

'FORSCHERTRIEB,' THE INSTINCT FOR RESEARCH: TOWARD A QUEER PSYCHOANALYSIS AND A PSYCHOANALYTICAL QUEER THEORY

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Linking the curiosity of the theorist to their sexuality, the paper argues for a Queer Theory (re-)turn to psychoanalysis, and its tradition of theory-based practice and practice-based theory, a move which must place the unconscious (of the object of study, of the researcher and the research) at the forefront of the research process.

The analyst's job is to facilitate the analysand's freedom to choose what he would like to do with his desire[1]. Whether that desire is 'good' or 'bad,' that doesn't concern the analyst. This analytical imperative entails the same critical opposition to the reductions of the self to namable identifications, conditioned by all sorts of moral-socio-political enterprises, that is supposed to 'drive' queer theory. Although it is a popular caricature to mistake psychoanalysis' ability to recognize certain systems of ideality for its condoning them, similar queer critiques against compulsory reproduction (of babies and workers, or baby-cum-workers), the irreplaceability of the couple, the ills of consumerism and even the evils of the "university-government-clergy-nobility" can be found in the vast, multi-faceted and dynamic psychoanalytic literature.[i]

An engagement with psychoanalysis is a political engagement in line with, to the surprise of some, Foucault's utopian politics of bodies and pleasures. It is easy, for the psychoanalytically uninitiated, to take Foucault's figures of 19th Century power-knowledge – "the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple and the perverse adult" – as jabs at a psychoanalytical project, which, at least partially created these figures. However, that would be to confound psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis into one big monster, and mostly, to ignore psychoanalysis' "progress" throughout the 20th Century and to mistake its recognitions for prescriptions.[ii]

Foucault's envisioning of that potentiality of desire(s) somehow unbound by a pre-made tautological relationship to objects, free to roam around like *flanêurs*, against what he called the "deployment of sexuality," is perhaps the unseen link that can suture both queer and psychoanalytic projects[2]. To insist on not seeing that conduit line may mean to keep on tripping over it, and allowing it to knot up and around the researcher's own desire for truth of her object of study. For, as we know, any analytical project that demands its truth without accepting its risks is one fated to be a victim of its own perversions. The desire of the theorist, or the "instinct for research" (*Forschertrieb*) or knowledge (*Wisstrieb*), whose first signs are known to coincide with the sexual life of children's "first peak," is too often missing from queer work's considerations, although it is never absent. And we would do well in recognizing the desire of the (queer) theorist, always already a (sexual) sublimation vying for some kind of mastery, precisely when it takes the shape of such symbolic reluctance: where is, for instance, the theorist's dealings with her own "counter-transferences"?[iii]

This is not to say that queer theorists haven't included their own selves, consciously and not, whilst producing their work. I am suggesting, however, that we would benefit from a more calculated, and strategic, awareness of self-implication in conducting research that is akin to the extensive work that psychoanalysis has created concerning the analyst herself as a desiring subject. The branches of Queer Theory that resist a psychoanalytical approach often reveal a blinding U.S.-centrism in their claims of

Austria-centrism against psychoanalysis itself, along with the history of a certain sublimation that comes with “I,” including strategies to control the personal risk inherent to the research, keeping it from contaminating the researcher herself, or exposing an always already contaminated researcher.[iv]

We know that all research activity begins at the moment it is aroused by sexual activity. And that the act of seeing, or finding out, is an extension of the act of touching. They are linked to the Freudian theory of perception, which views it (the faculty of perceiving) “as consisting of a sending out of feelers, of sensitive tentacles, at rhythmic intervals.”[v] The researcher’s research may function, then, as a kind of “propping,” much in the same way Freud describes Leonardo da Vinci’s drawings as “props” for his anatomical investigations, an alibi-practice that enables other kinds of practices, investigations and discoveries.[vi] Jean Laplanche describes sublimation, which appears as a doing “something else” with sexual energy (sometimes in opposition, sometimes working together with sexuality), as an instinct of “excessive strength [that] triggers the earliest childhood sexual theories,” the first of which revolves around: “Where do babies come from?”[vii]

Laplanche gives the example the mother’s pregnancy of another child as igniting that puzzling question. It provokes an investigation linked to a fantasy of construction faced with the parents’ refusal to come up with an adequate answer, establishing a connection between sublimation in the form of having-to-know and “turning back,”[viii] or what Heather Love may call “feeling backward.” This problematic question, emblematic of the drive to research, sets forth a traumatic relationship between the infant’s intellectual inability to discover the answer and the level of the problem being confronted. It also discloses the way the ‘will’ to know ‘now’ harks back to the ‘need’ to know ‘then.’

It is interesting to note that here the child’s being confronted with a “other,” the soon-to-be sibling in the womb, throws her in a queer position that drives Laplanche to liken children to Martians. Except that for a Martian, the most puzzling question, when parachuted on Earth would be, as far as Freud is concerned, the difference between the sexes (garb, behavior, social functionings). For the child gender difference is a natural “given from the beginning” (*‘von Anfang an’*). But what if the gender question is not a natural given for a child who may, also *‘from the beginning,’* occupy a place of queerness that exceeds the “normal” queerness of every child? If we follow Laplanche and Freud’s scheme of investigation-and-research as sublimation (sometimes a compulsion, *‘Zwang,’* sometimes a substitution for the sex act, *‘Ersatz’*) triggered by a puzzling question borne out of a sexual curiosity, how does a previous unsettling of the gender difference “natural given” complicate the order and properties of things? If “the source of the itch” for a queer child, or a proto-queer researcher (beyond the “normal” queerness of every researcher), either precedes the one in the unmarked child or is there at all, what role does that play in the way certain researchers cathect their object of research?[ix]

I mention Laplanche’s points here not to suggest that queer theorists, or Martians, might be more invested in knowing (whether it be where babies come from or where *‘they’* do), but to illustrate how in “falling backward” during research one, inevitably, realizes how much is at stake for oneself as a researcher, which reveals a layer that is part and parcel of the research itself – perhaps its crux.

I am proposing a queer theory turn to psychoanalysis, and vice versa, because theoretical work that doesn’t place the unconscious at the forefront of its approach is one destined to the crevices of its own narcissism -- the narcissist subject, of course, being one who cannot accept her own susceptibility of loss nor the absolute alterity of the other as other, all intolerable things for a Queer project.

References and Notes:

- i. Lucien Israël, *La Jouissance de L'Hystérique*, (Paris: Éditions Arcanes, 1996), 202. All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.
 - ii. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction – Volume 1*(New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 105.
 - iii. "(...) the instinct for knowledge in children is attracted unexpectedly early and intensively to sexual problems and is in fact possibly first aroused by them." Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Basic Books, 2000), 60.
 - iv. On American moralism, sublimation and misuse of psychoanalysis see Henry Abelove, "Freud, Male Homosexuality, and the Americans," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. David M. Halperin et al. (Routledge, 1993).
 - v. Jean Laplanche, "To Situate Sublimation," *October 28* (Spring, 1984).
 - vi. Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957).
 - vii. Laplanche, 20.
 - viii. Laplanche, 17.
 - ix. The desire to know is a kind of safe space where libido escapes to, *from the beginning*, from repression. Sublimation, then, avoids the formation of neurotic symptoms by channeling libido into the drive to research. It is always "precocious," in the sense that it occurs at the very same moment as "the first incidence of sexual excitation, at the moment of the emergence of the first vague or partial sexual drive." Laplanche, 17, 19.
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