There is little sense of responsibility to others in it, of negotiation or relating. It is a song about an ego looking back on a self-created world, of which it is the centre. This kind of autonomous self-delusion is much feted. Hence, it is one of the most popular songs of the last 30 years, much in evidence at funerals. To think in these individualistic, autonomous ways is very striking, some would say masculine (Gross, 1995). The other end of the spectrum according to Levinas (Levinas, 1967 in Peperzak, 1995) is heteronomy where one has a sense of a place in the world with others, where one is subject to others, responsible to and for others, some would say a more archetypically feminine way of thinking. Once again Copernicus comes to mind. Does everything revolve around me, or am I part of a small constellation in a much larger universe, subject to Other's laws, some of which I am not aware of, but live by. Levinas criticises all of Western philosophy for its adherence to the former at the expense of the latter (Peperzak, *op cit*).

Implications Versus Applications

Technologies employ methods that are applied to things, machines. When patients demand, there is a sense in which they treat me like a machine, in their desperation. The challenge for me is whether I respond like one. If we employ the machine analogy we do violence to each other. I can only say that a number of people have helped me to feel and think through things in the way they have

offered their work to me and I can only talk about the implications for me and my work. As Oakely (1990) writes, "Implicated has resonances of 'being folded within', which generates a sense of interiority; 'application' presumes a relation of exteriority."

A Joni Mitchell lyric comes to mind: "*I guess it seems ungrateful with my teeth sunk in the hand that brings me things I really can't give up just yet*"

I take it to mean that there is an important aspect of what I am writing that remains hidden to me. This line represents a continuing sense of lack that could easily be turned into action in my anxiety. Many people have helped me to feel and think my way through and I am populated by them, inhabited. In one language they are internal objects. They are also a continual reminder of my insubstantiality and lack, of how much I needed them and continue to need them. Without this grounding I am in danger of forgetting Copernicus, Darwin and Freud. Without a sense of narcissistic balance one enters into Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. That opens up the possibility of the self-made man, or 'I did it my way'. Everything I have written today comes from conversations with, or readings of, others that have helped me understand and feel more in connection with others and myself.

Ethics

What are our responsibilities? 'Our responsibility is for the Other's responsibility'

Levinas (1985)

My title refers to a statement by Levinas (Peperzak, *op cit*), where he suggests that the application of theory is the fitting of the other into my world view, a way of doing violence to them, of reducing them to the same, translating them into my world. Levinas calls this narcissism. It is to treat my own view as the solid and fixed point about which all else turns. A kind of pre-Copernican vision that is denying of the relational nature of communication. It is without ethics and fundamentally about the exercise of power. If so, it is my job to often feel destabilised by the Other and want for that discomfort to go away by reaching for something to ballast me, to make myself the centre. It demands a need to be in touch with the state of my internal world and how it is affected by the client, both what ballasts me and my insubstantiality. This is the work of de-translation and of journeying to the beyond. It requires a de-translation, not a retranslation where we are left to wonder how we got where we are today.

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