

THE CHRISTOPHER BOLLAS CONFERENCE ON FREE ASSOCIATION

Sponsored by the Toronto Psychoanalytic Association

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Lecture Notes by Leah Lucas

This is about how to listen to patients differently. Evolution is not necessarily progression of thought. When we return to earlier Freudian thinking we realize just how radical a discovery psychoanalysis was as an understanding of object relations. It was Freud who brought the dream back into the heart of Western consciousness. The dream fulfills an unconscious need. Freud discovered a relationship where a person could daily report their dreams to an other. This was a huge accomplishment for the human race. Freud found the solution to his patient's dilemmas was to lie down on the couch, relax, and say what comes to mind. This was an odd way to solve a problem. It was not solution oriented. The root to unconscious knowledge was through a relaxed way of attention.

We all have emotional experiences during the day, which compete for representation in dreams. Freud regarded dreaming as the most sophisticated form of thinking. During our day we are unconsciously perceiving and organizing our experiences and our lives. The aim of free association is to let somebody move from one idea to the next. Material is driven by the client's unconscious. With theory, here is a danger of abstraction, quasi-theological constructs. In the quiet we are left to ourselves. We all free associate; it is a natural way of thinking. Two figures can engage in this object relation. It will not occur if the analyst is too talkative or hijacks the hour. There is the concept of a larger secret to be revealed. Freud believed if a person freely talked they will go on to many things, leaps, chain of ideas. If allowed to speak long enough you discover a line of thought in a chain of ideas, a logic sequence. The classical group of psychoanalysts has abandoned this very core of Freud's practice. Ego psychologists made an error in

seeing forms of perception through psychic models of the mind. We must go back to the one way Freud saw unconscious communication. The value is in discovering forgotten material. Everyday human life is the bearer of great significance. It is where found meaning resides. In order to study the past one must look at everyday life. It is in the apparently irrelevant and trivial that one finds meaning. The analyst surrenders himself to his own unconscious mentation. He must not try to fix anything, but to catch the drift of the patient's unconscious with his own unconscious. The engine of psychoanalysis is unconscious communication between analyst and the patient's unconscious.

If you relax and listen, you will discover a tissue, a chain of thought, it is meditative, without ambition. You must trust that your unconscious mind will perceive a pattern. Certain things patients' say will strike us, more often than other things. You can echo the word, repeat, active echoing their word, not yours. It may move or puzzle you, so have sincerity in questioning the word. The analyst can't eradicate curiosity. The analysand may have a spontaneous and new arrival of fresh material if the analyst is the receptive unconscious other to receptive unconscious thinking. If the analyst is out of touch with the patient's flow, material will stop.

Christopher Bollas in studying therapy sessions in Sweden, Germany and Switzerland discovered that when a patient asks a question the next thing they talk about is the answer to their question. Listen to what they say and don't step in. People will make statements, which are actually questions then follow it with their own answer. This establishes an emphasis on the patient's material; the answer does not come from us. With Freud's culture there was a widespread belief in the concept of the unconscious. Now there is not that widespread belief. People in contemporary Western culture no longer believe in the unconscious. One aspect of the clinical task is to show patients how they think of their unconscious

using their own material to do this. People have contempt for the concept of their unconscious. Large parts of the psyche have disappeared. Analysts have to go back to Freud's way of thinking, rediscover a relation to the unconscious.

Be free to be one's own type of therapist. Go back to Freud's Interpretation of Dreams. His theory of the Unconscious is highly sophisticated and reveals an unconscious ego. The unconscious bypasses the preconscious in communicating to another's unconscious. Listening is an ongoing musical score.

For Freud, every word uttered is significant. Intersecting lines would come together in a nodal compact moment. Musical thinking is similar to Freud's concept of the unconscious. There is a type of meshwork, absurd to consciously comprehend, mental correlate to the brain, one cannot see the brain. But it gives us the means to help a patient discover how their unconscious thinking operates. It is efficacious in healing of the self. There is an overrating of newfound discoveries in psychology. Better to go back to Freud who was a radical, revolutionary thinker and re-read him. We must get it back stronger the long-term work and reintroduce the radical ideal of psychoanalysis in contemporary culture. We are custodians of the self's discovery of the self.

We talk to ourselves, there is always an inner dialogue going on. Freud made possible to have this conversation with the other. Listen to the patient's so they can hear us hear their unconscious speaking. Search for the other to speak the dream. The primitive survival of the species depends upon it. We cease to exist if we cannot experience information from unconscious processes. We require the other to mirror back the dream. Thirty-six thousand years ago, man represented cave paintings of dream animals. Freud is disconcertingly radical. Contemporary intersubjectivity is what two people think of each other on a conscious level. How much does a writer know in the process of creation? How much do we really know

about each other? Who is speaking to whom about what and how? Who is the analyst in the transference? We shift unconsciously in our technique in many categories. How is attunement efficacious in change? It indicates to the patient that a truly receptive unconscious of other leads to far more information and awareness. One makes more transformational interpretations at greater depth that lead to changes in the self. The patient has to create their own analysis; movement of character is a separate category. The amount of information is greater, meaningful lucidity about the client's central character problem is mutually informed. One is impressed by the patients' actions, movements words lending to multiple ways of working with any person. We have lost the core, which means deep trouble; we must rely on our unconscious intuition.

There is a distinction between unconscious content and unconscious form. Recognition leads to unconscious knowledge and growth. Pursuing several issues simultaneously leads to psychic growth. Think of ourselves as a form, we have different effects upon others. We are being celebrated, allowed to make use of as the object. I know the feeling I have inside me when I am with you but I cannot describe the you that I know. Who is this person as an idiom? We don't ever really know the other. It is categorically impossible to know our form as being and the way we affect one another. We are indescribable to one another; a great failed effort gives the feeling of that character.

My analysands orchestrate me in a certain sort of way - timbre, emphasis, intensity. As a form of thinking, when you write, neurologically different parts of the brain are activated. The same in analysis, our part in the world evolution. It is up to the patient to let us know where the emphasis is - some are like poets, painters, writers. As a culture we don't believe in the unconscious. Neuroscience is a return to theory of the procedural unconscious, the unconscious as a form of intelligence rather than the repressed unconscious. When did western society turn

away interest in the internal world? World War Two led to a more commodified world and self.

Patients consciously want suggestions as to how to improve their lives. One needs to help them to just talk. Explain the method, that I am thinking, that it takes me quite a while to get to know you. Explain how I work, they are frustrated and have to wait. I can't manufacture something just for production. Some people absolutely have to have a problem. We are not really talking about the same thing; it is actually different each time. It is a way of beginning the session. In many sectors, from the analytic self, from where we make interpretations, we need to feel free to invent an entirely different therapy for each patient. Part of an ancient consciousness is seeking to reassert itself.

Human curiosity is vital. The Socratic method is valuable as it objectified a form of thinking. Keep open the right question. Molehills are where we hide our mountains. Parents, not children suffer from ADD. They need an analyst to contain them.

ON DEPRESSION

Bollas' recent book Dark End Of The Tunnel is a five-chapter novella on depression. We no longer have any time for the human mind. On a cultural level it is a form of ethnic cleansing, a move to far shallower treatments. Depression is a complex series of mental activities. There is never one source of a depression. It is flawed to type one person who is. The intellect of the Americans is to destroy the life of the mind. There is not an adequate examination of the proliferation of medication. The cumulative effect of solving a problem through ingesting a pill is that the self has got to be rid of. No thought is given to signs of the self. A cultural attack on the human mind abounds. People have to start to speak up and address

it. There is a point where the collective movement is irreversible and will have to go to its own horrifying conclusion. People are overwhelmed and do not take a political position. My world is getting larger with all the therapists I know personally. DSM Four's description of depression is brilliant but it is not psychoanalysis. It has its own identity and way of understanding. I have always been on the outside of The Institution. New generations of younger people will become disenfranchised. President George Bush is an icon of stupidity – eradication of complexity is the political ethos of all countries of the Western world. Complexity of the mind or society is unpopular. Overuse of psychotropic medication in the U.S. is a legal ethical code, a wish to not think about the thoughts on our mind. It has to do with the mentality behind the approach to the mind. If the cause is in the brain, the symptom has no meaning. We are in the Dark Ages in mindless psychiatry. People are afraid to speak up and address the issue. When did you first get depressed? Questions are not being asked.

FREE ASSOCIATION

There are limitations to psychoanalysis when a patient cannot free associate. Get them to tell you what they did right that day. They need the right matrix. In thirty years of practice I have been seeing people in breakdown. Three weeks is the longest breakdown a patient had. In a breakdown there are no drugs as I relax with a highly disturbed person. Six or seven times in thirty years I needed to do a four-day marathon. Otto Will at Austen Riggs does the same thing. He never medicated anyone. If you are willing to see a patient through a breakdown it reduces your anxiety. But I have to spend two sessions a day, seven days a week with them. We are limited in what we are prepared to do. It is legal and ethical to do this. D.W. Winnicott and Micheal Balint will do this. Capture them before they decompensate, don't wait until it is psychically too late.

Category shifts are perceived between brain and mind. Educated people feel entitled to drugs. The effect of SSRI medication on a psychoanalysis is a cultural eradication of internal mental life. Drugs are unlikely to succeed as people rediscover that talking to another always helps. We need people to go on television and appear in public and speak up about these important issues.

British society is 80% non-medical and one of the most culturally diverse. The Lacanian movement is the most intellectually inspiring movement. We need people from all disciplines to be in the media, training for psychoanalysis must not become too expensive. We are on the margins, too important to disappear. The Austin Riggs Centre in the United States was on the front page of the New York Times, arguing against long-term psychotropic medication. That kind of clinic is thriving. Chestnut Lodge in the U.S. is still successful. We prescribe medication for ourselves, not really for them, but to make our work easier. There is an alarming decline in analysts of psychodynamic understanding.

I refuse to accept the departure of the unconscious. We must be dedicated to furthering the Freudian process, his great intellect and erudition - humorous, engaging, evocative. Something from here returns to us. The unconscious always surprises us.

Note: These are my transcribed lecture notes from Christopher Bollas' presentation on Free Association. Please excuse any inconsistencies from the audiotape. I have made my best effort to be faithful to his words and implied meanings.

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