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Psychoanalytic Practice and Queer Theory: Queering the Clinic

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Clinical Encounters in Sexuality: Psychoanalytic Practice and Queer Theory offers to re-start the dialogue between queer theory and psychoanalytic practice. The book provides a wide range of interesting intersections and in doing so illustrates how queer concepts can be accommodated in the clinic. As prudently noted by Gherovici (this volume), psychoanalysis and queer theory may converge but do not overlap. In that sense, any response to their complex encounter should not so much focus on what has already been chartered or explored, as on bringing to the fore the elisions and illuminations this convergence may produce. In order to do so one must remain faithful to the spirit of the queer; one must speak, in jest and in earnest, from a 'different' perspective; you may assume that today we are Deleuzians in our questions.

Question one: play, dramatis personae and key metaphors(?)

Queer is giddiness. The injunction to the analysts to not remain somber (Farina 2017: 96) is attractive, but does it challenge the sobriety of psychoanalysis in general? Farina invites the analyst to be drunk on love and to remain at a remove from the erotic object of analysis (2017: 96) Multiple possibilities open between the words 'not', 'remaining', 'drunk', 'remove' 'object'. But can queer theory radicalise the clinic, or is the latter so settled by its practices that can withstand the shocks of a queer interrogation? 'Queer' can be comfortably accommodated in the psychoanalytic realm by either being closely aligned with jouissance, or by being situated in the broad realm of identity as failure. But, is it enough to say that jouissance is queer (Farina 2017: 94)? Reducing a philosophical and political mode of interrogation (queer) to affect or indeed locating 'it' in the realm of Real deterritorialises significant debates into the realm of the ineffable.

Queer theory interrogates and challenges orthodoxies. Queer theory would ask: is there any room for 'play' between two figures that would be ideally poised for a queer-ing game: the one who is not supposed to know (analyst) and the one who does not yet know they (will eventually) know (analysand)? This dimension is indeed emerging in the book but only just, through positing the possibility of re-inscribing, for instance, fixated desires differently (Downing 2017: 139). Along the same lines, the Winnicottian ethics of becoming brother-mother (Snediker, 2017: 154) and the ease with which family members can be confused (Snediker, 2017: 157) chime with 'queer' but the dramatis personae remain tethered to the Oedipal scenario. Deleuze would ask: what is going to be our key metaphor? Are we going to continue talking about the Oedipal theatre or are we going to also talk about the factory (of machinic desire) (De Bolle, 2010: 16)?

A queer psychoanalytic practice would require a radical redefinition of desire as well as of the psychoanalytic self and/or of subjectivity that seems to always be framed as the product of a series of identifications and its failures (Freud) within a family nexus, with the self as the product of a dyadic (omphaloscopic asocial) mother-child relation (Klein, Winnicott) or a linguistically perceived subjectivity (Lacan) which ignores the concrete living body, the body's resistance and the revolt against stratifying molarising structures (such as the hysterical performance of defiance of the patriarchal norms). Equally, the unconscious remains untouched and tacitly accepted as the cornerstone of the psychoanalytic understanding of the subject. Specific definitions of the unconscious assume specific understandings of subjectivity and preclude other notions of being and becoming, while they perpetuate a very specific technique of transference interpretation, as well as an asymmetrical relationship between the analysts that knows and the analysand that does not know.

Question two: creativity (and) desiring machines?

Is 'queer' just another name for the failure of the Name of the Father, or can it lead to a discussion about how the psychoanalytic clinic can (or cannot) participate in unleashing vital and creative energies beyond the Name of the Father?

In the Encounters volume, queer *theory* is being presented as a rather unanimous canonical theory that draws mainly on Butler's work with reference to some other key psychoanalytic texts that revise the psychoanalytic theory's heteronormative canon (e.g. de Lauretis, Grosz). Deleuze disengages the concept of desire from the constraints of repetition and the death drive (De Bolle, 2010: 12). For Deleuze repetition is not co-terminus to the failure of remembering but rather points towards a Leibnizean unconscious qua multitude of small perceptions. Further, desire is *conatus*, capacity to be affected independent of objects, which can also be defined as the tendency to keep open the capacity to be affected to the greatest degree' (De Bollee, 2010: 15). Such a definition of desire invites the clinic to consider the dimensions of co-affectation as a credible alternative to the Name of the Father. A proper queer question would then be: does co-affectation have a place in the clinic, beyond the concepts of transference and counter-transference? And another: can queer open a space of creativity which is neither jouissance nor lack? Deleuze characterises the Freudian clinic as a mechanism, not as part of the desiring machine (De Bolle, 2010: 17). A mechanism fits in a deterministic world view and has no means of producing desires. Can queer theory open up clinical practice to wider filiations of desire, beyond sexuality as failure and specific assigned roles?

To continue in the same path of inquiry: for Deleuze partial objects are connected to machines, and the subject is the product of the desiring machine; the desiring machine connects, aborts and consumes free floating energy (De Bolle, 2010: 18). Syntheses, and not objects, produce new subdivisions (18). This conceptualisation of desire has no place for lack, as desire does not compensate for lack but is productive of material and social productions. As an increasing number of theorists focus on how affects are produced inside massive abstracts machines such as the internet (Ticineto-Clough, 2018) or in the realm of capitalist psycho-power (Stiegler, 2010) the psychoanalytic clinic will need to respond to the wider machinic functions of our social, political, and historical becoming. In that context, queer theory cannot be reduced to a proliferation of fluidities delimited to the personal and the private.

At the same time, the way we envisage the role of psychoanalysis in a wider (global, machinic) affective space, might have repercussions for how key concepts like masochism and sadism are to be used, dropped or modulated in future debates. If a masochist can be a person who hollows out a creative space of indetermination (Deleuze, cited in Hallward, 2010: 42) in a culture that offers no creative outlets only dump simulation, as Baudrillard might have added, perhaps we should be turning our gaze towards tarrying with excess, rather than with the negative.

Both queer theory and practice have been primarily political, much more interested in acts and acting rather than in a systematising all-pervasive theory. Queer has aimed at *undoing* established knowledge and discursive practices that reproduce 'sexual subjects' as *this* or *that* gendered identity or sexuality, following specific discursive regulatory frameworks. Can clinical practice participate in such undoings, helping patients to reach what Stoics called freedom from disturbance and a calmness of soul? Moving beyond the long-winded and endless wars between psychoanalytic schools and a certain competition about who gains the title of the best theory and the best technique, psychoanalysis needs to reclaim its purpose and *raison d'être*, as patients come to the clinic with a certain desire to (not) know and to (not) be freed from their symptoms - a quest for freedom, then, but a rather complicated and self-negating project.

Again, if power, as Baudrillard says, is in advanced state of decomposition, afflicted with hyper-reality and an acute crisis of simulation (Gane, 2000), an encounter between unorthodox philosophers like Baudrillard, queer theory and psychoanalysis (see Weaherill, 2017), should not so much promote a search for truth as a game of seduction. For Baudrillard seduction is the strategy which illuminates the present state of things: stasis of knowledge, metastasis of power. Seduction is more important than truth, a subversive strategy which the psychoanalytic adherence to the notion of **interpretation** fails to notice in its search for hidden meaning (Gane, 2000: 53). Queer theory opens a dangerous and wonderful realm between (non) knowledge and seduction, so long as what floats between the two is not subsumed in/by an act of communication leading only to interpretation.

Deleuze, too, replaces the dominant notion of 'truth' in classical philosophy with creativity (De Bolle, 2010: 10), holding that philosophy qua machine produces thought in encounters, among them with psychoanalysis. Can queer theory bring this kind of synthesis and this kind of dialogue into the realm of practice? Beyond thinking desire in close reference to mother and father (144) can (queer) creativity be accepted like the creativity of the artist who does not need to find a compromise between art and reality (De Bolle, 2010: 145)?

All is sinthome?

Gherovici notes that we avoid the phallus by making use of other concepts (object a). In this context, the Lacanian sinthome is a way of reknitting in the psychic structure what has been left unknotted because of the father's failure (Gherovici, 2017: 377). 'In order **to think** about sexual difference **without a direct reference** to the phallus', she writes, 'I propose to follow Lacan's later theory of the *sinthome*'. Further, '**since the *sinthome* is not a complement but a supplement**, it is a vehicle for creative unbalance, capable of disrupting the symmetry. (378).

Creativity is offered as an alternative to castration but lack does not budge. Can the sinthome accommodate the queer richness of becoming? If psychoanalytic theory subtends clinical *practice* and queer is also mainly *practice* - as doing and undoing of norms around gender, sexuality and bodies - a queer clinic needs to be perceived as a *mode of inquiry* that acknowledges the violence of norms, power systems and social exclusions, and promotes change. Instead of merely explaining (a practice that psychoanalytic practice very often falls into and reduces itself to), clinical practice is very much tied to change and transformation, as our patients come to the consulting room with a hope for change, not merely understanding; *something is suffering and can no longer be, or something needs to change*.

Finally, a queer clinic needs to question the traditional reliance on and privileging of transference interpretation. The latter perpetuates a closed totalizing system that uses the notion of psychic reality to foreclose critical and political thinking while it traps the client in a specific type of *folie a deux* that repeats and reinstates the violence of the normative. What is

really at stake in transference interpretation is not the desire of the patient but that of the analyst as the subject-supposed-to-know. Such a prevalence of the practice of transference interpretation in British psychoanalysis denotes a very specific interpretation of post Freudian psychoanalysis and raises questions about practices of translation of the original texts into clinical practice. Such practices risk infantilising the client and, more broadly, is symptomatic of a tradition which is itself infantilised and unwittingly wedded to the foreclosure of critical thought. It is queer that this volume does not contain any texts on self-criticism of psychoanalysis or of psychoanalysts themselves.

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