

Report on the APPI two part clinical seminar by Geneviève Morel

Part 1: The inclination towards terror &

Part 2: Gender, between interpellation and classification

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Geneviève Morel's seminar to APPI was given in two parts. In the first part Morel looked at the motivation behind terrorism, posing the question: What is it that propels terrorists to carry out 'such extreme acts of violence in the name of God?'

Morel related the paper to a series of violent events that have taken place in France over the last decade. She highlighted the difficulty in speaking about these events and in identifying what these events were, why they were carried out and who the perpetrators were. She stated that there is 'a failure to name the danger, to designate its cause or to identify its actors'. This failure, according to Morel, stems from diplomacy and acts as a safeguard against stigmatisation. The term 'terrorist' Morel told the listeners, is seen as 'politically loaded' whilst labels such as 'Islamic fundamentalist' and 'fascist' appear to result in a hatred of Muslims causing what she terms 'Islamophobia'. Alongside this, Morel contends, the majority of members of any of these groups are not terrorists. And, if only a small number of these become terrorists then 'why don't we simply talk about criminalization?'

To explore these points, Morel presented a clinical case in the hope of moving towards a structural knowledge. The case, entitled 'Between violence and devotion' introduced the audience to 'Mr. X.', a subject whose identity is ambiguous in relation to whether he is a religious fundamentalist or a future terrorist. The case, according to Morel, helps to exemplify an absence in relation to the paternal law. For Morel, this absence can be filled by a divine calling whose strict practices and rituals replace all other laws. Morel uses the term "interpellation" to highlight the way the subject is addressed by this symbolic voice. The Jihad struggle, as a symbolic authority, interpellates the subject; this can be either in real life or through the internet. Here, the interpellation offers the subject an escape from the social and family complexes and, through a sacrifice of oneself, promises rebirth. These religious ideals replace one's superego and moral conscience with a demand for 'a sacrificial life in the name of God'. Morel compares this phenomenon to obsessional neurosis.

In a bid to understand the totalitarian structure of the group, Morel drew on Freud's theory of 'hypnotic suggestion', where the individual gives up his own ideal for that of the group, an ideal which is embodied by a leader. For Freud, the existence of a leader is necessary to represent the hidden ideal of the group member. In the Jihad struggle however, no such leader earthly leader exists and Morel asks 'can the ego ideal convert to these ideologies?'

She looked to the Islamic documentation aimed at indoctrinating new members to Jihad. The documents are widely available on the internet and contain instructions for bomb making as well as links to films depicting beheadings. These images of beheadings, Morel says, are enjoyed through the scopic drive and function to fill the subject's painful void, exposing the once repressed death drive. For Morel, Freud's leader is occupied by the image on the internet. This image creates a collusion between the scopic drive (which fascinates) and the ego ideal, resulting in the dissolution of one's own ego ideal. Morel says that it is this collusion between the ego ideal and the scopic ideal that characterises the hypnotic indoctrination of these regimes. She says that this fantasmatic space blurs the real horror of the situation enabling the subject to sacrifice his own life.

In the second part of the seminar Morel looked at gender in relation to both interpellation and classification. For Morel, no classification could cover all the possibilities of gender. Instead the subject's gender is constituted from a series of unconscious interpellations which result in the subject taking up a position in relation to the object. These positions are as subjective as the subject.

Morel asks 'What is the psychoanalytic value of gender?' She considers our ideologies and attitude towards gender to be 'a social process'. Accepting or not accepting these cultural attitudes place one in a particular relationship with the Other. Interpellation is therefore, in the Althusserian sense, a series of movements taken by the subject from birth which places him in a particular subjective position. This can be interpreted through the subject's unconscious fantasy. Morel exemplified this using Guillaume Gallienne's film 'Les Garçons et Guillaume à table, [2013], (Me, Myself and Mum), to highlight how the individual's gender can be traced through these interpellations.

Geneviève Morel is a Psychoanalyst working in Paris and Lille. She holds a degree in Mathematics and a doctorate in Clinical Psychology and Psychopathology. She is President of 'Knowledge and Clinic', an Association for ongoing formation in psychoanalysis, and is scientific consultant for the review of the same name. She is also President of the College of Psychoanalysts of the A.L.E.P.H. (Association for the study of psychoanalysis and its history) and member of CFAR (London). She is author of 'Sexual Ambiguity; Sexuations and Psychosis', Anthropos Economica 2000; The Clinic of Suicide (paperback in 2010); Freud's Work; the Invention of Psychoanalysis, Breal 2006; The Law of the Mother, An Essay on the Sexual Symptom, Anthropos Economica 2008; Screens and Dreams, Psychoanalytic Essays on the Moving Image, Barcelona, ediciones S&P 2011; Sexual Ambiguities, London, Karmac Books 2011

Report by Edel Hurley