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Donald Moss

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DONALD MOSS

My work over the past twenty-five years focused first on homophobia, then on masculinity, and now on “the sexual aberrations.” The notion of “masquerade” informs all of that work: “homophobia as masquerade,” “masculinity as masquerade,” “sexual identity, aim and object as masquerade.”

I put “masquerade” in quotes here because I would also put its negative complement, “authenticity,” into quotes.

For me, then, clinical work takes place in a zone bounded by “masquerade” on one side and “authenticity” on the other. In this zone, the first-person-singular voice—both my patient’s and my own—is, in effect, placed in scare quotes. Neither voice is authentic or masquerading. Both, though, are psychoanalytic—no scare quotes added.

I think of this zone—the clinical environment—as analogous, say, to the one created by an accelerator in physics—an environment that makes possible the illumination of otherwise non-detectable—unstable—particles. These particles are the constitutive determinants of perceptible and stable entities—atoms there, and clinical voices here.

In the psychoanalytic situation, the quotidian first-person-singular voice is placed under extreme strain. Its stability is temporarily disrupted. It tends to be restored again, perhaps reconfigured, when it returns to its “natural” environments. There too, of course, stable first-person-singular voices undergo extreme

strains. But quotidian strains—unlike clinical ones—tend to enhance and affirm the voice's stability, to fortify the bonds of a familiar, and sincere, "self."

This experimental feature of the psychoanalytic situation—its peculiarity, its delimited disruptive premises—creates, for an analyst like myself, a predicament: how to speak, what to say, about the experimental findings from the clinical situation—very local, very unstable, and nearly imperceptible—in a non-experimental environment like this one. Non-clinical environments, with their presumption of stable, self-authorizing first-person voices, seem to offer no real place for the unstable, short-lived atomized voices found in the clinical setup.

And why should non-clinical environments provide such a place?

After all, we cannot proceed out here, outside the psychoanalytic situation, with scare quotes draped over and around everything we say. We have to take the first-person-singular voice more or less at face value. We have to trust it.

I do not mean to say, though, that as an analyst I do not trust the stable first-person-singular voice. Instead, I mean to say that I place that voice in conditions in which it basically tends to fall apart. I then work on the resulting fragments, trusting them, yes, while also, in effect, trusting the stable first-person voice from which they derive. The fragments warrant trust—no more or less—than does the stable voice. The problem, of course, is that the clinical analyst, then, is obliged to trust often incompatible entities.

The problem comes to a head regarding "identity"—sexual or otherwise—which, of course, I am also here putting into scare quotes. Freud famously read Daniel Schreber's sincere assertion—"They hate me"—as the stable outcome of its unstable component elements "I" "love" "him." In his—let's call it a "clinical"—reading, every element—subject, verb, and object—of the original stable sentence breaks apart. "They" breaks down into "I"; "hate" breaks down into "love"; "me" breaks down into "him." The result is paradigmatically psychoanalytic: two stable sentences, each declaring an "identity," one operative in ordinary

environments, the other only operative under the extreme conditions imposed by a "clinical" reading.

We must, then, if we are to take Freud at his "word" (quotes belong here as well), contend with, and accept, these two incompatible first-person-singular statements—They hate me/I love him. Not only does each statement—by and about Schreber—then, warrant scare quotes—neither is a masquerade/neither is authentic—but so also does Freud's writing.

We clinical analysts are obliged to treat it too as neither authentic nor a masquerade, but instead as an ostensibly stable text that might break down into volatile unstable components the moment we put it under the same kind of extreme strain undergone by Schreber's. Freud has not necessarily here made a stable discovery about the relationship between homosexual desire and paranoia. What he has done, though, is to have demonstrated the stable power of a clinically grounded psychoanalytic procedure—the power to decompose stable and molecular statements of identity into their constituent and unstable atoms and to then, momentarily, recombine those atoms into a new statement of identity—often one, as here with Schreber, that directly contradicts the original.

The result, in my view, is to disturb our every confidence in the molecular integrity of any first-person-singularly voiced statement of identity. The identity molecule—if and when placed under the severe conditions of psychoanalytic scrutiny—will likely dis-integrate, revealing its unstable atomic structure and its resultant susceptibility to reconfiguration.

Here is a representative moment from the analytic treatment of a sixty-year-old man this week. The bell rang twice during the session, indicating a delivery. I went to the door, received the package, and returned to my chair. My patient was clearly excited by the interruption. He went on, though, as if he were not. I pointed to his excitement. He said, "It's totally crazy. There's no point in saying anything about it. It's too crazy to try to say . . ." "What to do, then," I said, "now that it's come up?" The patient then spoke: "I heard someone out there say your name. I won-

dered who it was. A patient. A delivery guy. Was it a sexual thing? Something sexual out there. And then you came in with the package. What is it? Tell me. What do I have to do to get you to tell me? I'll crawl on the floor, I'll beg. Suck your penis. Crazy. I'm not going to talk about this. There's no point. I saw the package and thought: 'I want to curl up and be in the package.' Wrapped up. Safe. It's too crazy. Demeaning. Humiliating." The patient then stopped speaking for a few minutes. When he resumed, he spoke about concerns regarding his career and the possibility that his girlfriend may someday leave him. "This too is safe," I said. The patient had no obvious response and continued to speak about his career and his girlfriend until the session ended.

What can we say, psychoanalytically, about this man? We have to say, respecting his sincere first-person-singular voice, that he has a career, a girlfriend, and a quotidian life of subjective steadiness linked to consistent aims and consistent objects. And yet, we also have to say that when we put that subjective steadiness under strain, it, along with its aims and objects, comes apart, each element turning volatile and short-lived, but undeniably real—a transformed subject, new aims, a new object.

This man's quotidian identity, then, has no legitimate claim to either "authenticity" or "masquerade." The same can be said of the experimentally unleashed and unstable breakdown products of that identity: also neither authentic nor a masquerade.

Here is Freud again:

It has been brought to our notice that we have been in the habit of regarding the connection between the sexual drive and the sexual object as more intimate than it in fact is. Experience . . . has shown us that . . . the sexual instinct and the sexual object are merely soldered together . . . where the object appears to form part and parcel of drive. We are thus warned to loosen the bond that exists in our thoughts between drive and object. It seems probable that the sexual drive is in the first instance independent of its object; nor is its origin likely to be due to its object's attractions. (1905, 147–48)

And of this soldering, what can we say psychoanalytically about the soldered-together product—manifest/conscious sexual identity? We can say two things at once—one at the molecular level, the other at the atomic one. At the molecular level, we can, in effect, bear witness, hear, and, finally affirm the integrity of the first-person-singular voice. At the atomic level, we can also bear witness, once that voice is put under severe strain, to its breakdown products—its loosed subject, loosed verb, and loosed objects.

Another way of putting it: I think psychoanalysis has little beyond the commonsensical to offer about "identity" per se, but an enormous amount to offer about identity's constitutive elements—its atomic structure—and about the bonding forces by which those elements cohere: processes of identification, introjection, and internalization.

REFERENCES

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