

# Tony Duvert: A political and theoretical overview

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**ABSTRACT:** The late French writer Tony Duvert gave voice, scandalously, to the child-lover he never hid he was. He outlined, with rare precision, a desiring subjectivity struggling for existence in a hostile society, which portrayed him as a criminal. The right to homosexuality; the battle against the condemnation and the repression of underage sexuality; the deconstruction of the scary image of the ‘paedophile’, a bugbear typically represented as a rapist ogre; the invective against parents (the actual source of violence and of the castration forces deployed against children) and the institution of the family (the backbone of a morbid and unjust society); the ferocious criticism towards sexual and emotional capitalism, parenthood and the “bourgeois economic scheme of libidinal investment”: those are some of the themes Tony Duvert deals with in his essays, and on which we focus in this paper.

**KEYWORDS:** intergenerational sex; childhood; literature; politics; modern history; mass culture.

Tony Duvert’s theoretical writings and ideas belong to a generally overlooked, muted story that deals with a taboo issue even within queer studies: that of ‘paedophilia’. Yet, in this paper, we focus neither on children’s right to sexuality nor on child lovers’ claims as such. We do not want to speak through the personae of people we are not, once more ventriloquizing children – and also child lovers, who are deprived of their voice through the strongest stigmatization we can imagine nowadays. We shall consider the destiny of Duvert’s texts, which sank into oblivion a long time ago, as a perfect synecdoche for the repression of the very questions raised by those texts. To state it plainly, we are concerned with the recent history of adult discourses (and silences) about childhood; and with the evolution of a system of power-knowledge which deeply marks children’s bodies and minds.

In such a field of force, amongst other things, we can see two powerful processes at play which Duvert himself fully explored: that of the naturalization of historical categories; and that of the political exploitation of collective fears. Indeed, these processes widely exceed our subject, being coextensive with the development of modernity and mass culture. Nevertheless, in the untoward domain of paedophilia and children’s sexuality

these processes show up with such intensity that, over and over again, one feels compelled to question their political purchase in general. Following Duvert, the fate of his works and the process leading to the almost absolute discredit of his memory, we will sketch a complex and disorganic apparatus made of narratives, laws and court cases, media representations, sex-education manuals, interviews and so on. All these discourses and apparatuses compose a field of force, having a specific *image* of childhood as their untouchable gravitational center, where the specter of the paedophile ogre, haunting our allegedly grown-up, rational minds, has a fundamental role to play: that of the villain.

### 1. TONY... WHO?

Tony Duvert was a novelist and essayist rather well known in the 1970s. The start of his career was very sudden: he published his first novel, *Récidive*, in 1967, aged only 22, for the renowned Éditions de Minuit. Jérôme Lindon in person, head of the publishing house and great promoter of the Nouveau Roman – of Beckett, Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon and others – approved the manuscript of *Récidive* and continued to publish Duvert's writings until the latter retreated into silence in 1989.

In the 1970s, Duvert was the director of *Minuit's* journal, and he had a column in the famous gay magazine *Le gai pied*. Though he never became a massively popular author, Duvert was recognized as one of the finest stylists of the French written word. He won the prestigious Prix Médicis in 1973, thanks to the involvement of Roland Barthes, with an experimental and disturbing novel, *Paysage de fantaisie*. Duvert was all but politically correct: during the dinner celebrating the prize, he had a violent altercation with his very patron, Roland Barthes, on the issue of “children's rights” (SEBHAN 2010: 78). The rift between them, allegedly, will be irreparable.

Tony Duvert always claimed he was a child-lover. However, as he stated during an interview conducted by Guy Hocquenghem and Marc Voline, he did not want to “stand up for the current sexuality of a paedophile, or of a homosexual, or a heterosexual, or a man or a woman”. “For me”, Duvert stated, “they are all by-products of the State's control on sexuality”. Indeed, he believes that paedophiles, like the rest of society, treat children as dolls: something he could not swallow. “I do not stand at all by the paedophilia I see. I make common cause with counter-struggles: it is evident we must commit ourselves to a combat *against* the laws, *against* institutions. But

not *for* paedophilia, for sure. The fight to be led is for the total separation of State and sexuality, it is for the nonexistence of a State or an institution having a shadow of a relationship with sexuality”. Neither what he strived for was the liberation of childhood as such. He knew that childhood was adults’ phantasm, which first emerged during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and then developed during the 20<sup>th</sup>, within the liberal-bourgeois paradigm. So that children, *these* children, can never be free for Duvert. What he positively wanted, through his writings, was to reveal an ideological marginalization, and to open up a political ground to debate the relationships between adults and children. “I have something very simple, not to affirm, but to open up for discussion by others than me”, says Duvert. “It is essential that [intergenerational] relations become part of a culture; and it is essential something happens in them that is neither parental nor pedagogic. We need the creation of a civilisation”<sup>1</sup> (Hocquenghem *et al.* 1979).

## 2. THE SEVENTIES

At a first glance one may label a similar view as incurably utopian, which fact is open to argument. The point is these issues *are not* open to argument. But, for a time and in a certain cultural and political milieu, they were: when Duvert writes his more accomplished texts, say between 1973 and 1979, he is not a lone knight in combat. We can give some examples of the sources that inspired Duvert, and evoke briefly the French intellectual landscape within which his works were created and circulated.

*L’enfant et la vie familiale sous l’ancien régime*, originally written in 1960 by Philippe Ariès, was reprinted twice in the 1970s, specifically in 1973 and 1975. Here, the historian details the stages of the “discovery of childhood”, as he calls it, as well as the management of the progressive transformation of children’s subjectivity. According to Ariès, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the child was still regarded as a shameless little animal one could sexually play with. Yet, in 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, on the one hand a new sense of guilt was slowly sowed onto children through the confessional *dispositif*, and on the other adult portrayals of children as innocent and pure multiplied sharply, leading to an ever more careful segregation of people into age classes (ARIÈS 1975).

At the same time, in 1974 René Schérer, with *Émile perversi*, inaugurated

<sup>1</sup> All translations into English, if not otherwise stated, are the authors’.

a series of radical books devoted to childhood. In particular, *Co-ire* (Schérer *et al.* 1976), written in collaboration with Guy Hocquenghem, describes childhood in such a radical and provocative way that it seems impossible one could publish it today. And of course we cannot avoid recalling the release of the first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1974). Here Foucault sees in the body of the child "a 'local center' of power-knowledge", that is, a crucial element to understand "the pattern of the modifications which the relationships of force imply by the very nature of their process" (Eng. tr.: 98, 99). According to the philosopher, through children's bodies, through the surveillance of their sexuality, medical and social institutions entered the family, modifying it and using it to support biopolitical maneuvers, the "medicalization of sex and the psychiatrization of its non-genital forms" (100). Jacques Donzelot followed Foucault's suggestion in *La police des familles* (1977), where he detailed the process of transformation of the family from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, showing that the protection and control of this *new* childhood was the fulcrum of power-knowledge levers.

We must also mention the famous *Lettre ouverte sur la révision de la loi sur les délits sexuels concernant les mineurs* of 1977. The letter demanded the liberation of three men, at that time in preventive custody for three years, and in doing so criticized the law criminalizing sexual relations between minors and adults. The defendants were accused of having offended, without violence, the decency of a few under-fifteens who, moreover, had declared their consent. Among the signatories were Deleuze and Guattari, Barthes, Lyotard, de Beauvoir (BECCHI 1981: 35-36). Foucault returned to the issue in 1978, when he took part in a radio broadcast with Guy Hocquenghem and the lawyer and writer Jean Danet. It is not by chance that this speech, later published as *La loi de la pudeur* (FOUCAULT 1978), was thoroughly discussed by Judith Butler (2012), for it elaborates fundamental reflections about the question of consent. Here Foucault also expresses his concern over a vicious trend that unfortunately would consolidate in years to come:

On the one hand, there is childhood, which by its very nature is in danger and must be protected against every possible danger, and therefore any possible act or attack. Then, on the other hand, there are dangerous individuals, who are generally adults of course, so that sexuality, in the new system that is being set up, will take on quite a different appearance from the one it used to have. In the

past, laws prohibited a number of acts, indeed acts so numerous one was never quite sure what they were, but, nevertheless, it was acts that the law concerned itself with. Certain forms of behaviour were condemned. Now what we are defining and, therefore, what will be found by the intervention of the law, the judge, and the doctor, are dangerous individuals. We're going to have a society of dangers, with, on the one side, those who are in danger, and on the other, those who are dangerous. And sexuality will no longer be a kind of behaviour hedged in by precise prohibitions, but a kind of roaming danger, a sort of omnipresent phantom, a phantom that will be played out between men and women, children and adults, and possibly between adults themselves, etc. Sexuality will become a threat in all social relations, in all relations between members of different age groups, in all relations between individuals. It is on this shadow, this phantom, this fear that the authorities would try to get a grip through an apparently generous and, at least general, legislation and through a series of particular interventions that would probably be made by the legal institutions, with the support of the medical institutions. And what we will have there is a new regime for the supervision of sexuality; in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it may well be decriminalized, but only to appear in the form of a danger, a universal danger, and this represents a considerable change. I would say that the danger lay there (Eng. tr.: 280-281).

Since childhood is considered as constitutively in danger, as a “high-risk population” says Foucault, the legal and medical power-knowledge apparatus, and especially psychology and psychiatry, must preserve the paradoxical virginity of child sexuality at any cost, even against the desires of the non-adult him- or herself. Indeed, if children feel attraction for an adult, this desire must be considered pathological. It seems that, after all, this is the main reason why, in Foucault's view, the question of consent is elided by the medical and legal apparatus. Foucault exposes the fact that non-adults do not have the possibility to be believed, when they speak about their relations, feelings, contacts: “They are thought to be incapable of sexuality and they are not thought to be capable of speaking about it. [...] And to assume that a child is incapable of explaining what happened and was incapable of giving his [sic] consent are two abuses that are intolerable, quite unacceptable” (284), Foucault concludes.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This constituent impossibility to be heard, taken seriously and chose autonomously, especially in matters of sexuality and violence, applies also to other subjects – most notably women, especially if racialized and in connection with sexual labour. All differences considered, the relation between the construction of childhood, of femininity and of (homo)sexuality is foundational to the apparatus analyzed here.



It is in such a context of widespread, radical debate that Duvert's works were inserted. A debate that dealt not only with issues of sexuality and childhood, but more broadly with the repression and control of bodies and sexual orientations, parental authority and the disciplining role of the patriarchal family. In *Le bon sexe illustré* (1974) one can read analogous ideas to those found in the texts referenced above. But one also has to note the influence of Georges Bataille's writings, and in particular the notion of expenditure. Which is evident for instance in the fact that *Le bon sexe illustré* is more directly anti-capitalist and libertarian than the texts we mentioned so far.

Indeed, Duvert recognizes in proprietary right one of the two pillars of the bourgeois sexual order (the other being the duty to procreate, and thus the reproduction of the same order). According to Duvert, the sexual order expressing itself through medical-legal apparatuses, bourgeois and familial morals, ecclesiastical pressure, and sex-education manuals (of which *Le bon sexe illustré* is a thorough analysis), captures and redirects the nomadic desire of children. A desire that does not naturally reproduce the established order, and that would be able to crush the "bourgeois economic scheme of libidinal investment" and the discriminatory medical ideology according to which sexuality is founded on biological grounds – and therefore, first of all, on the complementarity of reproductive organs. "The genital organs", writes Duvert, "become the only place of sexuality because in twelve or thirteen years of life one learns to prevent desire to dwell in whatever place, genitals included. But puberty makes genitals 're-surface'. The rest of the body will be locked forever" (1974: 84-85). So Duvert agrees with Schérer, Hocquenghem, Lewinter, Groddeck and many others, on the fact that "the original and complete sexuality is child sexuality" and that "purely genital sexuality, especially in its phallic form, is an *ideological perversion*" (Schérer *et al.* 1976: 91).<sup>3</sup> Duvert states it openly, when he portrays psychology and psychoanalysis, two fundamental mechanisms of the power-knowledge apparatus orienting sexuality, as a sort of fictional drama, composed following a 'principle of inversion', whereby:

[Psychology and psychoanalysis] describe the interiorizations of Order that the child experienced as if they were natural stages of his development; the cultural,

<sup>3</sup> The idea of a whole, unrepressed sexuality is of course rather problematic. Here, we just intend to show how Duvert's ideas on this point were not at all unique to him. On the contrary, they were current in some intellectual and psychoanalytical circles of the time.

repressive and socio-familial data are not a system of pressure able to explain these stages, they are only an interesting scenario in which every child develops [...]. Medical discourse legitimizes, universalizes and eternalizes these actions of the social order (DUVERT 1974: 141).

### 3. THE CONFESSIONAL TRAP

One can easily find propositions of the same kind elsewhere, for instance in the *Anti-Oedipus* by Deleuze and Guattari (1972). Yet, in spite of the fact that his ideas were part of a wider debate in the 1970s, Duvert's thought later became taboo – as Gilles Sebhan, the author of the only existing monographs on Tony Duvert, rightly wrote in 2015. Sebhan himself received friendly warnings not to write about Duvert, if he wanted to stay out of trouble (2010). It seems that Duvert's fame as a child-lover (a 'paedophile', i.e. a monster in the public imaginary) earned him a fate of *damnatio memoriae*. But, in order to contrast and undo such censorship, one runs the risk of reproducing a sort of morbid curiosity for the details of Duvert's conduct, an operation which in reality reinforces the morality underlying such censorship. Even Sebhan, acting with the best of intents, falls into the biographical-confessional trap: he ventures into the darkness of intimacy, trying to dissipate the shadows enveloping the 'real life' of a dead man who cannot acknowledge or refute anything. In a sense, Sebhan tries to make the paedophile Duvert confess his guilt in order to absolve him after death.

This is not what we are seeking to do. On the contrary, we attempt to turn off the confessional machine. We do not want to produce any truth about Duvert's private life. We will not wonder whether Duvert, besides his sexual preferences, was disturbed or not; whether in his novels he elaborated on some biographical material; whether he told the truth, speaking about himself in his non-literary compositions; or whether he fostered on purpose the myths surrounding the extremely bashful person that he was. Indeed, the temptation to transform Duvert's life into a novel is strong. But we do not mean to elicit empathy for someone who was unanimously condemned by society, made into a scapegoat, even. We just want to *speak* about his texts and ideas, without concealing the fact that Duvert unceasingly fought for his own desires and his form of life through writing.

#### 4. A DISORDERLY RETREAT

The battle was uneven; Duvert lost it ruinously; and the signs of this defeat mark his texts. One cannot help notice the degradation of his theory and prose after 1979, eventually inducing him to total silence. Comparing his three main theoretical writings, *Le Bon sexe illustré* (1974), *L'Enfant au masculin* (1980), and *Abécédaire malveillant*, his last book, published in 1989 after seven years of silence, the difference between them leaps off the pages. In *Le bon sexe illustré*, one grasps immediately the existence of a general, coherent theoretical plan, a political commitment, hopes. Then the theoretical frame starts to disarticulate, the texts become more and more fragmented, up to the appearance of a collection of aphorisms organised in the most arbitrary way one can imagine: the alphabetical order. Duvert is aware of that, and one can easily find textual evidence of his disillusionment.<sup>4</sup> He knows that he has become repetitive and violent and spiteful. He has lost his self-control and hopes; it looks like he no longer believes in arguing on intellectual grounds. He is worn out; he is disgusted. He shouts; he outrages the self-righteous. Then he retreats into silence.

Of course, such an involution seems to reflect the dramatic changes affecting the European political context between the Seventies and the Eighties, a brief temporal transition which nevertheless marked a decisive turning point. A season of great mobilizations, libertarian claims, daring ideas and revolutionary attempts was quickly fading away. A book such as *L'Enfant au masculin*, which is wildly subversive in its contents, but where every proposition seems to vibrate with fierce impotence, resonates with the rallying cries against an overwhelming counterrevolutionary process that Duvert was *living out* tragically. As far as Duvert's personal struggle for the reframing of the relationship between children and adults is concerned, *L'Enfant au masculin* appears also as a sort of premonition of what will happen two years after its publication:

<sup>4</sup> Consider for example the following passages, appearing at the very beginning of *L'Enfant au Masculin* and of *Abécédaire Malveillant*, respectively: "Je me résigne à composer des essais qui méritent vraiment ce nom: des choses modestes, humbles, fragiles, des opinions à vif" (DUVERT 1980: 5); "Un recueil de petites opinions, de remarques, d'idées, est un catalogue de généralisations abusives. Bien sûr, tout ce qu'on peut dire de général est faux: mais excitant comme une médisance. Une revanche. Quinieux, calomniateur et rancunier: voilà qui tu es. Et tu aimes ça" (DUVERT 1989: 9).



the violent erasure of any possible political space, the silencing of people like him.

In 1982, the Coral affair erupted in France. The Coral was a *lieu de vie*, a place where libertarian education and anti-psychiatric practices were freely carried out. Claude Sigala, Alain Chiapello and Jean-Noël Bardy, part of the staff of the Coral, were accused of sexual abuse on children. The affair eventually turned out to be a colossal media bubble, a judicial fabrication exploited for political purposes, a dirty victory for the reactionary movement against anti-psychiatry. Even René Schérer was in some way involved, along with Jack Lang, at that time minister of Culture, whom the accuser blackmailed. Someone circulated fake documents implicating Michel Foucault and Félix Guattari. The Coral affair is the epitome of a dawning new era, and it seems to have been the *coup de grace* on Duvert's morale. Thereafter, he kept silent for 7 years. In 1989 he published *Abécédaire malveillant*, and was strongly attacked by the few literary critics who did not ignore him. Then silence until his lonely, pitiful death in 2008.

## 5. ABSOLUTE EVIL AND THE CHILD

Indeed, we live in a time when people like Duvert are considered as nothing less than monsters. He has not merely been forgotten after 'history defeated him'; rather, he has been metamorphosed into a beast, becoming unrecognizable. We should acknowledge that, seen from our perspective, his writings and ideas have become equally unrecognizable, getting substantially obscured by Duvert's 'paedophilia' (a word which probably has never sounded more disgusting to someone's ears than to our own). In a way, his voice has been taken away from him because of the stigma he bears. Even when we actually read Duvert's works, unmentionable spectres of violence inflect our perception of them. There is a sort of spell on us, a spell we need to break if we want to recover the possibility of collectively addressing the issue of paedophilia. We unwittingly associate a paedophile with a corruptor of innocent children. The very word, paedophile, arouses images of evil seducers, rapists, psychopaths, murderers and so on. That is why, as all persecuted persons do, child-lovers, even the nonviolent ones, are obliged to hide and live in the dark. Thus, more and more 'they' seem to scheme secretly, deserving persecution in the eyes of those who are afraid of them.

Stories and fears flourish thanks to mystery. Therefore, the spectral power of the paedophile villain is commensurate with his actual flimsiness, and feeds on the very mediatised overexposure and moral panic which paradoxically hides him from view.<sup>5</sup> Of course, the existence of disturbed persons and of actual abuses is not at all under question. But it is undeniable that the paedophile ogre is, first and foremost, a sort of folk-tale character, that conceals the very individual who over and again appears to perform its role. When this embodiment of the cliché by a real-life person happens, it is almost impossible to take off the mask of the monster, to wash away the stigma, to make the person's voice heard. This is exactly what makes the false cases of abuse so upsetting: the formation of a sort of "violent unanimity", as René Girard would say, against the presumed paedophile; the triggering of an infernal machine whose functioning is well explained visually by Andrew Jarecki's *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003) and by Thomas Vinterberg in his *The Hunt* (2012).

In a sense, we do not expect anything else but something awful happening, so that we can rightfully and vehemently reel off into the real world a huge mass of horrible images, in a paranoid loop. This is what happened during the Nineties in western Europe, especially following the surge of moral panics in relation to the heavily mediatised Dutroux affair,<sup>6</sup> eventually bringing about a change in the everyday life of millions of people (on this point cf. at least DUCLOS 1997). Catalyzed by the monster of the day, collective fears produced new legal measures, new safety precautions, new behaviours and trends. In 2010 Claude Olivier Doron summarized the effect of the anti-paedophile wave and of the Dutroux affair in France as follows:

<sup>5</sup> We are using the masculine pronoun intentionally, since normally the paedophile is imagined as a man. Once again, this reflects an idealised vision of femininity as intrinsically maternal, domestic and incapable of aggression (and therefore ultimately also as the property of a prototypically 'weak' subject to be protected, just like the child) – something which the feminist movement also contested. A critique of such vision of femininity often appears in Duvert's own writings and interviews, most notably in his virulent attacks against mothers' social role (cf. for instance DUVERT 1974; 1979; 1980).

<sup>6</sup> Marc Dutroux, named "le monstre de Marcinelle", was arrested in 1986 for kidnapping and raping minors. Convicted to 13,5 years of prison, he was set free on parole in 1992. Along with some accomplices, he reverted to raping and kidnapping children and teenagers: amongst his victims, Eva Mackova, Henrietta Palusova, Julie Lejeune, Mélissa Russo, An Marchal, Eefje Lambrecks, Sabine Dardenne and Laetitia Delhez. Dutroux was arrested again in 1996, and sentenced to life imprisonment in 2004. The Dutroux affair had a vast echo in the media across the whole of Europe and beyond.

The Dutroux affair completes the process of convergence – which started at the beginning of the Nineties – of different problematic lines that previously defined a common and many-sided object: “paedophilia”. [...] Besides, the Dutroux affair makes the arguments developed since the Seventies [...] definitively inaudible. [...] Now paedophilia is considered as the “absolute evil”, the intolerable structuring the moral economy of our societies. [...] Facing this “absolute evil” the mirror-image of a completely undeniable absolute victim emerges: the child. [In France], the fight against child abuse is declared “grande cause nationale” in 1997. And, indeed, 1997 records a great boost in the exposure and broadcasting of paedophile affairs (BLANCHARD *et al.* 2010: 269, 270, 272).

The spectral existence of the paedophile is no less real than the concrete case. Instead, the former anticipates the latter, because it offers a ready-made interpretative model which reduces the complexity of the events and incorporates them into preconceived discursive schemes. The paedophile ogre, as a belief system, realizes itself, creating a consonant social and political environment. Recently, Selene Pascarella – a former crime correspondent, who in her *Tabloid Inferno* (2016) gives extensive coverage to cases of paedophilia – has showed how much the toxic narrative schemes sprawling in the infosphere poison Italian jurisprudence. Not to mention family life. Parental love, as well as the desire of owning children, has received so much fodder, that it has blown up into a veritable phobia, parents fearing a world where every child left alone for a minute risks being kidnapped, raped and maybe murdered. Many evocations, many mysterious sightings magnified by social media call the spectre haunting family hearths. Here, on the one hand, folk tales about the bogeyman, the white van, the international paedophile conspiracy prosper, and appear as children’s stories in which the grown-ups started to believe; on the other hand, in the family homes the ogre actually lives, since the vast majority of actual abuses on record happens within the extended family circle.

Duvert is right when he says that the Stranger, the paedophile embodying absolute evil, the Marcinelle monster, is the double of the violent, castrating father, who psychologically or physically abuses the sexuality of his daughters and sons (DUVERT 1974: 104-107). The paedophile ogre is also the negative of the perfect dad, the spotless protector of the pureness of children. In fact, the contemporary ogre would not exist as such in the absence of the image of the angel-like child, i.e. a naturalized

ideological fetish. Since childhood is constitutively at risk, permanently under a sort of terrorist threat, the control and the management of children's lives become meticulous, transforming 'the rights of the child' into a war machine enlisting new-borns into the trenches of normative social life. Indeed, in order to confirm their angelic nature, adults decide that children *must* live in an Edenic reality, where nothing can tarnish them. They have to be set apart, at least ideally, from anything the adults have not previously bowdlerized. Ultimately, the ogre summons the little angel and vice versa.

## 6. THE PROFANATION

The strength of this ideological Ouroboros emerges through the impossibility to drift away from current orthodoxies. For instance, nowadays it is practically impossible to work with children without being an advocate, if only implicitly, of a "frigid pedagogy", as Egle Becchi would call it (1981: 7-35). In addition, the silence surrounding paedophilia transforms it into an extremely powerful political weapon: in fact, no-one can deny the political manipulations surrounding the Coral affair in France, or the Vallini case in Italy<sup>7</sup> – without mentioning that of Bambini di Satana, eventually leading to the censorship and the recalling of every copy of a lucid book about the facts: Luther Blissett's *Lasciate che i bimbi* (1997).

More appropriately, we should say that such political exploitation of paedophilia works because our Janus-faced fetish separates the objects it invests from public space, like all things 'intimate' and 'private' in the liberal-bourgeois, patriarchal and heteronormative paradigm, here brought to its extremes. Paedophilia, as a belief, seems to have the capacity to envelop everything it applies to into a sacred enclosure, a non-political space. Moreover, what paedophilia affects, even when it is a spectre incapable of affecting anything, is not only the real or suspected paedophile, but it is always, necessarily, childhood as well; and, through childhood, it casts its shadow on society as a whole.

As feminism also taught us, we must profane this sacred enclosure – at

<sup>7</sup> In 1993 Francesco Vallini was arrested, together with fellow members of Gruppo P (a group that debated and promoted consensual sexual relations between adults and teenagers). Vallini was also one of the editors of the gay magazine *Babilonia*. All were accused of conspiracy and alleged sexual intercourse with minors. Vallini was acquitted of the charges of sexual violence, but convicted for conspiracy on the basis of his activities with Gruppo P.

least because the wall of silence, the unspeakable horror or disgust the paedophile's image provokes, gives an aura of supernatural power to the object of hatred. The horror mystifying paedophilia conceals desires and potentialities that can and should be rescued, unleashed, developed or at least talked about and worked upon. Repression as a concept might conceal the productive side of power, as Foucault convincingly argued, but it also works in a very real sense as a *dispositif* within a specific mode of subjectivation (cf. RUBIN 1984: 277).

Duvert's was an almost desperate attempt to overcome the shame that society would like him to feel unbearably. Thus he showed that if 'paedophilia' is love for children, then everybody should be a 'child-or-teenage-lover'. All the more so if one wants to be a revolutionary, and end the abuses that are perpetrated every day upon an oppressed and silenced humanity. On the one hand, the 'paedophile' Duvert speaks of oppressed childhood, and on the other he talks about his own oppression, about the impossibility for the emotional subjectivity of child-lovers to flourish, especially if not wealthy and/or not aligned to the bourgeois logics of the libidinal market. Duvert the child-lover offers the vivid, bleeding outline of a subjectivity struggling for its own emergence.

Duvert's case seems to expose an aspect of struggles for sexual self-determination that should not be underestimated: the fact that, when we claim the revolutionary efficacy of our desire to be-come, struggling subjectivities are not free from 'rubble', as Duvert's resentment reveals. At any rate, it appears as if in order to obtain the recognition of other sexualities, for a long time LGBTQ movements for the most part have avoided dealing with the thorniest of issues – that which would have led to open confrontation, arousing blind media aggression and, once more, casting upon queer sexualities the stigma of depravation and perversion, from which they have been trying to liberate themselves. In the end, however we may look at it, the issue of 'paedophilia' involves queer, feminist and LGBT movements not only theoretically, but also historically.

On a parallel, Duvert's polemic and sharp invectives also had the merit of keeping the issue of sexuality closely tied to that of class and capitalism as central to processes of subjection and oppression – another somewhat controversial issue for queer movements today. This is a significant elision in many analyses as much as in praxis, which should give



us pause and lead us to question the extent to which our struggles for freedom may be founded on privilege, and enable us, in keeping with our aims, to make difference productive rather than exclusive.

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