

Tracy Morgan: “Institute No Institute” - Panel with Interviewees

Introduction:

I would like to welcome all you illegitimate people back from lunch. It is worthy of note that 20 years ago Otto Kernberg wrote his infamous paper on how to kill the creativity of analytic candidates and here we still are.

The panelists have fed us and now I want to offer some food for thought to the panelists. And then I have questions for them that were generated over lunch with the fine help of Orna Shachar and Will Braun—questions derived from the content of the morning and the thoughts we had in response to what was cultivated.

In planning for this conference, I often found myself thinking of the Meese Commission on Pornography—when asked to define pornography, the ever curmudgeonly Meese grumbled, “I may not know what pornography is but I know it when I see it...” Somehow I think that relates to what we are working on here.

Clearly some of the ground we are covering today includes questions regarding how we define psychoanalysis. And then like Desdemona, who asked, “am I that name?” how do we come to answer that very question?

If knowing nothing—I think Lacan called it being a dupe—is at the heart of being an analyst, being the one who is a few steps behind the patient, how to authorize this position—does a dupe need authorization?

From its inception American psychoanalysis fought vociferously to brand itself—and from there set out to create standards for defining who could bear the title of psychoanalyst. The anxieties aroused by the sexual subject matter to be taken up in the consulting room forced the question: who is the right person to listen to such things? In the fight to keep psychoanalysis in America respectable, as we all know, medical doctors policed the borders. Recall for a moment that the AMA was founded so as to keep fakers, quacks and charlatans at bay. What role does a fear of being referred to as wild, or as snake oil salesmen, as an article in the New York Times characterized psychoanalysts as being not too long ago, play as we think about the question of authorization?

Then there comes the question of psychoanalytic ethics, and we find ourselves looping back to a steadfast fear of being seen as charlatans. We have no charlatans on this panel, except myself: we have doctors of psychology and medicine—with my social work license I consider myself to be half a quack—but in America questions of psychoanalytic authorization have always borne a vexed relationship to the lay practitioner. Brill's fear, that “we should be absolutely flooded by a host of uneducated and unsuitable lay people who would before long change the whole character of the psychoanalytical profession” brings us back to Freud's dictum which was: a fear of lay analysis is a fear of analysis itself. And now we have in NY the LP—making psychoanalysis an independent profession authorized by the state. Now the lay person can have a license and with it comes an ethical price. So while the state plays a role in deciding who amongst the lay people get to answer the question “am I that name” affirmatively, another question remains: can psychoanalytic ethics, an ethics pertaining to unconscious processes, ever be germane to the ethics imposed by the state? Is there an inherent contradiction at the heart of

the LP? As psychoanalysis finds itself perpetually derided and yet part of the state mental health system—and yet still it rises—have we backed off from thinking more radically about authorization and so find our institutes graduating candidates that practice what Bollas refers to as “defensive psychotherapy”?

Asked questions:

- 1) Is there something inherent about psychoanalysis, the practice of psychoanalysis that compels us to incessantly seek authorization?
- 2) We live in times when being beyond the law is de rigeur—witness Trump, witness gun violence, witness the law as being out of control of itself as police use their guns freely—and I am a proud founding member of Das Unbehagen where the cri de couer has also been a desire to go beyond the law as laid down by institutes—the contemporary hunger to be outside of the law is rife and it is one we here share—so what if we looked at the overall push on our part, on Trumps part as part of the same thing—as a symptom—if we think of the quest for being beyond or outside of the law as a symptom, what is the symptom trying to say?

Unasked questions:

- 1) Is authorization a finite process? How might our interest in authorization be a fantasy about coming to a final resting place? Being an analyst involves, we could say, radical doubt at its heart—every session is a gamble—sometimes we listen with the third ear and sometimes we have cauliflower ears, sometimes we feel a sense of mastery and other times we are simply more blind than otherwise, to transform a

Sullivanian phrase —so given all that, what is the relationship to the desire to explore authorization, a desire that is very pronounced in this group, and the slipperiness, the falling in and out of working analytically, that we experience and endure as clinicians?

- 2) Do notions of purity and impurity play a role in our thinking about authorization? Speak to us about how already being authorized as a psychologist or a psychiatrist impacted your experience of authorization. Would we think that the process of authorization is different for the lay person?
- 3) All of the morning panelists are writers and readers—all referenced writers—Lindner, Freud, Phillips as having placed them on the road towards psychoanalysis. Does writing play a role in our thinking about authorization? If so how?