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Rhetoric and the Unconscious

Michael Billig
Loughborough University

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Michael Billig
Department of Social Sciences
Loughborough University

Abstract:
This paper develops the ideas of rhetorical psychology by applying them to some basic Freudian concepts. In so doing, the paper considers whether there might be a 'Dialogic Unconscious'. So far rhetorical psychology has tended to concentrate upon conscious thought rather than on the unconscious. It has suggested that thinking is modelled on argument and dialogue, and that rhetoric provides the means of opening up matters for thought and discussion. However, rhetoric may also provide the means for closing down topics and, thereby, provide the means of repression. It will be suggested that language is not merely expressive but it is also repressive. Moreover, the repressive aspects of language are built into the very practices of dialogue. In learning language, we learn the codes for socially appropriate ways of speaking. These must be acquired as habits, so that we learn to repress routinely the desire to transgress the codes of appropriate speech. Thus, the routine use of language provides the resources for repression. If language is repressive, then this applies equally to the language of psycho-analysis itself. Freud's famous case histories, such as that of Dora, can be re-examined, in order to see what Freud's own theory of repression was itself repressing.

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This paper presents the case for a rhetorical understanding of both conscious and unconscious thinking. These arguments are part of a wider project to develop a rhetorical, or discursive, psychology (for statements of this position, see for example, Antaki, 1994; Billig, 1991 and 1996; Edwards, 1997; Edwards and Potter, 1993; Potter, 1996; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). For a variety of reasons—both theoretical and methodological—this project stands at variance with the main trends of orthodox psychology, which prides itself on being a strictly scientific enterprise. Anyone trained in orthodox psychology learns a mixture of approach and avoidance. One is supposed to approach the recognised journals, which are largely filled with experimental reports and which are virtually unreadable for anyone not trained in the particular vocabulary of scientific psychology. On the other hand, the trainee psychologist must learn to avoid those sections of the library which house the 'non-scientific' stuff. The proper psychologist is not to take the humanities seriously, because philosophy, history and literary criticism are waffly endeavours which do not follow experimental procedures. Amongst these unscientific enterprises is, of course, the rhetorical tradition. Not all psychological texts are on the approved, scientific list, for there are waffly, and therefore improper, psychologies. For example, the works of Sigmund Freud must be treated as if carrying an intellectual plague, made all the more dangerous for being camouflaged as 'psychology'. At best, Freud can be treated as an infantile pleasure, like thumb-sucking, which the mature, scientific psychologist must outgrow.

There are, nevertheless, sound reasons for reverting to intellectual childhood, or for approaching what to the experimental psychologist is intellectually forbidden territory. In the first place, as will be suggested, the ideas of ancient rhetorical theory offer a crucial psychological insight into the nature of human thinking. They suggest that

to think is to engage in argument and, thus, that human thinking is inherently dialogical. In this respect, the rhetoric of argumentation provides the means of thought: it permits topics to be opened up for public debate, and, by extension, for the internal debates of solitary thought. This is a theoretical move made by a number of critical psychologists, who are currently rebelling against the standard experimental paradigms. Foremost amongst such critical psychology is the project of discursive psychology, which points to the role of language in constituting psychological states.

There is a further move which can be made. Rhetoric can be used to understand what we think about, and also what we avoid thinking about. Through the use of rhetoric, one can change topics of conversation or even remove certain matters from the dialogic agenda. If thought is rhetorical, then the rhetorical means for closing down discussion may throw light upon the processes of repression, which was key to Freud's theory of psychology, but about which Freud had surprisingly little to say.

In order to sustain such a case, a number of points will need to be made (see, Billig, 1997a, and in press for more details):

> a) If consciousness is dialogical, then, by the same line of argument, there is a case for claiming a 'dialogic unconsciousness'.
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> b) Language is not only expressive but it is also repressive. In learning to speak, we acquire desires which must be routinely, or habitually, repressed, or driven from conscious awareness.
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> c) Because the repression is habitual, it can be observed in routine uses of language, especially in conversation, but also in written texts.
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> d) Freud's own theories were themselves pieces of language. If language is repressive, as well as expressive, Freud's writings not merely expressed particular themes, but also would have contained their own repressions, even as they were exposing the ideas of repression.

The implication is that it should be possible to re-analyze Freud's own works, in order to see what they might be repressing. A word of explanation should be given at the outset. It is becoming increasingly customary to expose Freud, accusing him of bad faith or suppression of evidence (see, inter alia, Borch-Jacobsen, 1996; Masson, 1990; Webster, 1995). The present analysis is not conducted in that spirit. Quite the reverse, it emerges from a desire to integrate the central Freudian concept—that of repression—with the emerging project of discursive psychology. If that involves a critical re-reading of Freud, then this signifies a desire to read and re-read his works, to enjoy their arguments and, in return, to engage in argument with them.

The Nature of Thinking

To begin with, it is necessary to outline briefly the rhetorical approach to the topic of 'thinking' (for more details, see Antaki, 1994; Billig, 1991 and 1996; Edwards, 1997; Edwards and Potter, 1993). Orthodox psychologists, particularly contemporary cognitive psychologists, have often taken a Cartesian approach to the study of thinking. They have assumed that thinking is a silent, solitary (even lonely) activity, which takes place mysteriously within the brain of the isolated individual. Thus, the psychologist cannot directly observe the processes of thinking, but must infer their existence from outward behaviour.

This view of thinking, as an internal and individual activity, is exemplified by Rodin's famous sculpture of 'The Thinker'. Rodin depicts a man (of course, a man—not a woman), sitting alone, with forehead resting on his hand. He is not talking, nor paying attention to anyone. All his attention is directed inwards, as if he is removed from active social life. Nor is he wearing clothes (if it is unclear why nakedness helps the inner life of thought, then the absence of clothes emphasises that the thinker belongs to no social group and carries no marker of cultural identity). The image suggests that thinking is not a social, discursive activity, but is something solitary and silent.

However, there are psychological problems with this image of thinking. There is the methodological problem that a science of psychology, based on this image, will lack an observable object of study. Its topics, whether they be 'attitudes', memory-stores', or 'heuristic processes', will be ghostly entities, which, however powerful the methodological microscope, can never be directly observed. In this respect, cognitive psychology, like much of psychology, is a strange scientific discipline: its objects of study, which are the presumed 'cognitive processes' underlying thought, are inherently unobservable, for these hypothetical processes are not assumed to be neurological structures. Thus, cognitive social psychologists, in constructing models of attitudinal processes, do not assume that neuro-psychologists will uncover underlying physical structures which match their hypothetical attitudinal models.

There is another factor, which should concern those involved in education. The traditional view of thinking, as a wordless, soundless process, seems to imply that the thinking of other people is always out-of-reach. We may know our own thinking, but we can never know the thinking of other people. If thinking is this solitary, private activity, then we can ask how is it possible to teach thinking? According to the Cartesian view, it is hard to see how children can be taught to think, for thinking cannot be demonstrated. It must be something which mysteriously develops within the individual psyche, rather like Rodin's thinker, untouched by conversation or social contact.

Rhetorical View of Thinking

As Wittgenstein repeatedly argued in his later philosophical writings, another position is possible (for discussions of the relations between Wittgenstein's ideas and discursive psychology, see, for example, Harré and Gillett, 1994; Shotter, 1993a and 1993b). Thinking can be seen as a social, and above all, discursive, activity. Of course, this idea well pre-dates Wittgenstein. It was well expressed by the Eleatic Stranger, in Plato's dialogue *The Sophist*: "Thought and speech are the same; only the former, which is the silent inner conversation of the soul with itself, has been given the special name of thought" (263 e).

This could be applied to Rodin's solitary thinker. Far from being removed from dialogue, he might be imagined to be conducting an internal dialogue, debating with himself in an example of what the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky termed 'inner speech' (Vygotsky, 1987; see also Wertsch, 1991; Sampson, 1993). Such an internal conversation, given The Thinker's outward signs of preoccupation, will probably have an argumentative character. He is unlikely to have divided his mind into two speakers, only to find them in happy agreement—as if his desire says, 'I want to get off this rock and go for an ice-cream' and his voice of conscience replies 'what a lovely idea'. Were this the case, he would not still be sitting on the rock, head on hand.

Instead, we can imagine a fierce debate inside his head, turning over the pros and cons of a course of action. Perhaps the voices of desire and conscience are vigorously debating a course of action or the ethics of another's personality. Maybe, seated on his seaside rock, he is debating whether, despite doctor's advice, to go for that

ice-cream. Whatever the content of the internal debate, one might say that Rodin's thinker-as-debater has not been abstracted totally from social life. Instead, his internal processes would be derived from publicly observable debate, as he uses, silently and internally, a public language. He must have observed and participated in debates, and, thus, acquired the skills of debate, or argument. Only if he has done so can he sit there alone, arguing with himself.

This would imply that the skills of debate, or argument, are vital for much of our thinking. To think about ethics, politics or human character—in short, the questions which preoccupy social life—we need the skills of language. Central to language are the skills of argument, for language is not merely a device for naming objects or representing external reality. Language provides the means of justification and criticism, and most notably the faculty for negation. Indeed, a means of communication without negation, and without the resources for justification and criticism, would scarcely qualify to be a language (Billig, 1996).

Of all species, which can communicate to fellow members, only humans have the faculty for negation and, thereby, for argumentation. Other species can process visual information, recognise sounds and remember to orientate to particular shapes. Chimpanzees can even be taught to label objects and to make signs to signal basic requirements, such as those for food or drink. However much effort is spent to develop the linguistic signing skills of chimpanzees, there is a ceiling. No psychologist has been able to teach a chimpanzee to use sign language to justify and criticise. Only humans, equipped with the syntax of negation, can do these things. As such, dialogic thinking, or the conduct of internal debate, is something which is pre-eminently human.

The Study of Thinking

This linking of human thought to the use of language has a number of implications for the sorts of discursive/rhetorical psychology which is being developed by critical psychologists, especially by my colleagues at Loughborough University, such as Charles Antaki, Derek Edwards, Jonathan Potter and David Middleton. In the first place, discursive psychology recommends that the topics of psychology should be studied discursively, in contrast to the Cartesian approach which searches for hidden processes of mind behind the outward use of language. The discursive approach, following the later philosophy of Wittgenstein, assumes that many of the traditional topics of psychology are based on phenomena which are constituted within dialogue, especially argumentative dialogue. Thus, the psychologist, wishing to understand these phenomena, should be looking in detail at the operations of discourse and dialogue

This can be illustrated with respect to the topics of attitudes or memory. Traditionally psychologists have searched inside the mind for hypothetical attitudinal structures or memory stores. Discursive psychologists, on the contrary, claim that this is to look in the wrong place. Human memory is not merely, or even principally, about retaining stimuli. It is about performing social actions, such as remembering a birthday, remembering one's manners or remembering the sacrifices of past generations. There are a whole range of activities which we call 'remembering', or 'forgetting'. Discursive psychologists claim that we should investigate what activities are called 'remembering' and how these activities are accomplished in social life. Above all, discursive psychology should examine the claims people make to remember or forget things, and to see what they are doing in making such claims. One of the findings of discursive psychology is that people making memory-claims are typically not reporting on inner states, but doing other things (Edwards, 1997; Middleton and Edwards, 1990). For example, if someone, on returning from a trip, says to their partner 'I did remember you all the time I was away', they are unlikely to be making a simple report of an internal state. Instead, the memory-claim itself will be an action which

is accomplishing important interactional business.

The same move of looking at the outward behaviour, rather than the hypothesised internal structure, can be seen in relation to a topic, which has traditionally been central to social psychology—the study of attitudes. The discursive/rhetorical approach directs the psychologist's attention to the dynamics of debate. One can see 'the holding of attitudes' in terms of taking stances in matters of public controversy. Moreover, in participating in debate, people typically are engaging in thinking, rather than outwardly expressing a pre-formed, unchanging inner cognitive structure. In debates, and more generally in conversations, people say novel things, making utterances which in their detail have never been made before. Even when talk returns to familiar themes, which the participants may have discussed previously, it seldom, if ever, returns in exactly the same ways (Billig, 1991). Every day, people formulate sentences, which they have never said before, and, indeed, which no-one else has ever precisely uttered before. In this respect, dialogic creativity is a mundane, even banal, factor of the human condition.

It is hard to account for this mundane creativity, if we assume that our utterances are expressions of internal cognitive processes, which must precede the utterances. Indeed, dialogue takes place too quickly to assume that the outer pattern is merely a reflection of something more important taking place internally. There is an important methodological implication. The cognitive psychologist, taking the Cartesian line, assumes that thinking is not directly observable, for it is always taking place beyond, or behind, the observable, or hearable, surface of social life. On the other hand, given that people are readily formulating new utterances as they debate issues, and given that these utterances are typically not the outward expression, or report, of inner processes, then in debate the processes of thinking are directly hearable. The cut-and-thrust is the social activity of thinking.

By studying the micro-processes of talk, psychologists can directly observe, or hear, the social activity of thinking itself. In this way, the psychologist can see how human thinking is rhetorically accomplished and contested. What was formally assumed to be hidden, indeed mysterious, can be directly studied in its complexity.

There is a further implication in taking this discursive position. It is possible to see how thinking is learnt. If thinking is modelled on conversation, then the child's entry into dialogue is an entry into thinking. Language is not learnt in order that the child can possess a system of naming or even to represent the outside world. Language is learnt in order that children can participate in the conversations, and thus the social activity, that surround their lives. From the earliest age, adults are speaking to them, telling them things, commenting on their infantile reactions. As children learn to respond, so they learn how to enter this rhetorical world of justification and criticism. Moreover, they do not merely acquire the formal syntax of argument, but they learn what counts as persuasive justification and criticism, as adults and older children offer 'convincing' arguments why certain things should, or should not be, performed. And from a comparatively early age, child acquire the skills to challenge arguments and contest the rhetoric they hear (Dunn, 1988).

In all this learning, the child is not merely acquiring the rudiments of language, but of human thinking; the lessons can be transferred or internalised from outer dialogue into inner dialogue, so that children learn to conduct their own internal dialogues or thoughts, like Rodin's thinker. The movement, thus, is from the outer, social world of conversation and action into the inner world of thought, not *vice versa*.

Discourse and Freud

So far the argument has not been the least bit Freudian in its suggestion that consciousness is dialogic. Freud, of

course, was interested in the unconscious, rather than conscious. Moreover, he was seeking to track down the psychological elements of life which were buried within the individual's unconscious. His theoretical movement was from the outer world to the inner world, turning, as it were, social activity outside-in: the outward activity, such as moral behaviour or religious ritual, had inner origins, or so he argued. The theoretical movement of discursive psychology is the reverse: it turns the person inside-out. Processes, such as those of thinking, which appear to be inward, hidden and mysterious, are claimed to be outward and observable. In consequence, most discursive psychologists have little time for notions of the 'unconscious'; indeed, many are even uncomfortable with the word 'consciousness' (but see also Parker, 1992).

Nevertheless, it can be argued that just as consciousness is dialogically constituted so is the unconscious (the argument must necessarily be brief here, but for details, see Billig, 1997a and in press). The first step is to recognise the theoretical importance of the idea of repression in Freudian theory. For Freud, the characteristic point about the 'id' was that it was repressed, or prevented from reaching consciousness. At the start of his metapsychological essay *The Ego and the Id*, Freud was quite explicit about this, claiming that the idea of the unconscious came from the notion of repression. For this reason, in his 'Autobiographical Study', he claimed that the great discovery of psycho-analysis was not the unconscious as such: it was the process of repression, for "the theory of repression became the corner-stone of our understanding of the neuroses" (Freud, 1995a, p. 18).

There is something curious about Freud's treatment of the notion of repression. Although he claims it as the great discovery and corner-stone of psycho-analytic theory, he has little to say about the details of its operation. In his essay, 'Repression', he claims that repression is something which has to be continually achieved, otherwise the shameful desires, which are kept from awareness, would flood back into consciousness. But he offers few details to show how this task is continually achieved. In the *Introductory Lectures*, he admitted that apart from it being accomplished by the ego, "we know nothing more at present" (p. 339).

As is well known, Freud often wrote about the mechanisms of the mind in terms of hydraulic metaphors (see, for example, Shafer, 1976 for an excellent analysis and critique of this tendency). It was as if the energy of the id was constantly pushing against the doors of the ego. When the ego relaxed its control on those doors, as for example in times of sleep, then the energy comes bursting through, shaping our dreams. However, the hydraulic metaphor may be unhelpful for understanding the processes of repression, or the driving away of thoughts or wishes from conscious attention. If conscious thought is shaped by rhetoric, then so might the dynamics of dialogue provide the resources for repression.

The reason for suggesting this possibility is simple. As we talk about one topic—or think about a particular topic—so we are not talking or thinking about others. It could be that the directing of dialogic attention onto one set of topics, becomes a way of avoiding others and that there are conventional rhetorical devices for achieving this outcome. If so, rhetoric enables us, not only to open topics of conversation, but also close them down. Moreover, the necessary rhetorical devices can be internalised so that we might use them in our own internal, silent conversations, employing rhetoric to censor the drift of our own internal dialogues. In that case, the processes of repression, which are necessary for the creation of the unconscious, are neither automatic nor necessarily mysterious. Just like the processes of thinking, they are daily to be observed in countless mundane conversations. If they were not, then humans would never be able to acquire the necessary skills for the self-censorship of repression.

Projection and Repression

The possibility of a dialogic, or rhetorically accomplished, unconscious implies that discourse analysts must observe both what is talked about in conversation and what is not talked about. It can be assumed that, on occasion, speakers are involved in a joint activity of avoidance, so that particular ways of talking are repressed dialogically.

An example of such avoidance can be given. It is taken from a study, which I conducted a few years ago in order to see how English families talked about the British royal family (for details of the study, see Billig, 1992). The study involved listening to families talk about royal issues in their own homes. The speakers rarely raised the issue of race, particularly in respect to the question whether the heir to the throne might marry a non-white person. The very issue raised difficult issues for white supporters of the Royal Family, who saw the monarchy as symbol of nation and identified with the monarch as the representation of their own national identity. Such supporters could not say that the monarch must always be white, for that would risk the accusation of racism. Nor, for the same reasons, could they say that they could not identify with non-white as the epitome of 'Britishness'. Again, they would be laying themselves open to the accusation. Moreover, they could not say that the Queen would disapprove of a non-white daughter-in-law (or son-in-law), for that would suggest that the Queen was racist, and also that the speakers themselves, in identifying with a racist figurehead, were themselves racist.

Instead, the speakers tended to adopt ambiguous ways of talking, when the issue was raised. They would talk about an amorphous 'them', saying 'they would not allow it', leaving unsaid who 'they' were. Or they might say that 'the public' would not stand for it', as if they themselves were not part of that public. It was as if they were projecting their own unacceptable wishes onto unspecified others. Above all, awkward questions were not asked by the other members of the family. It is as if all speakers conspired dialogically to protect each other and to protect the projections. In this sense, the avoidance was dialogically constructed and protected (for details, see Billig, 1997b).

Conversation and Practical Morality

One of big discoveries of conversation analysis, which has been taken on board by discursive psychology, is that everyday talk is immensely rich: even seemingly simple interaction is filled with complexity. Because there are multiple codes determining even short interactions, participants must do a lot to keep interaction going. If they do not follow such codes, there are likely to be breakdowns and misunderstandings (Nofsinger, 1991; Edwards and Potter, 1993).

A sense of morality accompanies dialogic interaction. Harold Garfinkel (1967), founder to ethnomethodology, claimed that, in studying the micro-processes of social life, he was investigating 'practical morality'. This can be seen in 'turn-taking', to which conversation analysts given much attention. In order for conversation to take place, there have to be complex codes about how speakers alternate their 'turns', by yielding turns, taking up implied invitations to speak, interrupting without disruption and so on. If these unwritten, but daily practised, rules are transgressed, the risk is not merely the breakdown of the immediate interaction, but also a moral evaluation: speakers will accuse the transgressor of transgressing the morality of interaction.

This can be illustrated hypothetically by the codes for asking questions. There is a lot of evidence that questions, which are requests, will be normally phrased with 'indirection' in American and European conversations, where direct questions will appear rude or aggressive (Brown and Levinson, 1987). This can be seen in academic

seminars. At question-time, critical questioners are expected to preface their remarks with phrases such as, 'I was fascinated to hear what you said about X, I wonder if you have fully taken into account...' or 'I was interested in your remarks about Y but was a bit concerned that you didn't mention the work of...'. If critical questions are raised too directly or intellectual dissatisfaction expressed without any credit being expressed, then others are likely to suggest that the moral codes of politeness have been breached and that rudeness has been performed.

Practically every utterance, if delivered inappropriately, carries the possibility of moral censure. If we pitch our voice to high or too loudly, if we intervene too quickly or too slowly, then we run the risk of being seen to infringe the codes of politeness. As such, everyday we practice this conversational morality habitually. As we make habitual utterances which have never been said before, we run the risk of transgressing the morality which permits such utterance.

Rudeness and Politeness

This view of morality, as being something which is routinely accomplished in dialogue, is very different from the Freudian view. For Freud, the presence of moral restrictions is a sign of the presence of temptation. If there were no temptation, suggested Freud, then there would be no reason for moral codes. Moreover, according to Freud, temptations not only have to be resisted but often they must be repressed: we cannot admit to ourselves that we have the desires, which we regularly resist, and so the temptations, which morality forbids, must be pushed from consciousness.

A Freudian, viewing the complex codes of conversation and turn-taking, should ask what conversational temptations are all these codes being directed against? If complex codes are inbuilt into every utterance, then the Freudian would see temptations as being ever-present. The stronger the codes, the more they suggest the pervasiveness of resisted temptation. Thus, the daily accomplishment of conversation is being stalked by shameful hidden desire and temptation. One might say that ordinary talk, conventionally considered as 'polite', is somehow keeping at bay, or even repressing, the temptation of rudeness.

There are reasons for supposing that the possibility of speaking politely depends on being able to speak rudely (see Billig, 1997a and in press for more details). Politeness is not a biological imperative, but children have to learn the codes and intonations of politeness. The paradox is that as children learn the codes of politeness so they learn how to be rude.

Parents, or other adults, are frequently correcting children for inappropriate talking. They often utter words to the effect of 'don't say that, it's rude'. In speaking thus the adult is doing two principal things—they are indicating what is polite (how to speak) and what is rude—what should not be spoken.

Moreover, they are doing it in a conventionally rude way. Parents tend talk to children in direct ways which are unacceptable in adult conversation (for details see Billig in press). 'Don't say that, it's rude' is not typically the sort of utterance to be made in adult polite conversation. Thus, an adult, in so speaking to a child, is not just indicating what rude talk is, but the adult is exemplifying rudeness. Therefore, as the child learns politeness, it also learns to acquire the dangerous weapons of rudeness. Indeed, it is not possible to have one without the other.

Children, Rudeness and Pleasure

Studies of mother-child interaction show that the teaching of language, morality and polite behaviour is not smooth. Judith Dunn's work has been invaluable in this regard. She has demonstrated that the relations between mother and children between the ages of two and three are especially fraught, estimating that there are about 11 conflict episodes per hour. At this age, young children deliberately challenge and resist the authority of the mother. As the mother instructs the child about rules, including those of language and politeness, the child breaks them.

Above all, the breaking of rules is a matter of enjoyment. This is particularly true of the rules of not mentioning bodily functions and making rude jokes. In such matters, as Judy Dunn shows, children use styles of talking which are most certainly not copied from the mother. For example, Dunn (1988) reports of a three year old girl calling an adult visitor 'Mr Piggyface' and being told firmly not to use that expression again. The young child then went round the house, deliberately shouting 'Mr Piggyface' over and again.

This suggests something of which Freud was well aware—there is pleasure in rudeness. As the child becomes older and is expected to enter the world of mature conversation, such pleasure must be curtailed. Adult speakers cannot talk as a two year old, but must become responsible and polite. They must exchange the habits of indirect questioning for the pleasure of declaiming 'Mr Piggyface'.

Thus, politeness demands the repression of rudeness and of childish jokes. In Freudian terms, what is repressed is desired; it is an object of temptation. Only because the child is told not to shout Mr Piggyface, is there delight in shouting it. In this respect, the learning of dialogue creates pleasures and desires, which the child must learn to repress, or 'grow out of'.

Jokes and Rudeness

At this point, it might be objected that 'repressing' and 'growing out' of pleasures are two very different things. If we grow out of the pleasures, then we stop desiring those pleasures: they no longer attract us. But if we repress those childish pleasures, we secretly still desire them, but we deny these desires even to ourselves. The question to ask is what evidence is there that the pleasures of rudeness are repressed, rather than grown out of.

From a Freudian perspective, the most direct evidence comes from jokes. As Freud realised in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* many jokes derive their humour from the fact that they express repressed desires, especially those relating to sex and aggression. Many of the great comic heroes, from Diogenes of Sinope, to Groucho Marx and John Cleese are unspeakably rude. Instead of being outraged, by their displays of breaking the restricting codes of politeness, onlookers greet their antics with loud signs of pleasure. It is as if we would like to do what the comic does. John Cleese, as Basil Fawlty, not only insults the guests in his hotel, but he mocks the rules of politeness by insulting through overpoliteness. One can imagine the outrage if an academic speaker at question-time after a formal talk, behaved in the manner of Basil Fawlty. But because the joke is merely a joke, the release is safe—the rules are in fact strengthened by their breach being defined as just a joke.

Repression and Conversation

There are several implications which can be drawn from this linkage of conversation and the idea of repression:

a) Adult conversation is restricting: it makes demands on talkers.

b) There is a habitual need to curtail urges to rebel against these demands.

c) These urges must be repressed, or driven from mind; if speakers are conscious of the desire to be rude (for example to shout 'Mr Piggyface' to one's fellow conversationalist) then they will be unable to carry on routine, habitual conversations.

d) In consequence, the child who learns to be a moral, ordinary speaker, must learn to repress.

e) This does not merely involve repressing the desire to be rude, but learning to avoid disturbing subjects, changing topics etc., for the mature speaker must learn the routine rhetoric of dialogic avoidance.

Freud's Cases

I have been looking in detail at some of Freud's classic cases, reinterpreting them in the light of such concerns (i.e. Billig, 1997b; Billig in press). Not only do these cases bear re-reading for the light they continue to throw upon enduring issues in psycho-analytic theory (Spence, 1994), but they illustrate a further point in relation to the idea that the unconscious is dialogically produced. If language is repressive, then even Freud's own texts may have their hidden or repressive aspects. More particularly, in drawing attention to repression, and in revealing its hidden aspects, Freud may have also been engaging in repressive activity himself.

The case histories can be re-read in order to look for what Freud seems to overlook. One aspect, which has particular interest for a discursive psychologist, is Freud's accounts of his own dialogues with his patients. Freud was especially interested in the 'big' symbolism contained in his patient's words. A discursive psychologist, by contrast, might look towards the details of dialogue which Freud seems to ignore—this means looking at the little words and the rhetorical business which they can accomplish.

One case which I have been looking at is that of Little Hans, the young child whose development provided Freud with direct evidence for the Oedipus complex (Freud, 1990). Freud's account concentrates on Hans's desires, most notably his sexual desires for his mother and aggressive impulses towards his father. According to Freud, Hans represses both sets of desires. However, if Freud's account is read carefully especially the notes which Hans's father takes of conversations with his young son, it is possible to see more than the young child's desires. It is possible to hear his parents talking to him, often changing the subject, when Hans asks awkward questions. The parents are instructing him into the conventions of morality, telling him to be ashamed of certain wishes, to behave and to speak appropriately; they even can be heard to project their own desires onto Hans, as jealous parents, denying their own jealousy and teaching the young boy to believe that he is being unfairly jealous (Billig, in press).

Hans is also being taught the rhetorical devices of repression. For example, one can hear him acquiring the rhetorical device of 'yes but'. When he asks an awkward question, which raises the issue of parental desires, his father changes the subject with a 'yes, but'. He answers the question 'yes' but then dismisses with the 'but' and throws the topic back onto Hans with another question, which he implies is the 'real' or 'important' question'. It is

a device, which the young boy can be heard using later. In this way, the account offered by Freud can be read as an account of a young boy entering a world of dialogue, which makes repressive demands. He learns that some things are to be talked about and others are shameful. He learns discursive devices for changing the topics of conversation, and these discursive devices can be used to change the topics of his own internal thoughts (for details, see Billig, in press).

Sexuality, Politeness and Dora

Freud's case histories suggest that it is the sexual which is, above all, forbidden and is not to be discussed openly. But there is a paradox, Freud in his texts discusses sex openly; Hans's parents are Freudians—they are constantly bringing up sexual themes; and in psycho-analytic interviews, sex is talked about. Freud saw this as a liberation from repression, with the texts of psycho-analysis providing a non-repressive form of discourse in which nothing is hidden. Yet, if language is repressive, then these texts, which are so open about sexuality, might be drawing attention away from other matters, of which it was even more difficult to speak. In other words, Freud's own texts might be creating their own silences.

This can be illustrated by a slightly earlier case than that of Little Hans—the celebrated case of Dora, which Freud published as 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' in 1905 (for full details of the analysis, see Billig, 1997b). Dora, a young woman of eighteen, was showing symptoms of hysteria. Her family situation was complex, as her family's life was intertwined with that of another family, the K's. Dora's father, a domineering man, who insisted that his daughter consult Dr Freud, was having an affair with Frau K. Dora regularly looked after Frau K's children. Her father was regularly conspiring that the two families spend time together and share holidays. Herr K had been pursuing Dora since she had been fourteen. On occasion, he had even grabbed her, tried to kiss her, and entered her bedroom on holiday. At last Dora told her father about Herr K's advances. Her father refused to believe her. Dora had been greatly distressed, showing hysterical symptoms. Her father had wanted Dr Freud to cure her of this nonsense.

Freud sought to fulfil his remit by locating the cause of Dora's 'pathology' in her unconscious wishes, rather than in her family circumstance. He claimed that she really loved Herr K (which she denies and which Freud takes as sign of resistance). Also, he later suggested that she had lesbian desires for Frau K, which likewise had been repressed.

Feminist critics have recently criticised Freud for taking an apolitical stance towards Dora, and ignoring the politics of the family. However, they, in common with Freud, can be said also to be apolitical, in that their analyses avoid the outward politics of the time. Freud's original case report did not mention that both the doctor and the patient were Jewish (many of today's critics overlook the political significance of this). This might not seem a relevant detail for a psycho-analytic report today but at the time Vienna was a deeply anti-Semitic society. Its elected mayor, Karl Lueger, was an anti-Semitic demagogue, whose party had promised to sack all Jewish doctors.

At the time when Freud treated Dora, he was at the most isolated point of his life. He believed he had failed to gain promotion at the University of Vienna because of anti-Semitism. There were regular boycotts of lectures by Jewish academics. Freud himself had withdrawn from lecturing, even to fellow doctors. His only regular audience was the B'nai B'rith, the Jewish defence organisation.

Dora's family, like that of Freud, were assimilating Jews, who looked forward to joining mainstream society (see Decker, 1991, for details). As with many bourgeois Jews in the Vienna of that time, these hopes included an identification with German culture. It was a painful identification, for the culture was deeply anti-Semitic. Sometimes, bourgeois Jews ignored the anti-Semitism of the culture with which they were identifying. Sometimes they took on such assumptions, directing them against *Ostjuden*, or eastern, non-German-speaking Jews, as if they themselves were not really Jewish, but the eastern Jews were the real Jews, and the ones to criticise. One might say that an avoidance was built into the routines of life and conversation.

Freud and Dora's Conversations

This avoidance, it can be argued, even reached into the dialogic routines of Freud's consulting room. It is not merely that Freud and Dora do not seem to have talked about the political situation of the time (Decker, 1991). Perhaps that is unsurprising. After all, it is the nature of psycho-analytic conversations that the topics are personal rather than political. Dora seems to have understood the conversational game. She appears to have talked readily without undue inhibition. However, there is one point at which the conversation appears to have come unstuck, as Freud asks a question and Dora avoids replying.

The moment comes when Freud is interpreting the dream, which in the published report is presented as 'the second dream'. Dora says that she dreamt of going to a strange town. She meets a strange man and asks him the way to the railway station. She is trying to return home, because she has heard that her father has died and that all the family are at the cemetery.

Freud interprets the dream in terms of shameful desires. He claims that the underlying meaning is based on Dora's wish to kill her father, in order to be free to engage in sexual activity. In constructing this interpretation, Freud brilliantly makes connections between the German words for cemetery, station and female sexual organs.

Given that Freud claimed that dreams were 'over-determined', or have multiple meanings, it is rather surprising that he misses obvious religious interpretations. He does not offer an interpretation which suggests that Dora wishes to be freed from her father's traditions, in order to marry a stranger, or non-Jew. Jewish themes are indicated by the phrase 'the cemetery', to which the rest of the family have gone. 'The' cemetery, in this context, would be assumed to be a Jewish cemetery (in fact, a year after Freud's report was published, Dora, by now married, converted to Protestantism, along with her husband and infant child).

The most remarkable incident of all occurs when Freud asks about the strange town in which Dora dreams she is wandering. He links the town to Dresden, which she had previously visited. She describes that visit, mentioning that she visited the art gallery. Freud inquires about the visit. Dora replies that she stood in front of Raphael's picture of the Madonna for two hours. Freud then asks the seemingly obvious and innocuous question: what had she liked about the picture?

It is at this point that the conversation breaks down. Freud reports that she could give no clear answer to his question. Finally, she answers, 'The Madonna'. Most surprisingly Freud does not ask why she was stuck for an answer. Nor in his report does he present it as a problem. Quite the contrary, he seems to dismiss the incident, mentioning in a footnote that Dora seems to be showing an identification with the Madonna, and that this represents a culturally approved desire for motherhood and thus, a guilt-free desire for sexual intercourse. Freud does not apparently see the contradiction in this analysis: if the identification is culturally acceptable, then why

should there be such hesitation?

Of course, the identification in this case was not culturally acceptable. Freud does not discuss the symbolic meaning of a Jewish girl staring at the Madonna, as if identifying with the mother of Jesus. If her staring indicates a wish to be a mother, it is a Christian mother (as she, in fact, became). A whole complex of issues, touching on guilt, betrayal and self-hatred, is involved. But Freud in his report avoids all this, just as he and Dora in their conversation had apparently done. It was easier to talk (and write) of sexual matters, than it was to speak of these matters.

This does not reflect the personal psychology of Freud and Dora. It is a message of their times and conditions of life. The repressed themes were part of habits of avoidance, which were maintained by routine conversations leading in other directions. If the embarrassing topic should intrude (as it does following Freud's question about the Madonna), then after a momentary embarrassment conversation is directed along other paths, and all is forgotten. But, as with Freudian repression, what is forgotten is not obliterated, never to return, but it leaves its trace.

Conclusion

Perhaps it is no coincidence that the greatest psychological theory of self-deception was developed at a time and place when collective self-deception was built into conditions of life. In such conditions, avoidance can seem natural and rational. By contrast, too unbending a gaze, or too voiced a sentiment, might be taken as a sign of irrationality. This is illustrated by a story from Freud's own family circle.

The youngest of Freud's five sisters, Adolphine, was considered sweet, oversensitive and slightly dotty by the rest of the family. Sigmund, in one of his letters to his wife, had said she had "such a great capacity for deep feeling and alas an all-too-fine sensitiveness". Sigmund's son Martin, years later, was to write how she used to imagine insults as she walked along the streets. Other members of the family put this down to her silliness, verging on paranoia. She would say "Did you hear what that man said? He called me a dirty stinking Jewess and said it was time we were all killed" (see M. Freud, 1957, p. 16). It was rather a joke with the other Freuds.

Today, it is not possible to dismiss Adolphine. In the most awful way, she was proved correct. Years later, when the Nazis invaded Vienna, Freud was able to escape in time. So too was Dora, whom Freud had not seen for years. But Adolphine and three other sisters had no escape, being taken to the camps from which they were never to return. Even Sigmund Freud, justifiably praised for hearing things which few previously had dared to hear, had not been able to bring himself to hear what his youngest sister, not only heard, but had understood.

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