

Vern and the (re)discovery of psychoanalytic narration,

by Christian Eigner

It is well known that strangers often become a projection screen, but this fact is just as often denied. In forensic work in particular, one is confronted with clients who deny their projections, and this is precisely where the proposed presentation comes in:

Before you can even discuss clients' projections with them, it is often necessary to first get them to admit to these projections in the first place.

In fact, this is relatively easy to do if you add speech act theory, as formulated by the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, among others, to the common psychoanalytic perspective. This shows that genuine narratives have a different linguistic structure than projections and their denial. Based on the style of speech observed in an hour, it is possible to tell the other person whether they are engaged in a genuine narrative or are actively refusing to do so, instead using the other person or a stranger as a screen for their projections. This usually brings movement into the work with deniers, who can no longer cope with facing their projections.

How this works will be shown in the presentation, using the example of Vern, a violent offender from the Austrian prison system.

He long trivialized his actions and blamed the victims, but then understood that he spoke about them in such a way that he never told anything about them because all the criteria of a genuine narrative were missing and instead judgments were continuously produced.

From this, he not only understood what kind of speech is a projection; he also understood how to speak instead, i.e., truly narratively, which also opened up a new approach to himself and the world.

In concrete terms, this meant returning to concepts such as *tensions*, *strivings*, and other (*physical*) *moments of pressure*, with which every psychoanalytic narrative work must begin (instead of resorting to schemata and other quasi-psychiatric magnitudes and categories).

From there, it is then necessary to adopt a “*third person*” perspective in order to narrate about oneself and the *scenes* in which *tensions* and *strivings* manifested themselves, like a novelist, in order to escape the seductions of the language of state of mind.

Finally, the positions of others and also positions of experience and evaluation are added; in precisely this position and complement, which leads to a narrative that is so well-rounded that projections simply have no place anymore.

The *New Psychoanalytic Narration* that has thus unfolded, for which we would like to take up the cudgels here, is therefore a necessary condition and at the same time a solution if the other or stranger is to be overcome as a projection surface.

*Proposal for the IAFP Annual Conference 2026, **Belonging and Othering: The Stranger as the Projective Canvas**; specifically for the section “(Re)Creating Safety, Inclusion and Belonging,”*

No special requirements are needed! / I am an IAFP member, based in Austria, working in high-security prisons for nearly 15 years now.

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