



Intimacy: The Tank in the Bedroom

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Introduction

This title comes from an essay on the impact of political and, in particular, totalitarian regimes on intimate life. What I most want to convey today is that sexuality, gendered subjectivity, and intimacy are not simply personal and self contained, but always invaded by and cohabiting with forces of power and history, whether violent or seductive or dominating, or all at once.

Martin Mahler, a contemporary analyst in Prague, conjured up the clinical and social and professional dilemmas when Czech analysts and Czech citizens began to rehabilitate and recover psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic work, after the collapse of communism.

Mahler:

“The Hungarian writer, György Konrád, once wrote (2009): Some time ago, a butcher lived in our village. He had a house on the corner of a steep street. There was a military base near the village. Once, the butcher's wife was changing bedding and a tank crashed through the bedroom wall because the road was ice and slippery. The front of the house was damaged. The woman was also somewhat damaged, but not too much. When I met the butcher next time, I asked him about what happened. “History came to us,” he said”. The grotesque presence of a tank in the bedroom describes the ever-repeating experience of the loss of a safe and familiar home, a very “unheimlich” space in Central European experience” Mahler (2014)

Whether as a bludgeoning force or a subtle glance, 'History comes to us,' in the neo liberal state, as in the totalitarian. Intimacy is the contradictory site of freedom and regulation. Intimate life, particularly the intimate life of the body, of gendered experience, and of sexuality, however delicate, sensually rich, secretive, archaic, or primitive, is *always already* infused by regulation, by violence, and by power. Power expressed in micro and macro forms at many social, familial, interpersonal and political levels invades and constitutes, in conscious and unconscious forms, our most intimate and intricate psychic and somatic lives.

Postmodern theory, and contemporary American psychoanalytic work across many traditions, ensures that one can no longer see privacy and intimacy as a *refuge* from otherness, or from history or from the state, in their many seductive or demonic forms and conditions. Rather, the task of this essay is to be speaking about intimacies' ties to and dependency on social and historic forces. I consider violence across a spectrum of normative development circumstances but also in circumstances of extreme social destructiveness, always trying to attend to the elements of intimacy in these phenomena.

Yolanda Gampel has termed certain kinds of social forces as

'radioactive identifications':

I use the term "radioactive identification" or "radioactive nucleus" (Gampel, **1993**, **1996a**) to refer to phenomena that are comprised of unapproachable, nonrepresentable remnants of the memories of social violence that remain "radioactive," ...These radioactive elements lie scattered about—hidden in images, nightmares, and symptoms—through which, however, they are detectable. (Gampel, 1998)

Indebted to her work and many others, I situate my own thinking in the contemporary relational model, a form of field theory¹ in which the individual is only comprehensible within a complex field of conscious and unconscious forces. Relational psychoanalysis is more properly a landscape rather than a tightly organized work of metapsychology and technical regimens. (fn 2 My guides in this paper include, Winnicott, Laplanche, and Loewald, all three thinkers for whom the individual could only emerge in an interpersonal process, a process that predates but ushers in a world of external and internal objects. History is settled into the molecules of human experience, layered into dream spaces. (fn 3)

In working and writing as a North American psychoanalyst today, I have enjoyed the freedom to move among many interesting theoretical domains. Cooper (2015) coined the term 'bridge theory' to examine powerful structures that cross-theoretical geographies. I have another term to add to this discussion: Nomadic. Nomadic theory. Nomadic objects. This term has a history in feminism and in philosophy (Kristeva, 1980, Braidotti, 2011, Deleuze, 1994). Think of concepts and ideas not as codifications or as property for which the user has to pay taxes or other kinds of loyalties, but rather as mobile sites of energy.

Nomadic theory is a critique of the center as the defining force of a concept and its meanings. It seeks to destabilize the margins and the center. Surely Freud is one of our original nomads and psychoanalysis an appeal from the margins of the thinkable. In the idea of nomadic subjects, what is proposed is a non-unitary subject, a subject of multiple belongings. Relational psychoanalysis early on embraced such a view, considering shifting self states, as multiple sites where psychic states join social links. ¹

This perspective is also in line with contemporary ‘intersectional’ models of the subject. (Crenshaw, 2014) The intersection, a site of crossings, of movement that is regulated and unregulated, potentially violent and orderly. Race, class, gender, sexual orientation, culture, historical incidents, all operate at these intersections in unique and *emergent* combinations.(fn 4) I think of Surrealist Antonin Artaud and his idea of the Body without Organs, a view of the body not already colonized by language, by theory, or by the state including the psychoanalytic state which orders meaning and value to particular bodies in particular arrangements. The body recruited from Artaud is organic, breathing, pulsating, emergent.

I want to follow Laplanche’s theoretical intervention on Freud, and ask us to continue the Copernican revolution, to decenter our view of the body and bodily life (Saketopoulou, 2015), becoming nomadic in our thoughts about the relation of materiality in the body, intimacy, and psychic meaning. That is the challenge of contemporary theories of gender, gendered bodies and sexuality.

I organize this essay, into a discussion of Sexuality, Intimacy and Otherness in three forms: 1) as the subject is formed, 2) as sexuality and gender are regulated and managed at conscious and unconscious levels 3) and as subjectivity, sexuality and gendered life are subject to social violence.

Intimacy in Subject Formation

For decades now, in many branches of psychoanalysis, we have a developed critique of the tendency to essentialize binaries in relation to gender and sexuality. Here, however, I want to look at one binary⁵ that I think cannot be abandoned. That is the polarity of big and

little, especially the asymmetry of adult parent and the evolving infant. This essay depends on an understanding of the power of this asymmetry, in individual, in dyadic, and in social formations.

At first glance, the work of Laplanche stressing this asymmetry in the transmission sites between parent and child, and the work of attachment theory and research seem at odds. Theory and empirical work on attachment stress attunement, the extraordinary capacities and sensitivities of the infant and, in a sense, a more democratic arrangement of parent and infant⁶.

Here, I hope to build an integrative picture that includes the force of otherness in the individual subject keeping in play, sexuality and subjectivity, attachment and excitement.

In the constituting of the human subject, Otherness is prior to subjectivity and I will trace this idea in psychoanalysis to Winnicott, and Loewald as well as Laplanche. When Winnicott sets 'being' prior to 'doing', I think he is attentive to an archaic process in which experiences of linking, of going on being are primary. This is what Loewald was theorizing in his idea of 'primal density', experiences that require the presence of objects but are, strictly speaking, pre-objectal (Mitchell, 2009). Introjection is privileged and, in an important sense, for Loewald, exteriority and interiority are co-constructed. (Harris, 2016)

The human infant is susceptible (Judith Butler's term) and unprepared (Scarfone's term) and the encounter with the other that prepares the way for a subject constituted in and by language and discourse with others, will be overwhelming *and* attuned.

North Americans have now the increasingly visible (that is, in English) work of Laplanche and his followers (Stein, Scarfone,) in which the erotic is always more than, exceeds processing and in that excess the unconscious and subjectivity are constituted. The arrival of the enigmatic messages creates a demand on the child for psychic and surely, somatic labor. The fruits of this labor are interiority and unconscious meanings for experiences that both arrive and emerge. Laplanche restores the idea of seduction, the reality of encounters with an Other whose fantasy and material transactions of adult with infant infuse the child with experiences, longings, erotic forms of being and feeling that require acts of *translation* and registration that are the very work of becoming a subject. Laplanche wants a permanent Copernican revolution. The unconscious arrives and emerges.

The term 'translation' is important. I think that the work of translation, always partial and fallible and susceptible to mistranslation, is a subtle and demanding notion. All the participants in the sending and receiving of enigmatic messages engage in translation in the long work of integration and organization, work, that as Laplanche proposes will constitute subjectivity and the unconscious.

Enigmatic messages will be subject to forgetting and to elaboration, to distortion and construction. For me, the developmental model that best underwrites this is found in different instantiations in Winnicott, in Loewald, Bion, and others (Pichon-Riviere) is a kind of dialectic, a spiral process in which much that is beyond representation is registered and translated. The spiral and dialectic transactions between self and other work at the level of theory, of meaning making and of the individual's development. There is often in this way

of thinking a preoccupation with digestion, with taking in, metabolizing, feeding back, dialoguing and remapping. (Ferro, Civitarese, the Barangers, Pichon-Riviere, Bion).

The enigmatic maternal seduction – and all three terms are crucial- arrives without full awareness in either creature and in many aspects of this development elements of shame form and force what is constituted as subjectivity. Shame is a crucial element in my understanding of intimacy. It is the focus of the following section in the essay. Erotogenic zones are formed not innately made, leaning on self preservative instincts which over time are recruited to pleasure and longing and what becomes ‘infantile sexuality’.

Intriguingly, then, Laplanche propose a crucial question involving the meanings, fantasies, and structures of the adult as constitutive of infantile sexuality. What does the breast want? What does it mean to be able to frame that question? That the breast *wants* is part of the enigmatic seduction but an experience that remains to be translated, misrepresented, forgotten, remembered, etc. over the course of development⁷

Rozmarin (2016) has been interested in linking and differentiating Ferenczian work from the Confusion of Tongues with Laplanche. Both forms of ‘seduction’ have excess, inevitably, but in Laplanchean models, the translations organize subjectivity and unconscious fantasy and excitement from otherness in a way that is manageably excessive. Ferenczi adds to this discourse the dimension of trauma that is an attack on meaning and on agency.

Perhaps we might say that from Ferenczi and Laplanche we have as a condition of intimacy and interiority a spectrum of excessive messages, which become the endless task of development. The acoustic sensuous bath, in which the infant bathes, is filled with life

rafts and dangerous bastions. This process leads inevitably to a psychic apparatus in which the demonic and the delirious will swim together.

Excluded material-----

Levinas and Laplanche.

One of the most interesting projects devoted to crossing the divide of infantile sexuality and early attachment, is that of Chetrit Vatine (2004) who braids Laplanche with Emmanuel Levinas in a very subtle and profound encounter. She considers two different visions of the asymmetry in parent child encounters and finds a way to integrate them. Subject formation in which intimate, private is always already excessive, is flooding and transformative in unpredictable ways. And at the same time, interwoven with this process is the attunement to the immature child, which entails a profoundly ethical and demanding responsibility. The newborn arrives in a condition both of distress and dependence but is born into the particular asymmetry of big/little, the polarity that threatens and facilitates development.

This asymmetry, Chetrit-Vatine argues leads to what she terms a 'double founding;' a matrixial space in which the child inevitably encounters adult sexuality AND adult responsibility, whatever form these forces emerge in any particular dyad or social setting⁸. Matrixial space is drawn from a reading of Levinas on the power and primacy of the caress, the face, the 'being towards the other' in a stance that links but does not colonize the other.

It is at this level of a 'double founding' that patients like Jess are so grievously failed. It is inescapable that *otherness* lies at the deepest reaches of the subject, constituting intimacy – whether sane or mad- in whatever form it has arrived. (fn9)

Intimacy in Regulation:

Yet even these developmental complexities do not exhaust our sense of how deeply '*otherness*' shapes the subject. Many make the argument, (Butler, Corbett, Dimen, Rozmarin, Gurelnik, McGleughlin, and Saketopoulou, among others,) that we consider that the *other* arrives, inevitably, on conscious and unconscious regulatory missions.

Rozmarin: The Micro, routine, ubiquitous Political is everything and everywhere. From when I look at the mirror and register all the social categories I remember I belong to (or not, or ambivalently), to the ways I experience and believe (or not, or ambivalently) and am moved (or not, or ambivalently) by others' faces and behaviors and feelings and ideas..... The Macro political is the visual and invisible, dramatic but also daily political environment we all live in, what speaks out of mass media and social media, news, opinion, advertising, culture, fashion, etc. (Rozmarin, 2016)

Erving Goffman, from 1963 and his book *Stigma: The Management of Spoiled Identity* put it this way:

In an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant a father, college educated, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports. (Goffman, 1963, p.153)

Actually, make that person, there is one unblushing person and he is male. Blushing is certainly often one of the conditions of femininity along with other forms of degraded or disenfranchised otherness. More seriously, gender ascription and gender identity for women will inevitably entail suffering, whatever form of femininity you are following. This suffering is generic but it is also particular in that women suffer inevitably as we will all fail

at the demand to profess or enact the idealized ways of looking, speaking and acting 'femininity' required by our culture and subcultures. So I would say that, in gendered life, most of us are not strangers to shame, in various guises and quantities. Whether as micro-aggressions or as violent and explicit repression, the various messages about our inadequacies as persons, our humanity affect any of us standing apart from Goffman's one unblushing man. We have many names for this problem: interpellation, policing,

Clinical Material excluded

We blush, we shudder, we rage. What is clear in these clinical situations is how pervasive and debilitating shame is in the conduct of our most intimate projects. Shame is perhaps the most intimate of emotions as well as surely the most vexing. (Lewis, 1992; Schore,) It has been at the heart of Corbett's (2009) work on regulatory anxiety on the complexity and delight in phallic pleasures in boyhood and at the life endangering experiences of loss of credence as a person. While there are many gatekeepers of class mobility, culture, sexual identity, and race, the management of subjectivity is intimately bound up with shame and its vicissitudes. Intimate life is one of its deepest homes.

Intimacy and Social Violence: Radioactivity

Remembering the potency of shame in so many subtle aspects of our identities as gendered, sexed and raced persons, I turn to its potent force in social violence, where violence is triggered by encounters of identity and subjectivity

My colleague Samuel Gerson tells me about the recently translated memoir of Carlos Liscano. In *Truck of Fools* (English title), Liscano speaks in a clear careful voice of the intimacy engendered in torture. The torturers, having particular prisoners under their control, are termed 'reponsables' an astonishing word that conjures care and control. The intimacy arises through the terrible facts that it is the 'responsable' who sees, witnesses everything the prisoner experiences, and witnesses very close in. Liscano is never masochistic in this account, he remains spiritually clear and distinct but violence and intimacy are inextricable in the links to campangneros (the political cronies) and the responsable (torturer).

In Liscano's relation to his own body, to the bodies and sounds of others, we live in Butler's territory of precarious life. Butler, who has been writing under the influence of both Levinas and Laplanche, captures the excruciating mixture in subjectivity of tenderness, violence, and precariousness (a much favored term in her work) The encounter with the other to whom you are responsible is painful. We see the precariousness in the face of the Other. In a wonderful mixture of metaphors Butler speaks of 'the face vocalizing agony.' Here we see intimate awareness and the requirement to protect in exquisite tension with the vision in Liscano's work of the violation of that requirement in the most intimate of settings. And yet, torture is also the most political of settings.

In Gerson's seminal paper *When the Third is Dead*, which is about failures in witnessing, he describes the work of Helen Bamber, a young woman working with survivors from the concentration camp Belsen, as it was being liberated:

People were in very difficult situations, sitting on the floor, they would hold on to you and dig their fingers into your flesh and they would rock and they would rock and they would rock and we would rock together. You saw people rocking, but the act of rocking together and receiving their pain without recoil was essential. The reason people are so humiliated by terrible assaults on their body and mind is that they have a sense of contamination and the realization I had was that one had to receive everything without recoil. It was one of the important lessons I had in Belsen”

I pair these two moments, Liscano’s and Bamber’s, one of horror and one of enormous capacity to witness. It is our challenge to see how both moments operate in such intimacy.

I am going to integrate Gampel’s concept of radioactive identifications with the work of Donald Moss on phobic hatred to illustrate the potent brew of social violence and intrapsychic conflicts soldered into racial hatred, a hatred that often includes a hatred of aspects of gender and sexuality. Moss argues that such hatreds often situate within a psychic space of ‘we-ness’. We hate them because they Here there is the genesis of the truly mad idea that it is the *other* that has animated the violence and hatred, bringing destruction upon themselves. I think this phenomenon has some explanatory power over the manic excitement that Trump’s candidacy promoted in many people, perhaps in most of us.

Then, Moss builds his argument about phobic hatred, in which he focuses on misogyny, racism, homophobia and anti-Semitism, on the unsettling elision of ‘I desire’ to ‘we hate’. For Moss, phobic hatred is the residue of the powerful infusions of excitement and desirability emanating from the other. Even as envy is one animator of anti-Semitism, so many excitements about the black body and sexuality fuel racism in these strange unconscious transformations Moss is writing about.

Violent images, practices, excitements, potential and actualized forms of destructiveness and lawlessness: these are at the bedrock of intimacy and they are all formed through these process of seduction and regulation I have addressed in this paper. I want to illustrate this with an experience documented - in film and book – by a Texan psychoanalyst and ethnographer, Riccardo Ainslie. Ainslie arrived in Jasper, Texas scant hours after the news of a terrible murder had been broadcast. In 1999, three young men tied a middle aged black man to the back of a pickup truck and dragged him to his death along a deserted logging road in this Texas town. Among the many insights Ainslie had, as he and his students worked in the very overwhelmed and devastated Texan communities was how immediately collective and individual memory of historic and contemporary racial violence surfaced. The site was a deserted logging road, the site of a lynching from the 1920s, immediately brought back to awareness throughout the communities. How intimately and unconsciously, people hold violent histories. The ‘we’ that provided it and the ‘we’ that experienced it merge in a poisonous radioactive set of identifications. A lynching in the 1920s seemed almost a template for the events of 1999, an event well before the birth of the accused. An intricate partnership of structural racism, intergenerational transmission, laid the tracks of those 1999 events.

In Ainslie’s book, *Long Dark Road*, the reports of court transcripts and police house interview are too harrowing for me to give you much verbatim account. It is striking to read how much of the young men’s conversation with the police – whether confession or denial – was so sexualized and had so much sexualized violence. It is important to know that at many lynchings, (and there were many) earlier in the century in America, there was a practice of taking photograph and circulating them as postcards. The postcards reveal the

manic states of the observers, Arousal – desire and hatred - seem inextricably linked, as Moss has argued.

At a certain moment in the interview of the subjects Ainslie reports: "Berry simply broke. He looked up at Rowles and Gray and in an emotional voice said 'they went to fuck with a n....". Later at the conclusion of interview of the young man, John King, who is finally charged with murder and eventually convicted, Ainslie reports the following " The interviewer then came back to the events of the night of James Byrd's murder. King claims that the agent accused him of complicity in the murder. " I told them all to suck my dick and get me a lawyer." King claims... All of a sudden that hostile agent slams his fist into the table and screams at me. You're gonna fry for this, you little fucker. Ill see to it" At that point I told them to suck my dick again and that the interview was over.'" (Ainslie, 2004, p53). Phobic hatred, activated in the community, but also phobic hatred activated in the men who kill James Byrd. Phobic hatred is so lethal precisely because it is built on disavowed desire and its attendant shames. These men will grow up to be Goffman's blushing persons, of the most dangerous variety.

Conclusion:

It is this spot, this contact zone, where intimacy, sexuality, bodies, and violent destructiveness meet that we *must* stand in order to understand collective silences and collective action. Moss has written about the great internal (and external/social) impediments to doing just that. "Structured hatreds promised relief from otherwise unbearable constellations of identification and wishing" (Moss, 2001, p1333)

This paper was drafted during a long and frightening campaign before the American election and finished in its stunning aftermath. One argument of this essay is that symptoms and history co-exist, that we are invaded and constituted by much of social violence, in its benign and horrible formations. We need to be able to transform symptoms back into history. It is for this reason that we need the work on intergenerational transmission, particularly the work of Faimberg (2005), Apprey (2014) and others (Grand and Salberg, 2017).

Nomads at the intersections. I have wanted these ideas to be informative and useful in thinking about intimacy in clinical practice, in social life and as an organizing force in theorizing. In the nomadic practice of this essay, you might say, that one of the agendas in this talk is to Queer the Tank in the Bedroom.

Queer is perhaps the salient nomadic term, its meaning migrating from the domain of marginalized sexualities into the center, usually now seen as linked to any experience or act or being who feels at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which 'queer' necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence.' (Halperin, 1997).

We can imagine that the Tank has insides, perhaps a matrixial space, the site of life and death. This is also Bion's tank, besides which he 'dies' in 1917. It is his tank about which he is still talking in 1979 when he thinks of the shells grown in our minds and groups, shells which can be turned to jelly, minds that can be shattered.

The Tank is in the bedroom, I am arguing, in regimes of all kinds and under various sources and forms of power, whether the destructive tank crashing into a Hungarian

cottage, or the tinker toy tank offered to a little boy as a vehicle for gender regulation. The tank in the bedroom is one register of the strange disturbing manic excitement of the Trump campaign. We experience the overturning of reason and lawful speech, a stirring to which none of us is immune precisely because it hits in such an intimate spot. And finally, not to forget that the tank crashes into the woman, who has borne, even in this essay, and certainly in psychoanalytic theory, too much of the burden of intimate life, of care, of surveillance, of protection, and seduction.

With this essay, I remember and cherish three people very crucial to my life as a person, as a psychoanalyst, and as a citizen:

Robert Sklar (1936-2011)

Stephen Mitchell (1946-2000)

Muriel Dimen (1942- 2016)

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Footnotes

¹ I think of Field theories in terms of landscapes; not identical but overlapping. (Ferro, Civitarese, Stern, Baranger and Baranger, Racker, Bleger being important generative figures within this perspective.

² Speaking today as a representative of North American psychoanalysis, I will start at home, with some ideas from a panel Stephen Mitchell and I organized called ‘What’s American about American psychoanalysis?’ In that panel, some unusual ideas appeared. Schirmeister, a literary theorist, thought that the power psychoanalysis had in American when Freud arrived in 1912 was that it was still a country in mourning. For Mitchell and I, writing an overview, what was American was what tied us to pragmatics, the American phenomenology of William James, the theories of meaning from Pierce. In other words, we saw ourselves rising from a tradition rooted in the primacy of experience, particularly shared experience, and in the dialogue of self with other, along with triadic and dyadic theories of meaning

³ Faimberg (2005) speaks of the telescoping of generations, the unconscious transfer of alienated narcissistic identifications arriving often as uncodeable and undecipherable to their senders and to their recipients. Benjamin (1988, 1998) and Ogden investigate this

complex interface of self and other, intimate and social through their work on the notion of Thirdness.

⁴ I draw here on models of developmental that work a dialectic and digestive metaphors for change and growth. Not unlike Bion's notion of alpha function, and drawing from Piaget and Vygotsky, the child's internal experience is built through interchange and narrative and through the complex and multiple levels of individual experience: intrapsychic and intersubjective co-evolve. I set the term privatization in quotations to indicate the deep mix of the intimate and the external social. (Harris, 2016)

⁵ Within many branches of North American psychoanalysis, there is a developing critique of too sharp and reified a use of the binaries which historically organized and defined norms of gender and sexuality. I think of development, including development of theories, as more like a rhizome not a tree. Rhizome is an image from Deleuze. Roots arise and flourish in unexpected ways in different soils and environments.

⁶ I am certainly in a long line of writers interested in the integration of attachment and sexuality and I hope I give sufficient recognition to the difficulties in such a project. (Widlocher, 2003; Lyons Ruth, Boston Change Process Group, Scarfone, Beebe and Lachman, Seligman, Atlas, and many others.)

⁷ I give one example of the ways in which the intimate and the social/symbolic interweave. Not from a contemporary, but from the work of Sabina Spielrein who in 1912 began to think about the development of speech and thought, working with Piaget in Geneva but bringing a psychoanalytic sensibility to her engagement with child development. Language, Spielrein insists we notice, is made with the mouth. Speech thus arises in the context of nursing and the lips' encounter with breasts and milk. Babbling and the evolution of words and speech play emerged from the sensory and intimate dyadic experience of feeding. Speech thus will always interweave the symbolic, socially loaded forms of meaning and grammar, with the archaic and sensual worlds of the body. Intimacy and the social order are soldered together or annealed in the very act of acquiring speech.

⁸ Chetrit-Vatine sees development as a spiral process, an engagement of mutuality and asymmetry consistently working in the earliest points of subject formation, citing Aron and Mitchell as writers stressing asymmetry in the clinical situation.

⁹ This model of the interpenetration of thought, emotion and action is developed in the work of Matte Blanco and taken up by Lombardi and others. I think this work intersects with a tradition that is both old and new: Aulagnier's work on the violence of interpretation, the Botella's work on what they term *figurability* all operate with the need to identify primary process at a deep level, pre-fantasy and pre-representation. Terms like 'processural', and 'hallucinatory' capture some of the quality of these pre-objectal

experiences. This is in the current movement in Bionian field theory where primary and secondary process exist in a very new and more complexly layered fashion.
