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# Sex, lies and police interrogations.

## Metapsychological distinctions in the field of sexuality after #MeToo

### INGRESS

Taking the MeToo movement as a point of departure, three metapsychological differentiations are made. The fundamentally problematic nature of human sexuality is demonstrated, and shown to be as scandalous in contemporary western society as when Freud published his writings on sexuality in the early 1900-s.

### INTRODUCTION

The MeToo movement was initiated in 2006 by civil rights activist Tarana Burke. As if the movement needed a decade to gain momentum, more than ten years later, in the autumn of 2017, allegations were made against American movie mogul Harvey Weinstein and his systematic sexual harassment, repeated sexual violations and rape of numerous female co-workers, the majority of which were young, aspiring actresses. The movement became global when actress Alyssa Milano the same autumn posted a summons on Facebook for all women who had been sexually harassed to write #MeToo as their status, so as to draw attention to the dimensions of the problem. From that

point, the movement grew viral, spreading to most European countries and beyond. In Sweden, the movement was manifested in group after group of professional women publishing signed petitions to stop sexual harassment by men in their respective work places. Female actresses, opera singers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, and researchers manifesting for an end to sexual violations appeared in the press on a daily basis. A month later, official Swedish press published an in-depth reportage concerning the exclusive cultural club *Forum*, and its artistic leader, in the press named *the Cultural Profile*. This man was openly accused by eighteen women, the accusations ranging from sexual harassment to repeated rape. The dimensions of the scandal concerning *the Cultural Profile* drew on this man's intimate connections with the Royal Swedish Academy, which had supported the club's activities with massive sums of money. The Academy, it later turned out, had been aware of the sexual and financial abuses of *the Cultural Profile*, but chosen to turn a blind eye to what they knew. The exposure of the strong bonds between *Forum* and the Swedish Academy led to a profound crisis within the Academy.<sup>1</sup> *The Cultural Profile* was arrested, interrogated and now serves a three year prison sentence for rape.

Most women could recognize themselves, in one or several facets of the stories reported, but men and women were equally horrified. In the day-to-day conversations of unofficial discourse, men said they no longer knew how to approach women, women claimed that the women were being naive, and that in their time, a woman knew how to defend herself using a slap in the face to discourage a man's advances, and many claimed that the war between the sexes had reached a point of no return.

Simultaneously, within psychoanalytic discourse, many an author has lamented the "disappearance" of sexuality from the psychoanalytic agenda, which is most pronounced in Anglo-Saxon psychoanalysis.<sup>2</sup> The discourse of psychoanalytic theory and clinic alike, following the Kleinian and post-Kleinian focus on object-relations, has come to focus on early mother-child relations as manifested in the transference-countertransference. The underlying assumption is that early relationships with the primary care-giver would be made up of the mutuality of attunement, attachment, safety and care. The young child is seen as made up of needs which can be met in a more or less appropriate way, and the maternal breast is regarded as the sexually innocent breast which can gratify or frustrate these needs. The sexual infiltration into these early relationships is thus foreclosed, and the

scandal of the unbound, polymorphous infantile sexuality described in Freud's *Three Essays*<sup>3</sup> is lost and forgotten.

Returning to MeToo, sexuality was again literally in our faces on a daily basis, as it filled the media, be they official or social. It was as if what had been repressed in our daily discourses, whether everyday discourses, or the more sophisticated discourse of psychoanalysis, had now returned, and with a vengeance. The impact of the movement had all the impact of the uncanny, in the sense of the sudden appearance of that which should have remained secret or hidden, that which is both familiar – haven't we all read and re-read our Freud, in particular the *Three Essays*? – but which is thoroughly repressed, as we all keep “forgetting” the content of this text. I believe that the reason for our forgetfulness is the still scandalous nature of this text, and its implications for human sexuality.<sup>4</sup> MeToo could thus be regarded as a symptom, a compromise formation between the ubiquity of infantile sexuality on the one hand, and our cultural superstructure. But can infantile sexuality be regarded as a symptom? I will come back to this question.

In MeToo, the conflict, or problem of sexuality and its more violent aspects, was positioned as a conflict between men and women, of masculine and feminine sexuality, of their particular characteristics and the need for legal regulation of these relations, the main impetus being that the psychosexuality of men, as a rule, would be of a phallic nature, and if left unregulated would inevitably run its phallic course and manifest itself as domination and mastery. I do not deny the fact that we all, men and women, live in phallogocentric societies, where women are in all too many ways the objects of male domination and of social, economic and sexual repression. My purpose, in the following, is rather to make some distinctions concerning the field of sexuality, or more specifically, human sexuality, as human sexuality, masculine or feminine, is characterized by being a *psycho*-sexuality, fuelled and propelled by fantasy. In the following, I will attempt to take a step beyond the inevitable political aspects of MeToo, and to make a few metapsychological distinctions that can hopefully illuminate the problem from a psychoanalytical angle.

#### DRIVE AND INSTINCT, TWO SEPARATE ECONOMIES

In his close reading of Freud, Jean Laplanche<sup>5</sup> outlines a problem inherent to the central psychoanalytical concept of the drive. Laplanche claims that this concept has been blurred by an error in the English

translation, where Stratchey collapsed the two separate Freudian concepts of drive and instinct into the global concept of *the instinctual drive*, where in fact, these denote opposite and even antagonistic entities. Following Freud in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*,<sup>6</sup> Laplanche demonstrates how the concept of instinct denotes all that is inborn in the infant. The instinct is mainly striving for survival, and the concurrent satisfaction of such needs that require the intervention of a care-taker such as the need for safety, nourishment, warmth, comfort and all such aspects of daily care. There are needs that do not require intervention, such as the regulation of oxygen levels in the blood. Common to all these needs is the principle of their economical functioning. They strive for an optimum level, beyond which unpleasure inevitably arises. Satisfaction is thus possible. One might say that the instinct is what unites man and animal, in the sense of the inborn striving for survival, and the instinctual striving for that which keeps the organism functioning at an optimum level – that is, homeostasis. There also exists, according to Laplanche, a *sexual* instinct, but this is manifested much later, at puberty, when the organism reaches neuro-hormonal sexual maturation, and the subject is capable of striving for an object which can satisfy its needs, as orgasm and reproduction are at this point possible. But this comes much later.

However, what radically distinguishes the new-born human from the new-born animal is the little human's prolonged state of helplessness, creating an utter dependency on the care-taker. This, Laplanche claims, is what sets the stage for the infiltration of the drive, of sexuality, into the very young child's psyche. From the preconscious of the care-taker and his/her awakened infantile sexuality, sexuality is smuggled into all the gestures of day-to-day care, most notably feeding and cleaning, thus creating the erotogenic zones we know so well. The enigmatic message of the adult imprints itself into the highly receptive body of the child, thus creating fantasy, and the concurrent birth of infantile sexuality. This is what Laplanche terms seduction. What is made clear in the *Three Essays*, and is underlined by Laplanche, is the fact that the economy of the drive, of infantile sexuality, is quite opposed to the economy of self-preservation – or of the instincts. Where the instinct strives for the optimum level of satisfaction, for homeostatis, the drive keeps wanting more. What the drive wants is to pursue excitation, sometimes to the point of exhaustion. We are all familiar with what happens at young children's parties: one child eats cake until it vomits, the other spins around in a dizzying circle to the

point of fainting, a third child, playing a wild game with the fourth, bursts into inconsolable tears – these are all aspects of infantile sexuality, and they poignantly show its economical functioning which is in no way homeostatic, and requires protection and regulation from the adult community.

We could thus say that human sexuality, or psycho-sexuality, contains a profound contradiction. The sexual instinct and the sexual drive or infantile sexuality function in opposite, not to say antagonistic ways, the one striving for homeostasis and satisfaction with the help of an object of attachment, the other functioning heterostatically and striving for excitation led by the object-source of fantasy. At puberty, the coming together of these trends, of the sexual instinct and the sexual drive, is possible. But as Laplanche laconically writes – upon reaching puberty, the seat of sexuality is often occupied by the wild functioning of infantile sexuality. This is what makes adolescence such a clear and recurrent breaking point for many a young person – the bringing together of the two functions of sexuality is never easy, and for some becomes quite impossible. On the whole, infantile sexuality and its polymorphous perverse functioning remain in all of us, as possibilities, as strange habits and idiosyncrasies, as unconscious remains of an enigmatic message we keep trying to translate. These opposing trends at the heart of sexuality are what Freud termed the affectionate and the sensual aspects of the libido, as the following testifies to the difficulty Freud intuited in their coming together: *“It is my belief that, however strange it may sound, we must reckon with the possibility that something in the nature of the sexual instinct itself is unfavourable to the realization of complete satisfaction”*.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps infantile sexuality is still the repressed aspect of our highly developed post-modern civilization, as much of a scandal as it was when Freud published the *Three Essays*. And perhaps what we read, heard and saw in the media in the autumn of 2017 was the sudden and massive return of repressed infantile sexuality, made possible by the global dissemination of the internet. The claim on the part of a majority of feminists, Swedish and other, was that this was an exposure of the inherent destructivity of male sexuality. I think they are both right and wrong. I believe that what we witnessed was a manifestation of infantile sexuality’s destructive aspects, a potentiality in men and women alike, but made possible by the economic and social power of the men in question – Harvey Weinstein and *the Cultural Profile* – upon whom women depended for the continuation of their careers and am-

bitions. Structural inequality set the stage for the eruption of infantile sexuality, with its excesses and potential for violence.

#### SEXUAL CRIME – AGGRESSION OR SEXUALITY?

Freud, throughout his writings, adheres to the basic assumption of a duality of drives as the only way to account for the conflict inherent in human life. In no way could he accept the drive monism of Jung, as it could never account for the conflictuality of human life in general, or of love-life in particular. The first theory of the drives consisted of the duality of the sexual drive as opposed to the self-preservative instincts, later termed the ego drives. This duality captured the paradox, illustrated in the quotation above, that sexuality is never the harmonious, totally loving, innocent trend that we would like it to be. Indeed, sexuality within it carries the potential of being a disruptive trouble-maker that can go as far as endangering the survival of the organism. In 1920, Freud rewrote his drive theory, now placing the opposition between Eros and Thanatos - a postulated death drive, building his argument for such a drive upon rather speculative and metaphysical arguments, all of them terminating in a certain biologism. Gammelgaard<sup>8</sup> points out an ambiguity that runs through Freud's conceptualization of the death drive - at times he speaks of the Eros - Thanatos pair as complementary forces, the interplay of which is necessary for the upholding of psychic life, creating equilibrium and maintaining an optimum level of psychic functioning, whereas he at other times quite clearly implies an opposition between life and death, love and destruction, in short, one could say, good and bad.

In the following I will not venture into an argument about the stringency of the concept of the death drive, but with Laplanche, focus on the consequences this concept had for Freud's theory of sexuality, namely, what I would like to call the sanitization of the sexual drive, now rephrased as Eros. Eros, a rather abstract entity, was seen as that force which creates bonds, bringing together disparate elements, a general love of life and fellow man, the force behind international peace, harmony and coming together - in short, a force of binding. The power of unbinding, the whole disruptive mess of polymorphous perverse infantile sexuality, was placed on the side of Thanatos or the death drive. This, I believe, had the consequence of splitting off the more troublesome aspects of sexuality, and placing them in a separate compartment, where they came to be regarded as non-sexual, and as manifestations of the aggression, destructiveness and envy of the death

drive, and in addition, homogenizing Eros, making it a nonconflictual force. This latest turn in the Freudian theoretical body was taken up by Klein, and the whole Kleinian and post-Kleinian theoretical corpus leans on the later mentioned interpretation of the duality between Eros and Thanatos, as being an opposition between good and bad - sexuality being put on the side of Eros, and perversion on the side of Thanatos, making psychoanalysis the educative task of making the patient walk the line between them. Roughly put, the problem of our patients, according to this school of thought, is more often than not placed within their death drive, the assumption being that sexuality can take care of itself.

Laplanche,<sup>9</sup> in tracing the consequences of Freud's new drive duality - that is, his replacement of the survival - sexuality pair by the Eros - Thanatos pair, notes that this places the whole of infantile sexuality, all those perverse little trends so apparent in the child, and never absent from our psyches - the sadism, masochism, voyeurism, the greed, the coprophilia - on the side of Thanatos, or the death drive, thus eclipsing the inevitable aspect of sexual enjoyment inherent in them. What remains on the side of Eros is, as I wrote before, a sanitized and pure force of binding. This way of thinking, with its inherent splitting, has made its way into public and legal discourses, portraying sexual criminals as monsters, when in fact, infantile sexuality, with its particular economic regime - the tendency towards the increase of tension and pursuit of excitation, mobility as to aim and object, is universal and inevitably mobilized in the adult in the presence of the child, throwing the adult back to the enigmatic aspects of messages received when he or she was a child, and this mobilization can sometimes drive the adult to sexual violations. The presence of the child opens these floodgates. When it comes to sexual crime, the line between victim and perpetrator is blurred, as today's perpetrator in all probability was yesterday's victim.<sup>10</sup> In benign cases, I think this might be an aspect of the common depressions and regressions endured by new mothers. In more extreme cases, it might be what underlay the sexual violations of MeToo in general, and of *The Cultural Profile* in particular. I do not in any way claim to equate the assaulted women to children, but the fact remains that the assistants and female artists who came into contact with *Forum* and *The Cultural Profile* were quite young, hoping to gain momentum for a career in the arts, and were quite clear as to the influence of their employer in the field of the arts - and he took pains to make this influence clear to the young

women in question. The situation was thus clearly one of dependency and of generational difference, all of which might have mobilized this man's infantile sexuality.

PHALLIC PSYCHOSEXUALITY – A CONFUSION OF  
DISCOURSE LEVELS

The phallic phase of infantile psychosexual development is the dramatic stage of the Oedipus complex, of sexual differentiation and of object choice. It is the last psychosexual phase, paving the way for the period of latency preceding puberty. Thinkers as diverse in their approach as Laplanche<sup>11</sup> and Jessica Benjamin<sup>12</sup> have pointed out that gender difference is present, in a somewhat idiosyncratic but none the less active way, in the pre-phallic child. Benjamin notes the presence of multiple, cross-gender identifications in the young child, Laplanche points to the unconscious aspects of parental conscious or unconscious gender assignment, with all the shadings and intricacies of these. This plurality disappears in the phallic stage, giving way to a logic where the subject is either phallic or castrated, plus or minus real penis – in the child symbolized as phallus. The psychic logic of the phallic phase is entirely coloured by the binary thinking of all or nothing, potency or impotence, of mutually exclusive opposites, creating a logic of zero or one. At this point, difference (between the sexes) is seen as absolute, and the multi-dimensionality of variety and difference is completely eclipsed. Swedish literary scholar and journalist Nina Björk<sup>13</sup> points out that inherent to modernity, and post-modernity, is a powerful idealisation of phallic attributes which inevitably leads to the splitting off and relegation of such attributes that are deemed undesirable to woman, who is thus regarded as other, representing both seductive child and lost paradise. Björk notes that our civilisation seems to coincide with that of the oedipal boy in its chauvinism and intolerance of difference, and one cannot fail to see how Freud let the psyche of the oedipal and phallic little boy serve as the universal model for the subjectivities of both sexes.

However, on another, theoretical level, and following Freud historically, one can trace a change between the early Freud of the *Three Essays* from 1905, and on *The Sexual Theories of Children*, published in 1909 – where it is quite clear that phallic psychosexuality is one of the many sexual theories of children, infantilisms, so to speak. However, the Freud of *Femininity*<sup>14</sup> of *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*<sup>15</sup> regards adult psychosexuality, be it masculine or feminine, as biolog-



ically determined, by castration anxiety for man and penis envy for woman, these entities being conceptualised as the biological bedrock, or point of no return, of the psyche, as that which cannot be elaborated, that which cannot be transformed from biology or anatomy into psyche.

What seems to have taken place in Freud's thinking between 1905 and 1930 is a blurring of the levels of discourse. What was once an infantile sexual theory is now seen as a general description, a metapsychological account of masculine and feminine psychosexualities. Jacques André<sup>16</sup>, following Laplanche, traces the reasons for this as a theoretical consequence of Freud's abandonment of the seduction theory, which is based on otherness as the point of urgency to be negotiated by every child – the early otherness springing from the unconscious sexuality of the care-taker, infiltrated into the child as an open question, to be translated and negotiated for a life-time. The enigmatic other is thus seen as the hour zero of psychosexuality. When Freud abandoned his theory of seduction, he was obliged to find another point of urgency for psychosexual development – and located it in the phallus, in its presence or absence, castration/penis envy. André describes this as Freud's replacement of the primacy of the other with the primacy of the phallus. He sees the reasons for this as defensive, firstly on the individual and secondly on the theoretical level. Maintaining a theory of the primacy of the other as implied in the theory of seduction throws the subject, be it male or female, back to the early drive receptivity and passivity of early childhood. Phallic defences, claims André, are erected by girl, boy, and theoretician alike, in order to protect us from the passivity and receptivity of early infancy – where we all are the objects of identification, love and sexuality of the other. Phallic psychosexuality comes as a saviour from this state of affairs, and one might speculate whether the bedrock of castration anxiety – penis envy might be a theoretical defence against what is much more difficult to envisage, namely the ubiquitous presence of the other in our psyches. In this context one could ask oneself if infantile sexuality as a whole, centered to mouth, anus and phallus, could be regarded a compromise formation or symptom – of the other's enigmatic message, an answer to the absolute primacy of the other in the small child's, later the adult's, psychic life.

Returning to the autumn of 2017, to #MeToo and the scandal surrounding *the Cultural Profile*, it becomes clear that what we witnessed was not, as some voices in the media would have it, the inevi-

table and oppressive consequences of male sexuality as per definition violent and abusive towards women. What we heard and read was, rather, the manifestation of phallic infantile sexuality, with its inherent disregard for difference and diversity, exhibited by men who, characterized by the combination of real power and sexually immature psyches, could not resist the temptation of living out the perverse aspects of their infantile sexualities. As power might be regarded as the ultimate striving of phallic sexuality, it is central that powerlessness be split off and placed in the other – my idea being that the relative powerlessness of the assaulted women became a further incentive for the abusive men in question to secure the powerlessness there, within the women, proving its location within them by repeated sexual abuses, for which phallic power became a most powerful aphrodisiac – not for genital sexuality, but for its infantile, phallic counterpart.

#### FINAL WORDS

The point of my paper has been to attempt to make some distinctions, on a metapsychological level, to distinguish infantile from mature sexuality, phallic sexuality from its masculine counterpart, and to demonstrate the existence of sexuality and sexual enjoyment in the area of sexual crime, as seen through the lens of the MeToo movement. What these distinctions show us is that infantile sexuality may still be as controversial as it was when Freud published his *Three Essays*, as demonstrated by the shock and turmoil following MeToo. It also shows us that whatever the degree of sexual emancipation and seeming freedom of choice in the field of sexuality, human sexuality remains enigmatic, complicated and troublesome, however much we like to claim that we have mastered and understood it. The crucial point that Freud made in his *Three Essays*, that there is nothing preoriented or naturally instinctual in human sexuality, that sexuality mainly obeys a drive that is essentially variable, contingent and finds its object in a manner that is idiosyncratic and dependent on individual history – this point remains valid, as shown by the wild, polymorphous, formless sexual behaviour revealed by MeToo, which to my mind constituted a return of that which has been repressed in daily life as well as in psychoanalytic theory.

- 1 Gustavsson 2019
- 2 Davies 2018
- 3 Freud 1905
- 4 Zeuthen & Gammelgaard 2010
- 5 Laplanche 2006, 2011
- 6 Freud 1905
- 7 Freud 1912: 188
- 8 Gammelgaard 2018: 150
- 9 Laplanche 1976, 2011
- 10 Zeuthen 2017; Zeuthen & Hagelskjær 2017
- 11 Laplanche 2011
- 12 Benjamin 1988
- 13 Björk 1999
- 14 Freud 1931
- 15 Freud 1937
- 16 André 1995

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