

Homosexuality: why Psychoanalysis?

Stephen Gee

The range of papers we have heard today articulates in various ways the question in the title of our conference, 'Homosexuality: why Psychoanalysis?' Joanna Ryan began by tracing the historical background to the publication of *The Wolfenden Report* in 1957 which led, after fierce campaigning, to limited law reform in 1967. The aim of the reform was to withdraw the intrusion of the law into private life. Ryan evokes the very different social and political circumstances of the 1950s when homosexuality could hardly be spoken about officially and there was very little confidence amongst gay and lesbian people themselves. 'Coming out', in the way we grew to understand it after 1969, was unimaginable. Law reform relied mainly on a conception of the 'individual' derived from 19th century liberalism while the theory and practice of psychoanalysis at the time relied upon a view of the subject as formed by an unproblematised ahistorical dualism—the 'internal' world of the individual and his 'external' world. It could advocate liberalisation but only in order to propose treatment in the interests of adaptation to a society in which prevailing sexual norms were not to be questioned. We had to wait for the radical gay movement and the work of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler before psychoanalysis could be seen in its function as a discourse serving social regulation and containment. Ryan emphasises the importance however of the first attempts at law reform in setting the stage for the future. Living openly as a lesbian or gay man has only been possible to date in the liberal democracies. Her paper ends with the question, 'It would be interesting to know what the different parts of the psychoanalytic profession make of the current progressive legislation, civil partnerships, adoption rights etc, or whether as with *Wolfenden*, important sections of the profession lag far behind current social changes'. I myself attended a conference last December on 'Perversion'. A leading psychoanalyst from The Portman Clinic offered the very familiar post-Kleinian view that perversions, i.e. fetishism, transvestism and certain forms of self-mutilation are all defences against 'reality'—reality here unproblematically defined as the internalisation of a good combined object; in layman's terms, a man and a lady having a healthy fuck—in your head. 'Maybe', the psychoanalyst hesitated, 'Maybe, clinically—whatever I as a citizen might think—maybe, clinically, homosexual intercourse' (presumably male) 'is another example of this (perverse) defence'. I took up his hesitation and said that, 'Maybe, clinically, such a statement could be seen as homophobic'. My intervention was to no avail. Here you could witness the reiteration of the familiar dualism elaborated by Ryan in her paper: we'll tolerate your civil rights in what we define as the 'external world' but reserve the right to pronounce on your 'internal world' as pathological.

All the speakers today have been involved in the autonomous liberation movements of the 60s and 70s and influenced by the re-evaluation of politics, society and psychoanalysis that has happened since. In this vein, Mary Lynne Ellis offers a subtle description and analysis of her patient's homophobia, while problematising Freud's theory of phobia in the case of 'Little Hans', ('Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy', Freud:1909). The analysis uncovers her patient's fear of having been the cause of her son's homosexuality. Folded into her 'phobia' are fantasies of an unbounded sexuality and what that might mean for her. Faithful to her thesis that wider social contexts are crucial in the formation of subjectivity, Ellis sets out Judith Butler's argument that the foreclosure of homosexual attachments and identifications troubles a historically compulsory heterosexuality. Hence, the figure of the melancholy woman is produced, in this case, the phobic mother. In a particularly acute clinical observation, Ellis says, 'It is interesting that Teresa's homophobic feelings towards her son have been accentuated at a time when she is experiencing intense feelings of neglect by her mother and fury towards her'. The fury is born of the unmourned loss of a homosexual love towards her mother that could never be acknowledged. Following Levinas, Ellis

concludes by affirming that the analysis of identifications, even the adjustments and reconciliations that psychoanalytic therapy may help to foster, won't take away the radical alterity, the otherness of the other. Psychoanalysis can go so far but will never relieve this anxiety; that the other is ultimately unknowable.

Peter Nevins deconstructs identity politics and its affirmations. He critiques the contemporary compulsions to assume a common goal of happiness in our culture and values psychoanalysis as holding open a place where one can be miserable. For gay men the culture of happiness hides a cycle of complaint which is tied to an identity forged in trauma. Nevins' theoretical starting point is Slavoj Žižek's Lacanian reformulation of the superego—the ever present incitement to *enjoy*—no matter what. The ideal identity of the *über-gay* has a miserable underside owing to the unanalysed attachment to being punished. He draws on Freud's 'A Child is Being Beaten' (Freud: 1919). In Freud's analysis the little girl is unable to articulate a wish to be beaten by a father whom she incestuously loves. Nevins transfers this idea to the contemporary gay man who unconsciously requires punishment from the Big Other after whom he illicitly lusts. There's a barely conscious insecurity: can Western societies sustain recently-won civil rights *and* the incitement to unbridled sexual enjoyment now that the law has withdrawn to barracks? Nevins sees a way out of compulsive *misery* by an uncoupling from the rule and regulatory power of fixed identity. Alluding to the melancholy formation of contemporary gay identity, he proposes what might be a mourning and a return to what also might serve as a subversive stance—the irony of the traditional queer figure, divested of social power who can, from the outside, see the very artificiality of the social arrangements taken for real by those privileged to be on the inside.

The role of insult and persisting oppression in identity formation is the theoretical and clinical theme of Fedja Dalagija's paper. He admits his reservations and ambivalence about psychoanalysis while setting value on the initiatory subversion that can be found in a reading of Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud: 1905). He argues that Freud contests any notion that gender is fixed or complete, either biologically or psychically. However, the possibilities for a freer social elaboration of homosexuality are soon closed down—an historical missed opportunity perhaps? It is as though this potential, theoretically latent and even alluded to by Freud in his relationship with Ferenczi, sends his followers into a spin. Unconsciously insulted and traumatised by the subversive possibilities of psychoanalysis itself, Ferenczi and later, Klein, Kohut and others go into a pornographic delirium when they attempt to theorise homosexuality. The history of psychoanalysis repeats the trauma and ends up being part of the culture of insult. This trajectory is deftly described by Dalagija in the work with his patient. He defines adolescence as the crucial period when trauma is inflicted by anti-gay bullying and insults. His patient attempts to rework the trauma in various exaggerated and unsatisfying ways in sadistic, dismissive sexual encounters with other men. In a reaction-formation, he idealises relationships—opposing them to a denigrated view of cruising. Dalagija takes this up in the analysis and contests it. An important breakthrough occurs when the analyst, having come out of the frame at the end of a session to complain about his door being slammed, opens the door in later discussion and interpretation to a recuperation of hatred and aggression as a vital and separating force under a law which can now protect rather than persecute.

The last paper I think would probably never be heard in another venue or psychoanalytic grouping. Why? Because what Philip Derbyshire brings out, in restoring to our attention the liberationist theories of the 1970s, is the idea that homosexual desire has nothing to do with whole persons or identities at all. Instead, we have the celebration of bodies, part objects, intensities; flows of desire and a recovery of the anus as a vital site of pleasure. The delirium is no longer confined to the poetics of unconscious phantasy in the mind of the lonely psychoanalyst, but lived out in a gay club in King's Cross. The *whole* with a 'w', Oedipalised

and correctly gendered, restricts the possibilities and is nothing more than a regulating force for commodity capitalism. Better the sexed-up paranoid-schizoid heaven/hell of the cellar bar than the melancholy consulting room, in which confessions of the flesh are exchanged for flows of cash. This is a provocative caricature, but one which dramatises the tension which thrives between psychoanalysis and homosexuality—a tension which has produced a great deal of creative thinking today.