

**Colloquium Series Presentation: Review of Ken Corbett, PhD:
“Yes (The Constitutive Necessity of Perversion)”**

On October 29, 2010, Ken Corbett, PhD presented his paper “Yes (The Constitutive Necessity of Perversion)” at Manhattan Institute for Psychoanalysis’ Colloquia Series, held at NYU’s Kimmel Center. Dr. Corbett, who is an Assistant Professor at the New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis is the author of the book “Boyhoods: Rethinking Masculinities” (Yale University Press, 2009.) Dr. Corbett’s presentation was co-sponsored by Manhattan Institute’s LGBTQ Initiative Committee.

Dr. Corbett began his paper by affirming his belief in the unconscious and his belief that we are all polymorphously perverse. He discussed how perversion coexists with sexuality and that while most contemporary psychoanalysts would champion the idea that sexuality is “only bounded by the imagination” (Fonagy) this may be, in fact, an idealistic concept. Dr. Corbett went on to discuss the social limitations of the imagination given our need to define normal sexuality and consequently consider that which is perverse as deviant. Moreover, Dr. Corbett discussed the ways in which visual representations of desire and sexuality may work to confine or liberate our capacity to define desire and sexuality.

Dr. Corbett made use of various works of art to demonstrate how particular representations might alter one’s framing of desire, utilizing the historical forces, social climate and virtues of the painting in some detail. The first painting that he presented was entitled *The Storm*, described as a late 19th century French academic painting that had been met with much criticism when Impressionism was the preferred style of painting at the time. This particular painting, used as an advertisement for a psychoanalytic symposium on desire, inspired Dr. Corbett to consider several other representations of desire. He contrasted this painting with one entitled: *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* to exemplify how the framing of desire and sexuality is varying and complex and reflects the mores and religious beliefs held amongst the society of viewers in a given period. Unlike *The Storm*, where lovers were joined by romance, *Expulsion* displays the lovers Adam and Eve joined instead by tragedy; their nakedness or sexuality is characterized by shame and sin.

Dr. Corbett later used more contemporary paintings and photos that he characterized as “exceeding the frame” or more perverse, and which challenge the viewer to embrace “excess and enigma,” and to reexamine the ethics that guide his or her thoughts about sexuality and perversion.

During the discussion that followed, many audience members inquired about Dr. Corbett’s artistic choices and what informed his decisions to choose certain pieces of art. There was also commentary on the degree of perversity in the pieces displayed and whether they were, in fact, “perverse” at all.

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