

PERVERSION ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COUCH

(in: International Forum of Psychoanalysis 2005; 14: 176-182. Stockholm. ISSN 0803-706X.)

Introduction

Based on Freud's statement according to which perverse drives are constitutive elements of the human psyche, I shall attempt in this paper to evaluate the circumstances in which our perverse drives may interfere in psychoanalytical treatment. Such a question is pertinent when considering that psychic change is only possible by means of suggestion, based on positive transference [love] (1). No matter how well analyzed the analyst may be, he/she, is not free of his/her, unconscious affects, even perverted ones. This raises the question as to the extent to which we run the risk of responding in a perverse way to the unconscious representations that are mobilized by transference: how may the analyst respond in a perverted way particularly regarding manifestations of aggressiveness? For Lacan (2) aggression can only be understood as a subjective experience because, being a phenomenon of signification, it necessarily implies a subject. Furthermore, aggression is always related to narcissistic identification i.e. the other, the one who is different, the one who reminds us of castration, is the very target of our aggression. In other words, we are aggressive for we feel "castrated". From such a perspective, transference may be acted out as a way to protect a "non-castrated" place that in fantasy the analyst believes he occupies.

Perversion on the other side of the couch has many dimensions such as imposing a given theory as a defense against listening, or truly acting out with patients, or may even be an element in our choice of profession. After all, if we may readily establish a relationship between impulse paths and professional choices, should we not, for the same reason, question our own choice of profession: why do we choose to become analysts?

The first difficulty

When talking about perversion a preliminary question demands attention: why is perversion so poorly defined as compared with the theoretical and clinical definitions of neurosis? The theoretical-clinical definitions regarding this sexual manifestation change from model to model. Each psychoanalytical school of thought creates its own way of understanding perversion. Therefore, there is no common agreement amongst analysts as regards a satisfactory definition of perverse sexualities. Consequently, the clinical approach to "perverted" patients changes considerably from one school of thought to another. This brings up an important question: to what extent do these different models facilitate or impede our listening to such analysands? Might it be that certain schools of psychoanalysis use theory as an excuse to explain their difficulty, or even incapacity, of listening to the so-called "perverted"? Might a subject be labeled a pervert when indeed it is our theoretical background that does not encompass this specific drive organization?

Listening to a so-called perverted subject demands a different approach from that required when listening to a neurotic analysand. It is necessary to contain the hatred that may appear in the transference in the form of aggression, disdain and scorn towards both the analyst

and his professional capacities (3). Such a situation demands a unique investment in order to accompany the subject back, step by step, through the winding and repetitive path from his/her pre-genital sexuality up to the points of libidinal fixation (4). At the same time, we may observe forms of acting out that testify to the infantile character of his/her sexuality, and which may endanger the entire psychic changes the psychoanalytical work hopes to achieve. How do we react to this situation?

Another point that should be considered, although I shall not discuss it on this paper, is the fact that society is nowadays controlled by a form of "perversion order". How do we, as analysts, respond to that perspective since we cannot escape this perverse organization? How does this situation affect our clinical work?

There are many ways of approaching the proposed theme. In this paper, however, I shall center my consideration upon presentations of the sexual and the perverse on the analyst's side of the couch.

Freud's approach to sexuality:

The exploration of sexuality in Freud's work appears gradually through successive steps, each with its own unfolding and particular consequences. Four phases, all equally important, are revealed (5): 1) genital sexuality; 2) perverted sexuality; 3) sexuality of the Ideals; and 4) narcissistic sexuality.

Genital sexuality: genital sexuality is the foundation stone of the new discipline. Freud (6) is categorical in stating that sexual problems provoke the actual neuroses. They appear whenever sexual practice is suppressed or experienced in adverse conditions. Here Freud draws away from his colleagues, for whom genital problems were only one among other problems such as feeding difficulties, social disturbances, etc – and, as such, should be handled by repression. Because of the importance of fantasy, irruptions of genital sexuality in the analytical setting are always linked to other sexual manifestations that will be discussed below.

The perverted sexual: the revolutionary step in Freud's discoveries was that of the universality of perverse fantasies in mankind. In 1896/97, Freud became specifically interested, through the analysis of psychoneurosis, [hysteria in particular] in the so-called perverted manifestations of sexuality.

As we know, Freud's genius led to his perceiving the similarities between the fantasies displayed by his hysterical patients and the perversions described by the clinicians of his epoch. What is openly displayed in the perversions is veiled in psychoneurosis: "neurosis is the negative of perversion" was Freud's deduction.

Whereas his predecessors were concerned with classifying, labeling, and proposing a detailed inventory of the sexual perversions, rigorously adjusted to the psychiatric discourse, Freud, from his perspective performed a fundamental and innovative passage in stating that the perverse tendencies catalogued by his colleagues as aberrations haunt every human being's mind, including those who catalogued them, and are also present in the minds of children: infantile sexuality is polymorphously perverse(7). Since the unconscious is animated by the wishes that

perverted individuals manifestly display, perversions are no longer an indication that they alone (the "perverted") practice but are indeed constitutive of psychic life in general: "punish every man according to what he deserves, and who would escape whipping?"(8)

The analyst, from a perverted sexual viewpoint, may manifest perversion on the other side of the couch in acting out. In reviving infantile complexes, the seduction scene is frequently relived in the transference and occupies the forefront of the analytic stage. One consequence may be sexual involvement between the protagonists of the new scene, since the analyst/analysand dyad represents forbidden objects *for each of them*, because they incarnate incestuous objects. Therefore this form of acting out should be regarded as pedophilia: for it is not with an adult that the analyst is becoming involved but rather with the child who is present within the adult, who is seeking analysis precisely in order to elaborate a traumatic experience, which is then, once more, acted out instead of being worked through (9). The guilt that follows such an act, permitting the fulfillment of forbidden wishes, frequently prevents the analysand from expressing feelings of hatred that could lead him or her to reevaluate or even abandon the treatment. (This situation is similar to one in which a child, victim of sexual abuse, does not tell the mother what is going on because he or she is afraid of being punished - punished both for the fulfillment of something forbidden as well as for the pleasure this fulfillment supplies.)

In certain cases, the reviving of infantile traumas may lead the subject to a state of paralysis – not only psychic but also motoric – since the irruption of drives generated by the return of the repressed, immobilize the ego. In such cases, the agent of the trauma, embodied in the person of the analyst, has total control of the situation. This might happen when, through fear and not through idealization, the subject does his or her best to avoid arousing the wrath he or she once suffered, and that is suspected as being present in the analyst. Frequently this state of affair is erroneously interpreted (arising perhaps, from the analyst's defense?) as enjoyment (*jouissance*).

At the same time it is curious to ascertain how the acting out of analysts was dealt with, or even tolerated, by the father of psychoanalysis. It is sufficient to recall famous cases such as that of Jung and Spielrein, of Ferenczi and Elma, or of Jones and Kann. In the well-known letter to Jones dated January 14th 1912, Freud, who was well aware of the sexual impulsiveness of Jones writes: "I pity very much that you should not master such dangerous carvings, well aware at the same time of the sources from which all these evils spring, taking away from you nearly all the blame but nothing of the dangers".

In the case of Jung, who probably expected some retaliation from Freud regarding his behavior with Spielrein, we nevertheless find a very understanding Freud, as evidenced in his letter of June 7th 1909:

Such experiences, though painful, are necessary and hard to avoid. Without them we cannot really know life and what we are dealing with. I myself have never been taken in quite so badly, but I have come very close to it a number of times and had a narrow escape. I believe that only grim necessities weighing on my work, and the fact that I was ten years older than yourself when I came to (psychoanalysis), have saved me from similar experiences. But no lasting harm is done. They help us to develop the thick skin we need to dominate "counter-

transference", which is after all a permanent problem for us; they teach us to displace our own affects to best advantage. They are a 'blessing in disguise'.

Maybe, these attitudes reflected Freud's opinion in relation to ethics: (10)

Ethics are remote from me.... I do not break my heart very much about good and evil, but I have found little that is "good" about human beings on the whole. In my experience most of them are trash, no matter whether they publicly subscribe to this or that ethical doctrine or to none at all... If we are to talk of ethics, I subscribe to a high ideal from which most of the human beings I have come across depart most lamentably.

In any case, the fulfillment of forbidden and incestuous fantasies may lead to the destruction of the analyst as well as the analysand, since the fantasies underlying these situations go far beyond sexuality itself, revealing the unelaborated analytic material that remains. The Jung-Spielrein case, which almost destroyed Jung's practice and led Spielrein to deep despair, illustrates the connections between death and sexuality present in their relationship. According to Gabbard and Lester, it was probably because of resentments towards his mother that Jung was interested, at that time, in the potentially destructive and incestuous mother-archetypes that were, according to Jung, responsible for man's mythological descent to abysmal depths. At the same time, Spielrein was engaged in research on the inevitable presence of destruction in order to activate love: both texts, Jung's and Spielrein's, complement one another admirably.

Another manifestation of this sexuality corresponds to the passage from the sexual perversion to the "perverted sexual". As we have seen, the analysis of psychoneurosis allowed Freud to state that in the sexual perversions, the unconscious drives – identical to those that produce symptoms in the neuroses – are clearly evident and thus provoke shock and uneasiness. Perversion, as a testimony to partial drive fixations, is experienced by the subject as something that controls him or her, and without which sexual satisfaction cannot be obtained.

In the case of the "perverted sexual", the drives are displayed in a more disguised manner, making irruption in quite unexpected situations. The aim of this legion of drives is simple: immediate pleasure and at the lowest cost. The purpose of these multiple and archaic drives is to seek for what is most interchangeable, partial and unsteady: pleasure is all that counts. It does not matter whether partners are adults or children, humans or animals, living or inanimate objects: everything can be acceptable depending on the place and the circumstances. In other words: while in the perversions we are witnessing an organization around a partial drive fixed to a monotonous and repetitive form of satisfaction, in the perverted sexual, on the contrary, everything is acceptable as long as the drive is satisfied: the perverted sexual ignores any libidinal fixation.

Perverted sexual manifestations display what man's desire is capable of performing in search of satisfaction. What shocks us most is that they are present in everybody and not limited to those who are sexually perverted: no one is free from this form of sexuality. Its emergence may be observed in a privileged way in extreme situations such as wars, or acts of torture in totalitarian states - where, under its power, otherwise peaceful people are capable of perpetrating great atrocities against those who, shortly before, were acquaintances, neighbors or friends (11).

Manifestations of pure sadism may occur on occasions when the drive is not linked to fantasy. Without the latter, a destructive drive motion has no possibility of being modified in order that it may be invested, for example, in an erotic game; or again in the attraction that certain TV shows may awaken in us, displaying a mixture of horror and fascination so that we simply cannot avoid wanting to watch (12).

Even if the fantasy may convey an "acceptable" mounting calculated to obliterate the perverse drives, the work of separating fantasy from drive and then analyzing them is one of the most difficult and crucial moments in the analytical setting. Resistance is at its peak. Without the mediation of the fantasy, the subject is placed face to face with the drive in an undisguised state as well as with the destructive potential it embodies. Such a potential may be in direct opposition to the aesthetic patterns so dear to civilization. There are many examples in which the difficulty in elaborating the loss of a highly invested object is due to the hatred and sadism attached to that object, as well as to the masochistic fantasies related to this loss, which all combine with the pain of mourning the lost object. The elaboration of identificatory mourning charged with destructiveness against the lost object demands from the analyst a willingness to accompany the subject in a meticulous analysis of his or her object's choices. The analyst, when facing transference impregnated with the virulence of perverted sexuality that is on the verge of losing its object of satisfaction, must adopt attitudes that will protect the analysand from experiencing his or her hatred without fearing that the latter threatens both the analysand and the analyst.

Our professional choices may also be linked with perverse sexual drives. For Freud (13) the great researchers who question the origins, whether of the universe or of life itself - and I would add who also question subjective processes, the psyche, and the construction of psychosexuality - all are reviving, by means of displacement and sublimation, their infantile sexual research. From this perspective, we cannot avoid questioning our own professional choice. If, very briefly, we are capable of acknowledging the relation between the artist and exhibitionist, between the surgeon and the sadist, among others, we should equally be prepared to seek out the libidinal roots that sustain our own professional choice. Little can be done up to this point, since encounters are always re-encounters. It is, however, necessary for us to be attentive to how far we pursue our research on "infantile sexual theories"; i.e. what is the ethical limit to be respected in our listening? Without such questioning our listening risks becoming an avid voyeuristic tendency - an expression of the perverse sexual - embodied in the fundamental rule that everything must be said. To what extent may the analyst, through the analysand, make use of the analytical setting to explore the blind points of the analyst's own analysis? Or again, may the analyst be tempted to actively repeat what he or she had passively suffered? It is possible that our wish to become analysts, as well as our curiosity about the mysteries of the mind, originates in our own psychic suffering? (14) Certain authors sustain that the monumental discoveries of Freud are due to his courage and honesty in not withdrawing, as his dreams indicate, from his own sexual problems. After all, where stems Freud's fascination with human eroticism from?

Sexuality of the Ideals

As Freud advanced in his research, he accounted for another aspect of sexuality that plays an important role in the human psyche: the sexuality of the Ideals. Being an "Ideal", it does not matter whether its object is real, fictitious or imaginary. The love for the leaders and the masters, or the bonds that tie human beings, all have their source in this sexual dimension (15). The collective phenomenon, wherein a libidinal bond between the leader and the public takes place, is sustained by this form of sexuality. A state of infatuation may be its most extreme manifestation. In such a state "the object serves as a substitute for some unattainable ego ideal of our own"(16). This sexual expression is also employed in the creation of consumption demands, where objects are presented as references of identification thus producing the illusion that, by possessing them, we become part of a group (17). This is also present in the Lacanian concept of enjoyment or pleasure (*jouissance*): the Ideal responds to the pleasure of the Other that inscribes itself in the subject when, through identification, the subject reflects the desire of those who welcomed him/her into the world. This form of sexuality may be alienating to the extent that the subject caught in an imaginary net that promised narcissistic acknowledgment as well as the identificatory illusion that would calm helplessness (*Hilflosigkeit*), annihilates him- or herself as a subject.

The hypnotic situation, which is produced between a theory and a subject in search of the Truth that would eventually appease his/her anguish, is fostered by the sexuality of the Ideals. It is this form of sexuality that installs the master in the place of the horde's tyrant, investing him with the power of using his position as a political-ideological instrument. In this situation, any attempt to be a subject, any attempt to have one's own opinion and to speak as an equal is considered a heresy engendering the threat of excommunication.

The Ideals create imaginary filiations that are exemplified through the history of the psychoanalytical societies, to fratricidal emergence. A number of narcissistic claims are organized around the master affecting the "union" among the members of the society. Once more, the antagonistic tendencies of the human being appear (18): constitute oneself as "one"; i.e. unite in a community and, at the same time, claim the privilege of being the "one" to occupy the place of the master's favorite son, with all the cost that maintaining this imaginary and idealized position (envied and disputed) requires.

Transforming the psychoanalytical theory of a sect is, equally, a perversion of the Ideals' sexuality. This is liable to occur when, in search of psychic representations that may appease our anxiety, we sanctify theoretical concepts transforming them into dogma, and making of our theory a normative prison. As I have written elsewhere (19):

We get together accordingly to a way of thinking – that here occupies the place of the master – that seems to us the most "correct". But more correct in relation to what? In relation to the models that, in the transference, better comfort our anxiety. We may, then, talk of internal objects, constitutive signifiers of the subject, alpha and beta elements, and transitional objects. What counts here is our transference to the theory that best describes our individual myth. We get together around it; we create institutions that apply them in their theoretical-clinical foundations, in an attempt to explain what cannot be explained, to say what cannot be said.

The danger lies in using Freud's discovery not as a theoretical model to understand the paths of desire, but as a technique to dictate how this desire must circulate (20). One gets involved with the theory, and not with the pain of the subject who seeks analysis, thus compromising the analyst's listening when patients do not exactly fit the theory. To overlook this factor is equivalent to forgetting the many faces, always enigmatic, of the sexual. Like Oedipus confronting the sphinx, each one has an answer, always original, when confronting the enigma of the sexuality: there is no such thing as one unique path to deal with the Oedipal Complex.

We do not pay sufficient attention to the fact that the psychic changes produced during the analytical work do not depend on our theoretical beliefs. It is we, and not our analysands, who need theories in order to understand what occurs in the analytical setting. Our metapsychology is nothing more than an attempt to supply words for our clinical experience. Maybe we still have not sufficiently evaluated the paradox that exists between our theories and our analytical practice.

Clinical research is a particularly fertile ground for manifestations of the sexuality of the Ideals. As we know the necessary conditions for the setting in motion of an analytical process occur thanks to the revival of infantile complexes in the transference. The essence of analytical work is to seek out the adequate procedure to allow the sexuality therein to become an active power that will allow the subject to accomplish the mourning process of former identifications. However, should this revival become installed between analyst and analysand - an idealized relationship - we are then facing a perverse effect of the sexuality of the Ideals. In order to occupy the place of the object-of-pleasure of the Other (that the analyst supposedly incarnates) the subject may immobilize him or her in a death-dealing narcissism that may lead the analysand to give up the transformations that have been attained through the analysis. An analyst, fascinated by the idealized place awarded by the patient and forgetting that transference is always an imaginary investment, may crystallize such a situation in which anything but analysis may take place.

Finally **narcissist sexuality** was brought to light when Freud proclaimed the existence, deep in the human soul, of the love of oneself for oneself. The problem with this sexuality is not the fact that the subject is submitted to the pleasure of the other, as is the case with the sexuality of the Ideals, but mainly because the love of oneself for oneself may create a radical situation in which the subject might discover such enjoyment (*jouissance*) that he or she can then dispense with the other. (Would this be the ultimate expression of autism?)

As with other forms of sexuality, the narcissistic investment may be at the origin of perverse unfolding. This directly affects the transference: how is the transference handled when the dynamic of the relationship is based on narcissism? In this case, the analyst may be tempted to use the analytical situation to deal with narcissistic wounds. Furthermore, to transform the analytical process in an unconscious attempt to love, and be loved by one's patients, as one's would like to have been loved, expecting, thus, to be idealized by the patients. According to Kernberg (21), this is a result of the analyst's inability to separate his or her own limits, including the bodily ones, from the limits of the other. In other words, excessive transference blurs the distance between subject and object. The wish to cure and the wish to be cured are two sides of the same coin (22).

Narcissistic sexuality, when exacerbated, leads the analyst to see him- or herself as a "predator" and may use any patient to represent a potential sexual partner. Another possibility with the "predatory analyst" is exemplified by one who has attained a high level of professional recognition and, intoxicated by narcissistic pleasure, believes him- or herself superior to the point of theoretically rationalizing any acting out.

Final considerations

The questions presented in this paper are far from exhausting the complexity of its theme. We should all be attentive in order to avoid transforming one's argument as an exercise of voyeurism, persuaded possibly, by perverted sexual tendencies which would seek satisfaction through detecting traces of perversion in any castrated subject, whether analyst or not, and from there on adopt a pejorative criticism that would not add any contribution to our theme.

To propose that we reflect on such an insufficiently discussed polemic question is a variant of Freud's recommendation according to which each analyst, from time to time, should re-enter personal analysis. This recommendation is fundamental not only in order to question our clinical practice, but also to review the theoretical presuppositions that underline it, and provide the foundation for our interventions. In this fashion we may contribute to the advancement of psychoanalysis.

References

- 1 - Freud S. An outline of psycho-analysis (1938). London: Hogarth Press; 1975 SE 23. p. 176.
- 2 - Lacan, J., Aggressivity in psychoanalysis. New York: Tavistock Publications Limited; 1977.
- 3- Stoller. R. Perversion. New York: Pantheon Books, 1975.
- 4 - This point has been discussed in a previous text. Ceccarelli, PR. Neo-sexualidade e sobrevivência psíquica (Neo-sexuality and psychic survival). Psychê Revista de Psicanálise 1998; 2(2): 61-69.
- 5 - These four points are based on Gérard Bonnet's work. Bonnet G. Le sexuel freudien. Une énigme originaire et toujours actuelle (The Freudian Sexual. A primary and always contemporary enigma). Monographies de La Revue Française de Psychanalyse. Les troubles de la sexualité 1993; 11-46 .
- 6 - Freud S. Sexuality in the etiology of the neuroses (1898). London: Hogarth Press; 1975 SE 2.
- 7 - Freud S. Three essays on the theory of sexuality (1905). London: Hogarth Press; 1975 SE 7.
- 8 - Hamlet, end of the second act.
- 9 - It is in this way that Joyce McDougall defines perversion: "the attempt to force one's erotic imagination [the analyst's] on a non-consenting or non-responsible other [to the "child" inside the analysand]". McDougall, J., The many faces of Eros. New York: Norton, 1995, 177.
- 10 - Gabbard G, Lester E. Boundaries and Boundary Violations in Psychoanalysis. New York: Basic Books, 1995, 81.
- 11 - Situations of this sort, daily notified in the medias, occurs in wars times. The coldness one can witness in the torturers denounces the presence of the perverted sexual.

12 - Ceccarelli PR. Potencialidades de Perversão (Potentiality for Perversion). Boletim de Novidades da Livraria Pulsional 1998; 11(113): 79-82.

13 - Freud S. On the sexual theories of children (1908). London: Hogarth Press; 1975 SE 9, p. 215.

14 - McDougall J. The many faces of Eros. New York: Norton, 1995, 231.

15 - Ceccarelli PR. May I call you father? International Forum of Psychoanalysis 2003; 12(4): 197-295.

16 - Freud S. Group psychology and the analysis of the Ego (1921). London: Hogarth Press; 1975 SE 18, p.112.

17 - Ceccarelli, P.R Os efeitos perversos da televisão. (Television and its perverted consequences) In: Comparato C, Monteiro D, (org.) A criança na contemporaneidade e a psicanálise. Mentos & Mídia: diálogos interdisciplinares. São Paulo: Caso do Psicólogo, 2001, p. 75-86.

18 - Freud S. Civilization and its discontents (1930). London: Hogarth Press; 1975 SE 21.

19 - Ceccarelli, P.R Identidade e instituição psicanalítica (Identitary illusion in psychoanalytical societies). Boletim de Novidades da Livraria Pulsional 1999; 12 (125): 49-56.

20 - About the dangers of using psychoanalysis in a normative way are many. Ceccarelli P.R. Configurações edípicas da contemporaneidade: reflexões sobre as novas formas de filiação. (Oedipal configurations in temporarily: reflections on the new forms of families); Pulsional Revista de Psicanálise 2002; 25(161): 88-98.

21 - Kernberg O. Boundaries and structure in love relations. Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association 1977; 25 : 81-114.

22 - Gabbard, G., Lester, E., Boundaries and Boundary Violations in Psychoanalysis. New York: Basic Books, 1995, 87.

Paulo Roberto Ceccarelli*
e-mail: pr@ceccarelli.psc.br

*Ph. D in Psychopathology and Psychoanalysis by Paris VII University – Paris – France; Psychologist, psychoanalyst, Full member of the “Círculo Psicanalítico de Minas Gerais” (affiliated to the International Federation of Psychoanalysis Societies), Full member of the "Société de Psychanalyse Freudienne", Paris, France; Member of the Latin American Association of Fundamental Psychopathology; Appointed professor of the Psychology Dep. of the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais – Belo Horizonte, BRAZIL.