

some psychiatric conditions in which the mental apparatus is fundamentally damaged, such as autism and schizophrenia? Were they, in some way, too rational?

Debate about these and other points with the speakers had only just begun when the conference had to end. As always, philosophy had raised questions rather than settled them but most of the

audience seemed sufficiently hooked on ratiocination to appear to be well satisfied even so.

Further reading

- GLOVER, J. (1988) I: *The Philosophy and Psychology of Personal Identity*. London: Allen Lane.
 HARRE, R. (1983) *Personal Being*. Oxford: Blackwells.
 — (in press) *Pronouns and People*.

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Speculations!*

“If you don’t exaggerate what is the point of talking?”

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‘Speculations!’ was the Freud Museum’s first international conference and is part of a series of discussions on social, cultural and historical aspects of psychoanalysis known as the Freud Museum Public Programme.

The speakers were largely practising analysts, including several American and European Professors of French, English and Philosophy. The participants were usually either student or professional psychotherapists with a sprinkling of art historians and English literature academics. Thus the stage was set for talks on subjects like ‘Lust’, ‘Love: Between Passion and Civility’, ‘Silence’, ‘Autonomy’ and the politics of Psychoanalysis. These subjects reflected the stated aim of the conference – to explore the impact of psychoanalysis on wider culture. It was claimed that the disciplines which have been shifted from their grounds by psychoanalysis included psychology, sociology, women’s studies, anthropology and literary studies.

Perhaps it was therefore inevitable that the more clinically oriented practitioner would find much of the content verging on the obscure or irrelevant. The talk entitled ‘Anthropos phusei politikon zoon’ (‘Man is by nature a political animal’ – Aristotle), or Patient as Citizen, serves as a good example – with the complexity of its title signalling the un-understandability of its contents. Despite an intricate analysis of the political context of the analytic situation, the speaker James Hillman (Director of Studies at the Jung Institute, Zurich) deftly side-stepped the vexed issue of the inevitably political

*An international conference on psychoanalysis organised by the Freud Museum and held at the Institut Français on 26, 27 and 28 October 1990.

implications of patient selection for analysis being determined by the ability to pay. At other times of the conference similar impenetrable lines of discussion were sparked off by questions from the floor such as “How do you know that the silence you want to listen to is silence enough?”. In trying to explain why analysts fall asleep during therapy (an event I thought was restricted to Hollywood caricature) one speaker invoked the notion of ‘therapy as symptom’. This kind of discussion lends itself too easily to caricature itself.

It is interesting to note that in the final session of the conference, when a round table discussion ensued, the major preoccupation was the underlying nature of the psychoanalysis. “Which of the many disciplines that psychoanalysis is supposed to have influenced now ‘owns’ psychoanalysis?”, wondered the delegates. One is reminded of Thomas Carlyle’s comment, “Self-contemplation is infallibly the symptom of disease”.

This conference did explore many of the wider cultural implications of psychoanalysis in an entertaining and genuinely informative way, but in so doing it seemed to forget the clinical and scientific roots of psychoanalysis. Freud was a scientist but there were no scientists on the panel of speakers at this conference. Freud himself said, “The poets and philosophers before me have discovered the unconscious: I have discovered the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied”.

It would be a great pity of only 50 years after his death Freud’s deservedly profound impact on wider culture paradoxically led to psychoanalysis being stolen forever from the clinicians and scientists by the poets and philosophers.