

Discussion

Amanda Ravetz (AR): These two ways of looking clearly overlap but for me, (though it feels quite a tangle at this point!). Anybody can ask questions in a minute, but I'm going to start with one question: can you both say what you can take from the other person's way of understanding and what you can't take, what you have to leave?

Eystein Våpenstad (EV): If I should start, many things of course, I wrote down was something that the famous pianist, Keith Jarett once said, "I have to let my hands start the concert without me", that was my association. You mentioned positive psychology, that gives me bad vibes, I hope I have been able to show that reverie is also a very useful concept in rough situations, maybe that was my main object and maybe flow, it's not the best sensitising concept. For me at least, this is subjective, I'm more like rougherie, for me to point in the correct direction of what reverie can be, not only in psychotherapy, psychoanalysis but in life in general, we should not reserve reverie only for winning the Olympic medal or hurdles, it's also about living through difficult situations, maybe you said something about that?

Paul Stenner (PS): Yes, I don't want to be the representative of flow, in fact what I'm trying to do is take a critical distance from the concept of flow and put it in a broader picture foregrounding the idea of liminal experience, and when you foreground the idea of liminal experience, you put the emphasis on situations in which people become something other, become something else, so transformation becomes the key thing.

Now from my perspective, this is a very big set of questions which is why I tried to provide a big overview, so for example, I would agree with, there's nothing I disagree with about what you say, I would say psychoanalysis or the psychotherapies are one type of liminal affective technology with a specific historicity that emerged in a particular time and place, and that are in an interesting relationship with the other liminal affective technologies so right now, we're seeing a huge resurgence of interest in, for example, the use of things like art therapies and music therapies and so on and for me, the interesting question there becomes actually, these things seem to work better when they're not if you like framed within a therapeutic context because the therapeutic context is about restoring somebody to some sort of health, it's not about becoming something other, proximally, it can be about becoming something other and it should be about becoming something other but usually, when framed within the sort of regime of health, it's about restoring you to what you were previously so that you can get on with the world of daily life that Schutz talks about.

So for me, there's something about actually finding a place, a core place for the arts in particular, within our psychology, that our psychology needs the arts in a fundamental way and so that's what I'm trying to do in placing this in a bigger context, I don't think there's any disagreement at all between the, and I love this reverie/rougherie but as I tried to say, I would see this reverie/rougherie thing as proper to the ambivalent nature of any liminal transformation, which is always subject to a volatility whereby it can go either way and if it doesn't have that volatility, it's not a liminal situation but again, the liminal situation is emphasising becoming other, some form of transformation so the question becomes, what are we aiming to become?

AR: One more provocation I'll allow myself really quickly. Can you think of what you've been talking about as a liminal affective technology? Does that work for you or does it not work for you?

EV: I think it can work quite well for me, yes.

PS: Two things, first one of clarification, "rougherie", can you spell because I'm not

clear?

EV: Maybe I can show it to you afterwards. R-O-U-G-H-E-R-I-E.

Mike Anusas (MA): I was really intrigued by your discussion of music and damage and that process there, and I was wondering whether there was a connection with the movement/rocking like in angst but also the movement of [inaudible 00:27:44] so for me, having had a mother and father who held me and rubbed me, but also had [inaudible 00:27:51] intimate and I wondered is that a relationship to the music?

EV: Yes, absolutely. How we should say, that's the start of everything and the start of everything is this music, as I said, hope I said it, sometimes only one single note, one sound, one small touch of dance, maybe that's the way to say it, often working with children, they do not dance, they build something or they draw something or they just sit there hating me and then I suddenly out of this nowhere, get this feeling of dance, not that I actually see a concrete dance, ballet or just dance or something but it's not words, it's not enough to explain this but I usually think that it comes from very, very, very early, from Day 1 or maybe in-utero experiences, of rhythm, of breathing, of moving, of being alive.

PS: Just to clarify, going into that state is to find comfort or is that a sense that some people have an absence of that nurture?

EV: I will not speak of this as a rule, it can be both ways, with these children doing something which is not a dance at all and when I feel like this dance-like thing, it can be both comforting and chaotic and painful, and it can be in the opposite direction of what obviously seems to be going on in the room.

If I, not all the time but I hope maybe in 10% of the time, I don't make statistics of this but when I, transformation beyond that catastrophic change, when I come into this and start, I got it post reverie, start to understand, then it is extremely interesting if my feeling is the opposite of what is going on in the room.

PS: I think it's really interesting and I love this connection, obviously a primal connection to music with rhythm but I think one observation that I've had about the use of that sort of rhythmic technique in unstructured liminal situations, is that rhythms are ways of providing structure so it's as if when other forms of structure collapse, if you like, you have more primordial patterning or structuring devices that are available to you so even, for example, the rhythmic sobbing when you're absolutely distraught in a catastrophic moment, is better, if you like, than the abyss of no structure or like hysterical laughing is a structured, rhythmic, organic form and then we gradually build up our structures from that core and there's a lovely moment in that film, *The Cave Of Forgotten Dreams*, I don't know if you've seen this movie where they go into the Chauvez Caves and there's this moment where they're looking at the beautiful prehistoric cave art, primordial liminal affective technologies on the wall and they notice that they can hear their hearts beat and so they stop and the director says, "Let's listen to the heartbeat" and that idea that that might have actually been part of why these caves were used, why they chose really difficult to get to underground caverns where you'd have gone with some burning thing to, you know, to get in touch with the primordial beat of your own heart, as the guiding source of your becoming, if you like.

Rachel Genn (RG): I've just got something to say about the mind link, spontaneous liminal experience and the closed reverie analysis and it's something that Virginia Woolf says, it's in the quotes that I put in Dropbox, about what she's doing when she's piecing things back together in writing, "I hazard the explanation that a shock is at once in my case, followed by the desire for explaining, I feel that I've had a blow which is not as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life, it is or will become a revelation of some order, it's a token of some real thing behind appearances and I'll make it real by putting it into words."

So it kind of links your two explanations ...

PS: Beautiful. Can you send me that?

RG: There's a copy of all of these in the Dropbox.

PS: I think that's absolutely wonderful, particularly the distinction between appearance and reality and the idea of a shock that then provokes an intuition or an insight, that you use for the art form in order to assemble in a way that makes it clear to you, so that you can also then take that out there, so that other people can respond to it and resonate with what you've found in that art form.

I use this image of a dog leaping into some water at the beginning of this book on liminality and this was a meditation on one of Aesop's Fables, which is about a dog that goes to a still pond of water, and he's got a piece of meat in his mouth or her mouth, it depends on the version of the fable, looks and sees the reflection, drops the meat to grab the other one and obviously loses the meat.

And I think of this, if you like, the fable itself is a liminal affective technology, it's rendering in symbolic form, some really important intuition and I think there's always a superficial, moralistic level to those things like don't try to get things more than you should, know your limits but also I think there's this profound meditation on a shock of experience that jolts us into a state of consciousness, so literally the dog is not conscious, the dog is not self-conscious, is unable to recognise his own reflection as his own reflection and yet, it's precisely this disconfirmation experience is what jolts the dog and creates the possibility, were the dog able to bear it, of something like a flash or self-consciousness and that self-consciousness is precisely the distinction between appearance, the shimmering image of the meat in the water and reality, you cannot eat that shimmering image in the water.

So I think the Aesop's Fable also sums up what I think Virginia Woolf says, reiterates so beautifully in what you just said and I think that is the process of transforming an unstaged spontaneous liminal experience into a devised liminal experience, which symbolises it and enables you to hold that insight and to communicate that insight that you've learned through that experience.

RG: Yes, and it's not just flow through you ...

PS: Yes, not just shake yourself and go on! As the dog undoubtedly did!

Myna Trustram (MT): What comes to my mind sitting here in this boardroom, looking out at the sea is, I don't know if it's fact or story that Bion said for the beginning of that big important lecture he was giving, "I'm looking forward to hearing what I'm going to say" and I've always thought of that with a degree of awe, "Oh, so you haven't prepared what you're going to talk about?", but also comfort that in a way, you can't end the preparation and so hearing your talk has kind of clarified for me, why that phrase is so important, so thank you.

Anne Douglas (AD): It's just an observation that the way, if I've understood it correctly, the way you described reverie is taking an experience that's very raw and unprocessed and turning it into a communicable form, and I was wondering about the relationship between reverie and improvisation, where it seems to me there's almost the opposite dynamic, where the point of improvisation is to constitute the experience, to constitute the brain, not to process, I don't know whether that would be very early on in the conversation to bring this up, but I think there is a connection between reverie and improvisation, that in the way that you described it, it's almost the opposite.

EV: What should I say? Lately, I have been very interested in spontaneity and spontaneous ways of presenting myself as a therapist because in many psychoanalytic circles they say, "Don't be spontaneous. You are not allowed, Freud said no, you should sit and be very neutral and abstinent" and all this, and this doesn't work, not with children, not with adults, no way. So I had to improvise, I had to take a chance, as Bion also said, "Every psychoanalyst should be scared, really scared before every session" and what we are scared of is, "How will I be spontaneous in this session? Will I say something stupid? Will my reveries come too privately into the relationship? I have to survive" and maybe in this process of going along and trying to survive and

trying to clean up the mess I make, is very therapeutic and in this process, reverie, improvisation, spontaneity goes together, I think.

PS: It reminds me of a lovely line on method, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the poet, has a beautiful sort of social theoretical method and he sums it up by saying, "To open anew, the springing water, not to carry, bucket by bucket, and pour into the leaden cistern or to try and clarify or purify a sort of stagnant tank", so the method is to open anew the springing water.

That seems to be the gist of what improvisation is about, what you're trying to do is you're trying to produce a flow and you're recognising that if you're not producing a flow, you're poisoning yourself but we're all caught between, if you like, we've got to live our lives as well so you can't be improvising all the time, so there are spaces where improvisation is more suitable, spaces where things have been polished enough that you can just pass them around with great clarity and ease but spaces where actually it's much more difficult and you've got to actually work harder to know what it is that you want to say, as the other question began with.

So this is a lovely space precisely because we're invited not to have to know in advance, what it is that we want to say and I find that very nice but a bit scary!

Caroline Gatt (CG): I'm shaking because I'm really scared about what I'm going to try and say but I want to say it in a way which is not a critique and yet having a critique still allowed within it, so from what you're talking about, being sort of responsive to what's happening, either in a therapeutic session or in a liminal state, is very much about paying attention to what's sort of happening now, whatever that temporal place is and yet both of you have talked a really lot about primary foundations or proto, pre language and I'm wondering in what way can this interest in something primary, be not contradictory to that interest in this temporal now where everything really is, seems to be important?

EV: Developmentally, of course psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, I think is very much rooted in infant/mother interaction from the very start and it's here and now, immediate inter-subjective situation but of course, you can think of it as a metaphor and the meeting of minds or the meeting of therapist and patient cannot one to one be reduced to a mother/infant situation, it's more like inspiring in my work, thinking that or to say about improvisation, I can't decide that let's say 12 minutes into this session, I will start to improvise, then I do not improvise, what I try to do is what Bion says, without memory and desire, which is not possible but I enter into the session and try to, during the session find where am I in this particular moment? And sometimes I can do that, very often not, then I am as you said, in an ordinary way of living my life, earning my money to pay my bills and to look at "oh, 40 minutes of this session, urgh", but hopefully maybe the next session or the next one with this patient, I will find something in the here and now and this is, I think if I find something reverie, it is very much like what a good enough mother finds together with her infant.

PS: I think it's a wonderful question so well done, I mean for me, that really is a big question, the book I wrote before this was called Psychology Without Foundations, which I wrote with a colleague, precisely because I really don't like this idea of first principles or this idea of solid foundations because when you're dealing with something that is always moving, the last thing you want is a foundation, you want to think differently about it.

But I think what we're both getting at, I love the send me your pillow example of it, is a mode of communication and a mode of symbolism that is not reducible to, if you like, high level discursive symbolism and there's a sort of tyranny to high level discursive symbolism, which in fact floats upon and pre-supposes multiple layers below it, so the word principle is wrong, primary is wrong, there's so many layers and levels here that you don't start thinking of it as 1, 2 and 3, but nevertheless you can say, "What we cannot do is address this starting at the level of high level discursive symbolism".

AR: One more question before we break for lunch, Tim?

Tim Brennan (TB): It's not really a question, it's more an observation on where I think it's kind of getting to, which is beginning to talk about reverie in relation to finding something, like you just said, which is closer to an idea of epiphany really, manifestation and revelation, as opposed to a kind of suspended state in which the conditions of possibility have not been clarified as yet.

However, I would think that there would be a kind of flexibility, an interplay between the two, an iterative interplay between finding out and the suspension or contemplation of a cloud of unknowing, so the idea of God as a cloud of unknowing, it's not possible to comprehend, it's beyond comprehension.

So I'm just, it was more of an observation really, that to actually begin to define reverie as the process of clarification, it would be not quite accurate I don't think but that there would be this slippage between epiphany and reverie.

PS: Deleuze has this very nice concept that he never quite develops but gets from Bergson, a fabulation, which I think is another one we should probably put on the table next to this, Bergson gives the example of a lady in a lift who goes to enter a lift but the lift is not there, but she saves herself by hallucination, she hallucinates a lift attendant who pushes her away and he uses this as an example of a fabulation.

But I think it's really interesting to look at how many great art works, how many great novels, for example take Dostoyevsky's novels, for example, practically all of them are inspired by some dream or another and that dream is the high point of the novel and that you know, or Proust's liminal experiences that make up his great work.

These are exactly epiphanies that supply visions that give the novel almost in one go, that then is, I'm not saying it's easy to write it but there's an imagistic, visionary layer to these things which underpins the, if you like, the word play of the discursive that's absolutely crucial but I think fabulation is maybe a way to go for getting at that process, taking it from the "oh-oh" moment of shock which disorients you, to the "aha" moment of vision and understanding which you can then use to navigate the becoming that you're thrown into because what you've got doesn't work anymore.

EV: Most of the time, I think my reveries, they don't come into post-reverie or into a revelation or into understanding or these kind of things, they are just there and as I try to say, referring to Ogden, what is the main problem for a psychoanalyst is that you try to push these things away, you think "Oh this is my own stuff, this is noise, this is making me not being a proper analyst, I have to go back to my own analyst to repair myself", so this is the main point in this work, I think just to admit that they are there and welcome them and maybe 10%, 5% sometimes in some therapies, with some patients, you can use it, you can find some way further on which develops into some kind of understanding and therapeutic work.

TB: The problem that exists is the fact that when Morrissey asks for the pillow, the pillow still exists whereas when you meet the Buddha on the road nose to nose, you have to kill the Buddha because there's more things to learn beyond the Buddha. So, it's kind of interesting.

AR: Thank you both.