

CREATIVITY IN PERVERSION

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This paper is a work in progress which aims to consider the meaning of and the links between creativity and perversion from a psychoanalytic view point. It is intended to open up this area for re-consideration, rather than making an oracular statement. It may raise more questions than it answers. The paper falls into two parts. The first looks at ways of thinking about creativity and perversions, that is, it will explore the state or nature of knowledge used to conceptualise these issues. The latter section offers some thoughts arising from the first section, reflecting on some writing by Colm Toibin and David Malouf.

At first glance these two concepts do not seem to sit well together. Do they go together and is there a necessary coupling? In preparing this paper I found I had to find both a place in my mind, and literally some dedicated work area so that I could think about these umbrella concepts, or positions as I came to regard them. Both embrace diverse elements and might be thought of as reflecting shifting states of mind, rather than fixed hard wiring... possibly with a dynamic link between them.

Whether there is a necessary link between creativity and perversion is debatable. Dr M. Glasser who worked for forty years at the Portman Clinic attended by people with sexual dysfunction, expressed the view that 'homosexuals are creative because they are creative, not because they are homosexual.' My thought is rather to wonder about what are they creative, and whether that is specific to those with perverse characteristics.

I found myself wondering along the following lines: if a situation or state of perversity is similar in some degree to a situation of adversity, and if then the challenge or need is one of overcoming a 'hostile' or oppositional force, perhaps an element or spark of creativity is prompted by a 'new' defining of the perverse problem. The critical issue might be whether there is a wish to overcome the perversity, or whether there is a wish to submit to and perhaps revel in the perversity. My clinical work illuminates and informs this notion.

As a psychoanalyst my central concern is to understand what happens to and between objects in the internal representational world of my patients... what generates these actions and transactions which structure mental life. In both perversions and creativity we have to understand that much is being transacted in this internal object relation world. My understanding is informed by transference and countertransference events in clinical work.

I have an analytic interest in the processes of naming and writing, in what is written, and why it is written. Do we need fiction which like dreams represent aspects of the internal world? Are written stories simply another form of reality, another part of our world, another form of truth? Perhaps what is written is a way of forging a communication within the writer with other less conscious aspects of the self... perhaps a re-ordering, a re-viewing, or metabolising of experience or understanding? This has some bearing on how we conceptualise what 'stories' our patients bring us in each session. Not fictional stories but graphic accounts of what lies in their interior landscape... far from fictions.

While I have no formal teaching in critical theory, or in cultural studies I want to move to thinking about links between analytic ideas, gender theory, and creativity and perversion as understood within these different and conflicting frameworks. On the surface this is not an easy task as so much of analytic thinking might be considered to be fixed within a phallogocentric framework, dependent on the concept of the nuclear family with a patriarchal focus. This seems to run counter to contemporary gender theorising, and fits better with turn of the century thinking about family and gender roles.

Perhaps we have to recognise and review the way sexuality and instinct are contextualised and thought about, since these concepts comprise the premise behind 'analytic knowledge'.

The classical psychoanalytic framework rest on a developmental view of maturation from infancy to adulthood, encompassing the transitions from infantile polymorphous perverse sexuality through to adult sexual identity, based on identifications with parents, as parents of children.

However as Carolyn Stack points out, 'the moment we posit a linear sequence of development we make choices about normality and deviance'. There is an implicit pathologising of differences within the classic psychoanalytic model ensconced in an Essentialist configuration of sexual identity.

It is a fact that to elaborate the established psychoanalytic view immediately brings to light the normative view of sexual identity, pushing in favour of normalising heterosexuality and pathologising other sexual identities. This expresses the friction between the Essentialist and the Social Constructionist positions. These terms may need clarification.

'In terms of sexual orientation, the Essentialist view holds that there are universal (perhaps biological) characteristics common to all people of a given sexual orientation, constant across eras and cultures. The opposing view known as Social Constructionism, holds that our concepts of sexual identity are shaped by the society we live in, and that people cannot be accurately classified using the concepts of another society, even if the behaviours seem similar... Constructionists believe that the meaning attached to different attractions is culturally specific. In a society in which a binary conception of sex and gender did not exist, people might not feel the need to classify themselves according to the sex/gender to which they are attracted'. (Highleyman, 1995)

This Constructionist position opens the way to the Deconstructionist defence against the analytic perspective which follows more closely to the Essentialist position. Can the fact of sexuality in society as an imperative instinct be deconstructed away? (Perhaps this has to take account of how we view 'truth' in the analytic frame work. As David Bell pointed out in his recent paper, analysts are concerned with ontological issues and do not go along with the relativism of the post modern position, which eschews 'truth' in any singular dimension.)

However this revision of the heteronormative position has perhaps led to the elaboration of Queer Theory, which looks at gay and lesbian frameworks within which identities can be formed and situated, challenging meanings previously linked to binary modes of sexual definition, and the traditional norms of gender. Queer Theory depends on a decentralising of gender as the organising structure of eroticism. This idea that 'sexual identity, desire, performance and conscious and unconscious fantasy are all culturally mediated, socially constructed, and politically freighted is central to Queer Theory.' (Stack , p 80) Thus Queer Theory (Jagose) offers a critique of the idea of any fixed or stable sexual identity: it tends to figure identity as in-process or non-Essential, and therefore sits within the postmodern framework, rather than the modernist base of psychoanalysis.

'If we unhook gender from anatomy, and parental images from gender and desire from reproduction, we are freer to imagine psychic possibilities extending beyond the boundaries that traditional relationists offer us'. (Stack, p.83)

That is a very big shift from the normative, instinct based, gendered view of sexual identity.

Such a shift upsets the view taken by analysts where the notion of linear development is the norm and other sexual identities are viewed as regression to, or a fixation at a pregenital level of functioning. Such a contrary view has been seen as destabilising the supposition of heteronormative sexuality with its attendant conscious and unconscious structures which determine behaviour. Perhaps however, such a destabilising may allow for the emergence of what has not yet been thought. How else can there be something new created?

Psychoanalysts may find a difficulty here in not seeing this as an abrogation of psychic reality, substituting other deconstructed realities in its place. These substitutions are sometimes viewed as part of a neurosis or psychosis. It is viewed as a disjunction with reality, one which attempts to normalize a denial of biological reality, and so ablates or deflects heterosexuality. I think it comes down to the question as to whether biological and psychic realities can be equated.

That perversions have acquired a pejorative aura is without question. Paedophilia, bestiality, sado-masochism are not behaviours society condones. I noted on the cover of Chassegeut-Smirgel's book *Creativity and Perversion* an illustration of an angel descending head first down a ladder in to Hell, I presumed. Later, that image brought to mind Milton's *Paradise Lost* where Satan is pushed over the edge to a place where he and his revolutionaries built a palace called Pandemonium, with pillars of death, chaos and sin. When I thought some more about this Christian theological writing I wondered if it is linked with Bion's notion of K and -K and the capacity/incapacity which allows psychic truth in therapy to be won or destroyed. This position underlies the psychoanalytic work of contemporary Kleinian analysts such as Betty Joseph, Edna O'Shaughnessy, Steiner and others whose writings focus on perversions of experience and psychic truth. Here perversion is understood to be more to do with states of mind, and internal object relations than with sexual behaviour per se. Meltzer in particular writes from this reference point, in his book *Sexual States of Mind*.

The psychoanalytic understanding of sexual development and identity adheres to the centrality of instinct theory, to the fact and fate of the Oedipal conflict, along with notions of sublimation, reparation, identification processes and the significant role of narcissism. It is apparent that sexual prejudices about sexual identity may arise from a felt narcissistic injury when the wish that others be just like 'us' are not met with. Such prejudices are the necessary base of defensive positions which might threaten our own sexual identity.

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We need to consider what is meant by the notion of creating and creativity. Creativity has been defined as the need 'form, shape, originate, to give existence to, to renew, to re-construct, to give new form or character, to form out of nothing.' There is a double emphasis: the making of something new; and the renewal or reconstruction of something that has gone before.

Two basic analytic pieces of knowledge are implied in this sense of creativity.

The first refers to Freud's paper on *Two Principles of Mental Functioning* with the gradual establishment of the reality principle over the earlier pleasure principle which structures early infantile being. This is connected with the later Kleinian elaboration of the nature and function of phantasy, and later with the role of infantile phantasy. The work of the ego psychologists, and the development of defence structures depend on this paper of Freud.

The second comes from the work of Klein and her followers with the development of the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position. These concepts have been used by Kofosky Sedgwick in her writings on performativity in *Queer Theory*. These positions are central to work by Hanna Segal in her literary analyses of the writing of Golding, and Salman Rushdie. The work of mourning and reparation is implicit in her thinking about creativity. For Klein and Segal creativity lies in the restoration of the lost or ruined object. This restored object can then be internalised in a restored form, and so be re-established in the ego which is then strengthened. This takes place initially in the earliest of primary object relationships, both of part and whole objects.

Whether this notion which is central to Kleinian thinking is the whole story is questioned by Marion Milner. Mary Twyman writes about Milner as a writer, artist and psychoanalyst, 'Marion makes an original contribution to the analytic controversy about whether psychic creativity seeks above all to preserve, to re-create the lost object, although this function is present. For Marion it was secondary. The artist's fundamental activity goes beyond the lost object to the primary aim of creating what has never been, by means of newly achieved powers of perception.' (Twyman, 2001)

I find myself increasingly in sympathy with this viewpoint, which allows for a 'new' creation whose existence may overcome some more obstructed or arid state of mind. These observations by Milner are supported by the psychotherapeutic work of Susan Kolodny whose case studies which explore creativity and its inhibitions in artists and writers.

This leads into the question of creativity in the perversions. We have to understand that the various perversions each imply a different and complex set of object relationships which are enacted in the perverse symptom or behaviour, both in mental transactions and actions between individuals in the external world.

Hinshelwood provides a basic psychoanalytic definition of perversions when he writes of perversions as 'the construction of a different reality which would disavow or obstruct identification with the sexuality of the same sexed parent.' It is a very serious matter to interfere with reality, yet Freud did just that as he established new ways of thinking at the turn of the century, at a time of social political and economic upheaval. If we cannot bear such shifts in thinking, how can knowledge grow?

Laplanche and Pontalis support Hinshelwood, specifically including homosexuality, fetishism, transvestism, voyeurism, exhibitionism and sado-masochism. 'In a more comprehensive sense perversion connotes the whole psychosexual behaviour that accompanies such atypical means of obtaining sexual pleasure.' Again a heteronormative sexual position is implied.

These definitions focus on the manifest sexual behaviours. Contemporary psychoanalysts are concerned also with perverse states of mind and feeling which are directed towards damaging a good and creative conjunction in work and understanding. Thus we have the sexual behavioural perversions and the concept of perverse object relationships, which may or may not include overt behavioural sexual perversion.

It can be said that psychoanalysis has moved from seeing perversion as a defence against instinctual derivatives to seeing it as a defence against object relationships. It reflects a shift in the conceptualisation of sexuality in general. Freud's paradigm for the sexual drive can be reconceived in terms of source, aim, and quality of relatedness to Object; a move away from searching the symptom to looking at how relationships are established and enacted.

Psychoanalysis places great significance on early infantile experience and the effect and nature of the maternal-paternal presence. It is this which affords the medium for later development of mind, body and spirit. Infant observation and child analysis suggest that this development follows a linear sequence. Sometimes there is fixation, or regression, or a fracturing of the component instincts, rather than their integration into mature adult sexuality with reproduction being the biological expression of this process and development through identification.

However, generativity can be seen to take other forms where sublimation is at work is expressing instinctual needs, particularly in some creative and artistic forms. This is not exclusive to so called perverts. 'Homosexuals are creative because they are creative'. It does not answer the question about what form their creativity takes, or to what extent the activity succeeds in being creative, or what that is intended to achieve.

It is possible in part to differentiate between different forms of perversion. On the one hand one might think of sado-masochism as having much more to do with the death instinct, since the activities entail cruelty, control, contempt and triumph, a manic edifice where the object is demeaned into near extinction. This appears to be in contrast with the role of the life instinct and sublimation in the creative arts which aim to new expression, rather than a simple enactment of the perverse impulse. To what extent the aim is achieved is sometimes a matter of degree.

Homosexual choices may reflect an attack on the sexual parental couple, in an effort to lay claim to the exclusive possession of that parent or parent equivalent. Homosexual intercourse is made the same as heterosexual intercourse, an equivalence which denies differences. Perhaps this can be taken to an extreme point where the whole notion of gender and differences become impossible to think about, hence the paper by Dyess and Dean 'Gender: the impossibility of meaning,' in which they read gender in terms of the Lacanian Real.

Chasseguet-Smirgel points to pseudo creativity in perversions. I think of it not so much as pseudo, as reflecting a degree of failure in creativity where idealisation of destructiveness may hold sway. Such a state might be illustrated by the plight of a man given to both sado-masochistic behaviours and cross dressing. Coming out of a childhood of chilling loss, brutality and sexual abuse he developed what could be thought of as a perversion. He understood that he was trying to be and relate to his impoverished and lost mother, albeit in a vampish version of cross dressing, interspersed with sado-masochistic sexualised activities with an idealised and compliant woman. This pattern of compulsive behaviour relieved his sexual needs but did not relieve his distressed state of mind which was filled with a terrible depression, gathered around a childhood of loss, deprivation, and abuse and an absence filled with very bad elements. The destructiveness of his perversion lay in the constriction of his own internal world and external life, with damaged relationships with his wife and children. He remained the lost and abused child.

Anal sadistic eroticism and the attached level of functioning is seen in those patients who oscillate between being caught between a cruel state of sexualised anal eroticism and valiant moves towards the depressive position. Here there is an oscillation between anal sadistic attacks which destroy and disfigure felt experience, and the experience of concern and care in the relationship. This is accompanied by triumphant scorn where the analytic work is felt to be a bag of shit for which the analyst should apologise since the analysis brings this understanding. It is relevant to the perverse transference that the repetitive escalation of this state of mind culminates in the equivalent of ejaculate in the consulting room. It is noteworthy that this escalation has a masturbatory quality to it, salaciously and consciously enjoyed in deforming and disfiguring the face of the analyst. Each time this trajectory is enacted the bridge to the depressive concerns is approached and aborted as the patient returns to the land of the Rectal Dweller. The addictive quality of the destructiveness of this pattern of mental transactions is related to the death instinct with its murderous intent. Its consequence was a paranoid damaging of stable and caring relationships. This formed a particular and painful transference and counter transference and impaired the analytic work.

Such configurations raise a question as to whether, or to what extent perversions are fixed entities, or are they inherently unstable, given to endless repetition obstructing a different kind of relating, which might include helplessness, dependency and need. This can be understood to be linked to obsessional defences.

Masud Khan writes, perhaps too harshly and too categorically, 'There are those that fuck from desire and those that fuck from intent. The latter are perverts... Intent by definition implies the exercise of will and power to achieve its ends, whereas desire entails mutuality and reciprocity for its gratification.' (p.197) This question of power in sexuality and sexual relating is a major issue. An idea related to that of Masud Khan appears in the thinking of Birkstead-Breen when she makes a differentiation between the penis-as-link, and the penis as omnipotent phallus. Again the nature of object relationships comes to the fore.

To return to the question of what it is that the so-called perverts create. It has been said that phallic omnipotence governed Leonardo da Vinci's relationship with his young boy assistants. In his art he can be seen to be seeking the mother in nature and making reparation to her in it, finding there a creative space.

A similar notion is put forward by David Sylvester (1997) an art historian and critic, writing about Francis Bacon, 'Francis Bacon did all these pictures of figures with open mouths, possibly shrieking, which were based on the famous still of the nanny in the Odessa Steppes sequence of Einstein's film, 'Battleship Potemkin'. Francis Bacon said that there was one human cry even more remarkable for him, the cry of the women in 'the Massacre of the Innocents' by Poussin. Now one of the women was a mother and the other was a Nanny. In both cases the woman was crying at the threat to a child's life by the action of the troops. Bacon was so attached to his nanny that she was still living with him when she was old, until she died at eighty. Francis came from a military family and he loathed his father. When you think of classical analysis it is so obvious why Bacon had been obsessively painting that image. It is deeply rooted in his life and his history....'

Bacon sought repeatedly to formulate and find again the face that anguished to protect him.

In this context we can consider the book *The Blackwater Lightship* by Colm Toibin.

On the surface this book describes the impact on a family of the dying from AIDS of one of its members Declan, a grown homosexual man. Behind this narrative is a range of previously unexplored experience following the rapid illness and death of the father of this man. Although placed with their grandparents during their father's illness, Declan and his sister suffered silence, separation, and evasion of the truth as the mother struggled to do what she could not do, that is to manage her own personal loss and grief. Declan expresses his aloneness in his nightmares of that time, 'I'm small, I'm tiny, like the smallest things, and everything is huge and I am floating'.

When Declan becomes terminally ill he asks to go to his grandmother where he and his sister lived while their father was dying. Declan says, yes, the house gives him the creeps, but he needs these creeps. It becomes clear that he had internal work to do in this house before dying, work that was of the past and the present.

Now the grandmother is the embodiment of what the children lacked at that earlier time; she provides for the whole family and Declan's gay friends in every practical and emotionally present way.

These dying days are a screen on which a range of different personal and sexual relationships are described: those between the gay men and their partners; between the estranged mother and her children; between the new heterosexual generation of the sister and her husband and children. Included are two levels of observers: the critical neighbours, looking to spy and judge, and two resident cats, terrified of anything that sounds different, taking as the grandmother says 'a dim view of you lot'. They are the disembodied, puzzled and fearful onlookers who in the end bolt, but not before smashing a few treasured items of the past.

This grandmother now is hard rock resilience itself: in recent times she equips her house with a deep freeze, central heating; she learns to drive; agrees to the re-designing of her house, and acquires a flick knife to deal with intruders. She is concerned to live her life with her eyes and sensibilities wide open. Given to life as she is, she nevertheless believes 'Life is a vale of tears and there is nothing we can do about it.'

In the background are the heterosexual couples each encapsulated in their own way: the sister, her husband and their children cut off from the family until this point; the past parental couple, lost in death of father. Even the two local lighthouses, Tuskar and Blackwater Lightship are seen to be in a mating partnership, until the latter was taken out of commission.

There is an urgency in all the family members to revisit this house and its landscape. Visits to the nearby strand carry powerful childhood memories. Now it offers a different space and position for talking, away from the experiences within the house.

The narrative allows us to see a range of relationships and conversations within them. These include the loving heterosexual couples; and the homosexual men and their partners where the relationships range from the transitory couplings of Larry, to the deep relationship between Paul, and his French partner. This relationship is quite profound; to the sister, it 'sounds like true love'. We see this relationship as it evolves and culminates in a marriage conducted by the catholic priest, followed by a feast provided by the priest's housekeeper. Paul's partner needed this marriage to deal with his terror of being abandoned.

There is a re-working in detail of the loss of the father to both children. The impact of the months of silence is opened up so that different feelings and changed perceptions can be poured into that silence. A new relationship is created between the mother and Declan's sister. It is not a return to the old relationship of childhood. It can only happen because of new perceptions which include real and shared psychic pain which previously would have been denied in a false reconciliation.

For Declan there is a different reconnection effected with his mother. At the point of his greatest pain and most acute decline, he is heard to mutter, 'Mammy, Mammy, help me Mammy.' His carer Paul says, 'He's been wanting to say that for a very long time, or something like that. It will be a very big relief to him'.

The new relationships coalesce with the mother and sister singing an old lullaby to Declan as the mother cradles him during his final journey to hospital. The mother and daughter are then to go together to the

daughter's house for the first time; and in that setting the mother will, for the first time meet her son-in-law and her two grandsons. The transgenerational links are reshaped and reforged to make a new form.

Perhaps my prejudice, arising from my own cultural and heterosexual identity inclines me to see this novel as a masterpiece because the author, himself homosexual, writes comprehensively about internal realities which have to be assimilated: realities of silence, separation, absence filled with hatred and terror, loss and estrangement. He allows a creative working through of old and present griefs, a relinquishing of old convictions to create something new in which kinship ties are rebalanced, and relationships are experienced anew, homosexual and heterosexual. Toibin has not drawn back from the conflict about doing the work in the writing, or from where it led him, or from the fears and pleasures it aroused nor from the end result for what it signified to him.

It is worth noting that Toibin later offers us further insights into the lives, creativity and object relationships of gay artists and writers in his recent book *Love in a Dark Time*.

I feel that in his novel *Blackwater Lightship* Toibin achieves or demonstrates a more creative apprehension of sexual experience and identity than say, the short story by David Malouf *Southern Skies*. This story is about the induction of a young man into homosexual experience by his professor. It offers an enactment but not a creative shift. It is an offering or a theme pervading much of Malouf's writing which often seems to end in a fading away with no conclusion except perhaps leaving a lead character facing again a terrible desolation. I think here of *An Imaginary Life* where the wild boy is sought by Ovid in his cold place of exile. But in the end, Ovid is left alone to die in alienation. A similar theme seems to run through *Remembering Babylon* where the lost/found boy Gemmey ultimately fades away, perhaps to be massacred. Perhaps both these writers struggle with the essential loneliness and bareness of the perverse position in which relationships are to some extent impaired or limited, though Toibin might see that differently. He gathers in experience of a different kind than does Malouf. One might have to ask whether the preference in this instance for Toibin is structured by the familiarity and normalisation of the family unit which runs through his novel.

Perhaps that leads back to the notion of the link between perversion and creativity, that creativity appeals because it has to do with life and perversion seems to turn away from a particular kind of life that our society inclines us to value and judge favourable. Although Toibin is homosexual he is more on the side of creativity than perversion in its destructive sense.

To come back to the issue of creating: It is the work of making something manifest, lifting it out of the hidden feared or lost place, to shape it up, give it form, and so to apprehend it in anew or different form, or a new and changed position, so to take possession of it in such a way that there is an integration and not a repudiation of conflicts. Perhaps this is rather like the way a gifted actor will offer a different experience of a given role each time he enacts it, in such a way that the onlooker glimpses something of the felt central Object in that role. Does the depressive position allow for the creation of something new, or is it simply referring to a mending of something old, damaged or broken.?

I think as reader and viewers of creative work we are offered such flashes of newly created experience each time we read or look again.

Analysts must search out such moments to use our minds in creative conjunction with what our patients privilege us to sense and work with. In that sense I incline more to Marion Milner's view of what creativity is about, a push to the new and an opening of those possibilities.

Perversion does not prevent creativity. It might be said that because of the nature of the object relationships there is a push towards re-creation and new creations which apprehend a different reality. Maybe this is what Toibin searches out, or least explores ... a new defining of the perverse problem. Certainly there is a dynamic link between the perversion and the creativity to which it may lead. Perhaps it has something to do with the breaking of an old entrenched frame in a lurch towards the making of something new. Perhaps that is what creativity is about, and to that extent it is different from replication, restoration and repetition via unchanged identifications which may function as enclaves or retreats.

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