

## Insult and Identity

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Sometimes I feel tempted to subscribe to a reading of the history of psychoanalysis, and the formation and subsequent uptake (I avoid the word development) of its main concepts as originating in Freud's radicalism and the unwavering openness of his enquiry; followed by a gradual hardening and loss of this spirit by those psychoanalytic theorists who claimed to be building on and 'developing' Freud's ideas based on their clinical observations. There was a genuine conservative backlash by Freud's contemporaries as well as the second generation of analysts where prejudice, common sense and a sharp division between what is 'healthy' and what is 'pathological' were gradually resurrected to lend psychoanalysis an air of respectability.

Klein and her disciples followed with ambitions of providing a total theory of mind, and the schools inspired by Lacan confined the complicated maze of subjectivity to closed structures and a fixed truth about the types of desire that govern and determine the so-called 'subject positions'. These two schools gave us two utterly different versions of what is to be regarded as properly psychoanalytic. The former seemed to call for the painstaking building of insight that will eventually enable the analyst/ patient couple to colonise the area designated as the unconscious. The latter celebrated the quirky and eccentric aspects of the analysand's unconscious, which could never be fully captured or understood, and regarded the quest for such knowledge as a symptom par excellence. As well Klein and Lacan, there are Jung, Winnicott and the myriad of object-relations psychologists—all easy to read as spoilers of the psychoanalytic promise—who produced solidified and fixed theories of the development or formation of subjectivity/identity. They rendered sexuality and aggression—two major psychoanalytic bugbears—more knowable, less socially conditioned, sometimes represented as entirely ahistorical, or left untheorized as they turned their attention to child-rearing. They all produced excessively normative accounts of development, of little use to those who live on the sexual margins.

This summary is obviously an oversimplification: Freud was a man of his time and if we search for dogmatic assertions and gender bias in his work, it is only too easy to find examples. Nor is it true that the history of ideas to which Freud gave a name—psychoanalysis—has one single founder. The psychoanalytic writers, to whom I have referred, were not merely the corruptors of the Freudian truth; despite their disappointing limitations, they produced many useful theories, which inform and aid much of our clinical work.

Perhaps it is Freud's lack of concern about contradicting himself and consequently the fact that his legacy of writing is shot through with ambiguity, which allows many contemporary writers, notably the queer theorists of the last twenty years, to anchor their work in Freud's writings, thus giving him a renewed appeal. Maybe it is Freud's references to homosexuality—the possibility of finding something affirmative, or at least not condemning—that entices me to begin this paper by paying homage to his open-mindedness, by citing the cautionary note in his foundational *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud 1905). In this paper, Freud raises a big question mark over the popular, commonsensical proposition that a human being is either a man or a woman. Freud argues against the proposition that true psychological types defined by sex. He begins by distinguishing between the sexual aim 'the act towards which the instinct tends' and the sexual object, 'the person from whom sexual attraction proceeds' and goes on to illustrate just how shaky the connection is between the two. So flimsy, he claims that 'the exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is a problem that needs elucidating' (Freud 1905:146 ft). Nor was he about to compartmentalise individuals according to sex. 'Pure masculinity or femininity is not to be found either in a psychological or a biological sense' (Freud 1905: 220 ft). On the

contrary, Freud insisted that the psychic components of the opposite sex function to varying degrees in everyone. Freud also famously refused to regard homosexuality as a symptom that would warrant psychoanalytic treatment; the patient would not need it if he felt happy and creative and only miserable homosexuals were regarded as needing help (Freud 1935: 786).

However, the followers, even faithful contemporary followers of Freud like Ferenczi, adopt a different language. Thus Ferenczi refers not to homosexuality but to the problem of homosexuality (Ferenczi 1909: 168-174). In a posthumously published 1909 paper entitled 'More About Homosexuality', Ferenczi describes his treatment of two homosexuals, the 'inhibited' and the 'uninhibited' homosexual (i.e. the practising and the non-practising) and shows a clear preference for the inhibited one 'who at least has some religious scruples, namely fear of hell'. This one makes better progress.

Moreover his interest in curing homosexuality is very personal given his exceptionally close erotic bond with Freud (who treats him like a pathetic wife). Their correspondence shows that both were aware of this fact and discussed as if it were a problem—hence perhaps, the problem of homosexuality. Ferenczi's paper contains a mixture of popular prejudice and poorly formulated psychoanalytic concepts. It reads as follows:

Homosexuals love women too strongly (terrible intensity, mostly a sadistic colouring of love, perverse fantasies)... The inhibited patient ... is making real progress... The left half of his body is similar to that of his mother, while the right half is male, himself. The two halves copulate. His father is dead, murdered. (In his unconscious now he himself and now his mother figures as the murderer.) He carries all these things over into the transference:

- (a) he puts me in his father's place and murders me a hundred times a day;
- (b) he puts himself in my place and makes me copulate with my mother;
- or
- (c) he identifies me with himself and himself with his mother and lets himself copulate through me. (Ferenczi 1909 168-9)

And so on. It could be regarded as a mitigating factor in the production of her theories, if we recall that Melanie Klein underwent an analysis with Ferenczi. His dramatic and exaggerated descriptions of murder, mayhem and copulation, the bodies split into two sexes along a horizontal line, all apparently taking place in the unconscious before being carried over into the transference read like a parody of Kleinian analysis. On a more serious note, as the extract from Ferenczi above indicates, much psychoanalytic writing about homosexuality concentrates almost exclusively on the relationship of the gay patients to their parents, and on their infancy and childhood. The preoccupation of many analysts is with providing something like an aetiology of homosexuality—as if the question that really needs answering is, 'What made/makes someone turn out to be gay?' Ferenczi's naive accounts of divided bodies, the work of hardened homophobes such as Melanie Klein (Klein 1950: 43-47), contemporary writers such as Bollas (Bollas 1992: 144-164) and McDougall (McDougall 1989: 36, 83, 85, 110)—where the treatment of the gay man is presented as instigated by the patients' own loathing of their same-sex desires and shrouded in liberal gestures—all come with a narrative, a narrative of what went wrong in someone's life and of identifying the developmental fault that resulted in the same-sex object choice.

The work of Jacques Lacan must be seen as an exception to the developmental narrative. Instead, in Seminar I Lacan credits the homosexual subject (the one) as exemplifying the perverse structure of desire that keeps him stuck in the cul-de-sac

of narcissism (Lacan: 1953-4: 221-2). For Lacan, sexual difference seems to act as the privileged or even exclusive principle of alterity (the human capacity to recognise the otherness of other people). This conclusion seems quite logical. Lacan writes that, '[The homosexual] exhausts himself in pursuing the desire of the other, which he will never be able to grasp as his own desire, because his own desire is the desire of the other. It is himself whom he pursues.' (Lacan 1953-4: 221) Queer commentators, such as Jonathan Dollimore have noted how for Lacan homosexuality serves as an exemplar of the tragic nature of desire (Dollimore 1991: 201). Being assigned a role of tragic hero may at least deliver you from being the embodiment of a failure to develop properly and the sleight-of-hand remark by Julia Kristeva, (one of the foremost contemporary analysts influenced by Lacan) adds a further refinement to the homosexual's place. For Kristeva, 'the homosexual shares the same psychic economy as the depressive woman; he is a delightful melancholy person when he does not indulge in sadistic passion with another man.' (Kristeva 1989: 28-29) Yet if some writers in the French tradition bemoan and even delight in the homosexual's futility and indulgent depressiveness, they at least seem to have given up on the hope of 'converting' homosexuals and the prognosis remains poor.

The hope of deliverance comes from a very different psychoanalytic tradition, notably Kohut (Kohut 1971: 57-73). Kohut is the analyst who, more than any other, underscores the positive aspects of narcissism. In a detailed case study entitled 'Clinical Illustration of Idealising Transference', contained in Kohut's 1971 seminal work *The Analysis of Self*, he presents a case study of his work with a homosexual patient spanning several years. He writes, 'The hub of the patient's psychological defect as manifest in his homosexual phantasies, indeed the central defect of his personality was the insufficient idealisation of his superego'. (Kohut 1971: 59) This simply means that his patient did not feel himself to be 'enough of a man'. Kohut traces this feeling back to the various disappointments the patient experienced in relation to his father. Kohut goes on to explain, 'the patient's homosexual fantasies can thus be understood as sexualised statements about his narcissistic disturbance.' In a footnote Kohut elaborates this point, 'the unconscious presence of a fellatio fantasy of the patient in which swallowing the magical semen stands for the unachieved internalisation and structure formation' (Kohut 1971: 60). In other words, by sucking off other men the patient, Kohut claims, hoped to 'rob the external ideal of its power and perfection and thus in his phantasy acquired these qualities for himself and achieved a temporary feeling of narcissistic balance.' (Kohut 1971: 73) It is far from clear why the act of fellating other men represents a robbery. Kohut is at least clear about his aim; through building the patient's insight he is helping him to 'abstain from the sexualization of his defects and needs ... and move towards more reliable modes of achieving a narcissistic equilibrium through nonsexualized insights and through the building up of a psychological structure.' (Kohut 1971: 73) Eventually the analyst's and the patient's desires coincide and Kohut writes in his concluding paragraph:

Clinically speaking, the homosexual fantasies receded long before there was an equally manifest improvement in the other aspects of the patient's psychopathology; the fantasies recurred only during periods of stress. Subsequently they were replaced by occasional memories of fantasies, which had lost their sexual connotation; they were called homosexual 'fears' by the patient, i.e. he experienced them only in the context of a distant apprehension that they might return to plague him again. Ultimately even these 'fears' disappeared almost completely. (Kohut 1971: 73)

The case study's relentless use of the word 'defect' to refer to the patient's homosexuality and the self-assured dismissiveness in their pronouncements on homosexuality by the other writers I have mentioned, leads me on to the topic which I wish to explore in this paper—the theme of insult—in fact the culture of insults,

slights and derisions that most or all of the gay men that I have worked with come to recall in the course of their therapy. Needless to say, the theory and practice of psychoanalysis is not the only, or even the principal, source of homophobic insult but its long-standing complicity with pathologising homosexuality, given its claim to expertise in understanding human suffering makes it potentially more pernicious than the common insult of the playground bully.

My emphasis on the effects of insult is intended to make an argument that the formative traumas that are the foundation of many gay identities take place much later than infancy or early childhood. Much of what a patient comes to realise has been damaging took place in his early teens—the times when the impossibility of fitting into the socially prescribed gendered roles became apparent to them and/or was noticed by their peers—almost always eliciting some form of bullying, ridicule and exclusion. Patients are often reluctant to speak in detail about these largely repressed memories. Only once the therapeutic relationship has been established, do some become able to face them, to remember and shudder while recalling the name-calling, the fear and the desperate struggle to fit in and be like the other boys. Some patients then go on to enact the confusion that surrounded these experiences; they ask themselves questions: ‘Was I a victim or was I asking for it? or, ‘Why did I allow myself to become a victim? I’d never let it happen now.’ Or they make statements like, ‘My childhood was quite happy until I started school. I could never tell my parents about the bullying; it would be the same as outing myself.’ What then often emerges in these cases is a powerful ambivalence about celebrating /exaggerating /seeking approval for the patients gay /camp / outrageous /girlie side and wish to subdue, normalise and pass as straight at the same time.

My patient cannot find a word to describe his homosexuality: ‘gay’ is patronising, fickle, camp and castrated; ‘poof’ too raw and close to the playground; however, ‘queer’, promises something. I ask what this is and he explains that it is less effeminate—decidedly not normal—slightly dangerous, but he wishes to name himself. He comes up with ‘homoguy’. The fact that he can begin to use language, even if it falls short and requires a neologism, is no mean feat—given that he had been depressed and withdrawn for months, unsuccessfully treated with medication and had withdrawn into his bedroom. In the first few weeks of analysis he rarely left his parents’ home; he was in his mid 20’s at the time and was signed-off from work. Listening to music and coming to see me were the only things he could do to keep his rage and tears at bay.

As a spotty and effeminate boy from the age of eight to fourteen, D was frequently verbally bullied at school. Sometimes other boys would play a game on him where, for a few days, they would appear to be his friends and thus he began to believe that he was part of the crowd. When they made him believe that the bullying had stopped, one of them would shatter the illusion by saying something like ‘go and wash your face you filthy queer boy’. The shock on his face made them laugh even more and another would add ‘you thought you had us fooled’; they would then take turns in mimicking and exaggerating his high-pitched voice, supposedly mincing way of walking and demanded to know which one of them he fancied. Now, years later, as he wiped his tears after telling me this, and looking inconsolable, he fixed his gaze on me and said as if to defend himself, ‘I didn’t fancy anybody; I didn’t even know I was gay. I just felt defective. It was before I became aware of my sexuality.’ The all-too-common description of the vicious bullying of this patient is summed up in Judith Butler’s comment about the strange ways in which many lesbians and gay men come to take up their sexual identity, through a violent exposure to regulating others before they have a sense of their own desire and when they are least able to turn this newly ascribed identity into something positive or creative. (Butler 1999; ix-xx) Insults came to haunt the relationships D would subsequently form with other boys and men.

As he grew older and went to university, he was swept along with the liberating and tolerant discourses that promised inclusion and protection from verbal violence. He felt that he fancied men and there were gay societies, other people like him. Seemingly he was at liberty to put his traumatic past behind him, but perhaps understandably, nobody was prepared to speak about any violence involved in their own gay identity—why recount a tale of powerlessness and humiliation and risk being seen as an indulgent victim? Where else other than in therapy can a story like D's be told without incurring some embarrassment or impatience? D came to realise that he himself was an agent of this dismissal. At first this happened when he began to fall in love. He became obsessively drawn to particular gay men whom he imagined had been able to *pass* as straight and/or were strong and aggressive enough never to have had to endure the searing humiliation he went through—gay men who walked, talked and flaunted their sexuality with ease and confidence. When one of them showed an interest in D, he was, once again, close to believing that 'he had arrived', that he was accepted as he thought he had been with the boys at school. I asked him what he felt then. He smiled and said, 'I think I felt I wasn't defective anymore. I think M played up to it. He could pass as straight; he was tough; he could defend himself'. M advised D to tone down his gay mannerisms with which he complied. In analysis, it became clear that this partner and several others after him contained a promise of healing his bruised sense of being a man. Looking back on this experience, the logic he formulated was something like, 'if they are gay men and want me, then I must be enough of a man myself'. For a while, D was lulled into a fantasy that the other was secure in his masculinity—indeed that there was such a thing—and so when rejection came, it was devastating. He felt that he had not only lost a boyfriend, but a guarantor of his ability not to be defective, to be a man and, less consciously, his belief that his life was worth living.

He recounted several experiences with a similar theme and his despair grew stronger as he realised that the quest for masculinity, uncontaminated by the traces of any effeminacy, was not just an ideal of his childhood bullies, but also of the gay men he was now meeting. He disregarded the men who showed interest in him, seeing them as equally defective, and went after those who treated him with considerable ambivalence reinforcing his sense of his own 'defectiveness'. An analysis of this word 'defective' produced for D the association of losing safety, being unlovable and paranoically sensitive to the judgement, gaze, and glance of others. Butler writes:

There is a set of legitimating norms, and they all come with their punishments and costs, so that when we emerge into subjecthood we emerge with a set of norms that give us a place—the legitimacy—the lovability—the promise of security and we risk all these things when we abdicate these norms. What is punishment for the child, but the perceived withdrawal of love. (Butler 1997: 7-8)

Although D intellectually accepted being gay and went through the process of coming out to family and friends who did not reject him; although he marched at Pride and was dazzled by the exhilarating feeling of taking up the streets and belonging to a crowd and not to a minority, he remained troubled about his past and unsure of why he was meant to proud about his sexuality which had brought him so much grief.

A dream reported at this time threw more light on D's divided desires. The Civil Partnership Act (2004) had recently been passed and, whatever its limitations, seemed to afford a prospect of recognition/legal recognition of same-sex couples. Perhaps it promised an air of respectability for those, like D, whose experience of his gayness had been marred by a profound disrespect. He dreamed of two houses, in one of which faceless men were having sex with each other in a frenzied, and to borrow his word, 'passionless' way—a house he wanted to get away from. He was then transported to another house, which was light and hosting some kind of

celebration. When I asked for associations to the dream, he explained that the first house reminded him of a gay sauna, which he had been frequenting mostly when drunk and always walked out of feeling dirty and regretful. The other house looked very much like the place where one of his cousins got married. His face lit up as he described the cousin's romantic encounter and the family's lavish wedding party. A rather obvious interpretation that he wanted to leave behind the passionless world of gay saunas and be claimed/loved as signified by the marriage produced a long account of his frustrated desires to have a 'real boyfriend'.

I made some comments about the over-sharp division between sex and romance in the dream. He was surprised when we disagreed that his Internet dating and visits to gay saunas were not regarded by me as manifestations/symptoms of his self-loathing, his sabotaging himself-his pathology. In a somewhat puritanical way, he expected himself to stop having sex outside relationships, yet he had no relationships. He also imagined that the outcome of the analysis would, amongst other things, mean that he would no longer go out cruising. I acknowledged his desire in the dream for an intimate and loving relationship but also suggested that it seemed more of a problem that he felt guilty about casual sex and more importantly that he seemed to engage in it in a way that prevented pleasure, enjoyment and a potential conversation with other men. I knew that I was taking a position, was sounding educative and perhaps having an argument with a psychoanalytic establishment that regards this aspect of gay life as a further example of 'the disturbance and alienation in the mind of the homosexual' (Bollas 1992: 144). Thus we discovered that D could not enjoy the sex he has and can have, for very specific reasons. I carefully avoided his desire to be given some overarching theory of why so many gay men cruise for sex. For D, any men he met in this way were as defective as he was. He looked down on them and engaged in consensual bullying/SM scenarios in which, this time around, *he* was the abuser. He could penetrate them, throw a few homophobic insults at them, reach an orgasm himself and then walk away. He could be in control.

'So you express your masculinity in an exaggerated almost caricatured way?' I said. 'Perhaps-don't know about masculinity, but I guess yes, for a few moments I don't feel gay-those guys behave as if I'm not gay-just someone who happens to be passing.'

'Passing' I repeated.

He laughed, 'Passing by, passing through, I mean'.

'You believe they think you are straight really and had just stumbled across a gay sauna?'

He protests, 'They want me to be like that, that's all they want, to be abused, to be disrespected. That's all I can offer.'

Given his experience of bullying, I was beginning to think that his current sexual contacts served the purpose of not only attempting to master the trauma of the abuse by identifying with the bullies, but it also constituted a fantasy of masculinity based solely on aggression, rapacity and disregard for the other. The sum of his experiences of rejection by those men he regarded as *real* consolidated this conviction. It was tempting but rather facile to jump to the conclusion that his desire consisted of taking up a masochistic stance and inviting rejection from others and that the cycle of rejection was based on this dynamic. Butler summarizes this argument when she writes:

The insistence that a subject is passionately attached to his or her own subordination has been invoked cynically by those who seek to debunk

the claims of the subordinated. If a subject can be shown to pursue or sustain his or her subordinated status, the reasoning goes, then perhaps final responsibility for that subordination resides with the subject. Over and against this view, I would maintain that the attachment to subjection is produced through the workings of power, and that part of the operation of power is made clear in this psychic effect; one of the most insidious of its productions. (Butler 1997: 6)

D was himself keen to close his narrative with this, making me even more suspicious, although this left him feeling hopeless, stuck and depressed. He wanted something more, something different, but this was apparently unavailable to him.

I had in different ways over the three years shared all these thoughts and speculations with D, including his own passionate attachment to subordination/suffering, sometimes as direct interpretations to his material, at other times as repeated attempts to take apart/deconstruct the recurrent terms-masculinity, defectiveness, respect and disrespect of sex and his conviction of the impossibility of sexual pleasure-enjoyment outside of a romantic bond. So when he said, 'They want me to be like that, that's all they want, to be abused, to be disrespected. That's all I can offer', this seemed to me warrant a response. I began by saying, 'there is so much in that' to which he gave a reassuring nod 'for instance you confuse performing and playing with being powerful or submissive in sex with being a powerful or submissive person. For others it may be an act. For you it is as though it becomes the very truth about your being.'

'Can you say more?'

'Well, why you are so sure that all the men you meet casually only want what they say they do—to stick to the rigid game plan/SM scenario. Might they not be longing for something else as well, you do! And it's not true that's all you can give, that's all you choose to give'.

'Well they probably do want more, they sometimes try and talk to me ...I'm just realising this now. If I get to know them it will soon show that I am not what I pretend to be. They'll see me as everything else I am—weak and I cry a lot... (Mmm) and then they won't want me anyway.'

'Or are you also anxious that they are not as submissive as you imagine them to be? Your fear prevents a relationship from developing, whatever the setting, be it a sauna or somewhere more romantic'.

'Really, that sounds like what I sometimes feel—that I am afraid of all men. I make them larger than life. I don't have that with women. Neither the men I look up to or look down on live up to what I carry in my head.'

The analysis need not stop or remain stuck at this point. I went on to suggest to D that, underneath this view lay an old heterosexist assumption (mind set), which he had bought into. This constrains the possible modes of exchange into binary pairs starting with penis/vagina, active/passive, man/woman and also attempts to mimic heterosexual coupling between two men. The 'straight mind', as the late feminist writer Monique Wittig argued, could not conceive of a sexual act not involving a penis—the same straight mind perhaps that finds it difficult to allow two penises to both be active/passive/flaccid/erect—both flaccid and both erect (Wittig 1992: 32). Needless to say, the 'straight mind' is not the exclusive property of heterosexuals. In the early history of gay visibility, it was almost compulsory to take up one of the positions that mimicked heterosexuality; there were tops and bottoms, butches and bitches, butches and femmes perhaps to make it more comprehensible to the society at large. Contemporary gay culture is far less preoccupied with these divisions—many

men describe themselves as 'versatile' and one of the aims of the word 'queer' is to express the undecidability of sexual practice preferences. D struggles with this desiring and fears a greater fluidity in his identity, at the same time as both the old certainties and new possibilities have left a mark on different aspects of his personality.

Buoyed up by his sense of his fledgling assertiveness, D was on the bus with a friend in a large multi-ethnic part of London when the two young black men sat next to D and his friend and were playing their music loudly on their MP3 player. D braved it and politely asked one of them if he could play his music a little less loud. One of the boys used his body language to animate the verse, punching the seat in front of him and stomping his foot and finally pointing his finger at D and his friend at the word 'disease'. D felt scared, yet angry. 'Well say something queer boy', he was tormented. Another passenger joined in, a black woman who was concerned about the two boys and praised them for not believing in what they teach them at school these days—that paedophiles are equal with solid men. Rather lamely, D repeated his mantra about the loud music only to be accused of being racist. Both D and his friend stayed on the bus only as long as it took them to pluck up the courage to get off and received a few parting shots of name calling, but felt lucky to have escaped any physical violence. After recounting this, D begun to sob, I said, 'They were insulting'. He looked at me shaking his head and said quietly: 'They silenced me'.

'Being insulted to the point of frightened silence makes you want to restore yourself—as white, as English, as an artist, an educator—but not as gay', I said. 'What's wrong with wanting to show to the bunch of ignorant people and to show to the public what it's like having to go through this?

Despite his scepticism, I continued, 'I can understand that you want to make good the insults and not be silenced. It is as though you are trying to negotiate something, to win over the respect from the tormentors ...and they just hate you. As if you believe you can convert others' hate into acceptance, if only you keep trying.'

'They *do* know something about you. Your gayness is recognised. And it is as if a part of you feels that needs justification. I think it's that which is silencing you.'

Looking upset, he replied, 'But if I can't change what they think about me I can do nothing.'

'You can change what you think about them. You can hate them back if you allow yourself. You can hate and refuse their violence and use the powers beyond persuasion to fight them.'

Like what?

'Like going to the police and reporting the hate crime you suffered.'

'But this happens all the time, I am sure—the police won't take it seriously.'

'It's up to you'

The session after this, having followed my suggestion to report the incident to the police D described his pleasant surprise at the seriousness and respect with which the police handled the incident. He found out that there was a specific hate crime unit in the police and an officer, himself a gay man, in charge of dealing with homophobic crimes both verbal and physical. He expressed his relief and commented on the strangeness of this situation in which an institution of the state, up until recently involved in persecution and sometimes harassment of gay men, has been transformed into a powerful ally. I thought there was something profoundly

moving in his description, almost a sense of disbelief that the Regulating Other protects and not merely punishes him—indeed that *it* is able to recognise and reassure him that he had been a subject to unacceptable verbal violence—that the insults he received deserved redress. He thanked me for making the suggestion, adding that he would never have thought of it himself. I thought to myself about the extent of the alienation some gay men still have in seeking recourse for homophobic violence by means of the law despite all the publicity. I also wondered if the request for help constitutes for some, something like a second act of coming out and claiming not only tolerance and acceptance but also claiming the right to be recognised as full citizens worthy of protection.

In recent months, my work with D has been engaging, as he becomes more alive and more challenging. He demands more from life, more from his analysis. He is excited as he describes the strengthening of the friendships he has with other men, which still tend to remain Platonic, and his growing confidence that he deserves to be taken seriously, especially in his artistic work though it tends to be prefaced with caution and shyness.

‘It sounds cheesy but I can stop playing some of these different roles which I felt I had to do ‘cos I didn’t know who I was or wanted to be. Well I still don’t know who I am. But I feel I don’t just have to play the role of either being the suffering artist or the tormented lover, or the abuser and be *me* whatever that is. That *me* now feels exciting; in the past it was frightening—I take that back, it feels not only frightening but also exciting.’

I bear witness to D’s changing and remaining the same. I notice he is less punishing of himself when he doesn’t live up to his ideals. His self-reproaches when he has too much to drink or has casual sex are described in the more tempered language of ‘slipping-up’ rather than ‘totally fucking everything up’. His curiosity about what the future might hold feels helped by a greater sense of agency he feels he has in his life. These days there is something worth getting up in the morning for.

Finally in summary, I should like to draw together several different strands running through this story: through both the clinical vignette and the psychoanalytic writings that made me want to speak of gay identity, insults and psychoanalysis. The idea for the paper came from an excellent book by Didier Eribon.<sup>1</sup> His book entitled *Insult and the Making of a Gay Self* is a fine and monumental study of homosexual cultures through literature and politics including various discourses on homosexuality, only one of which is the discourse of psychoanalysis. In my struggles with psychoanalytic theories and their insulting aspects, I have often found it sustaining to turn to texts outside the psychoanalytic mainstream to provide a requisite distance and help me formulate a critical approach to psychoanalytic texts and their clinical application. Authors such as Eribon, Butler, Bersani and Dollimore who form the theoretical backbone of what has become to be known as ‘queer studies’ or ‘queer theory’ are also deeply involved in re-thinking psychoanalysis—for these authors, unlike for Foucault, psychoanalytic discourse not only limits/regulates or normalises our lives but holds, almost despite itself, something that can aid us in our understanding of how homophobia operates and how it can be contested (Butler 1997, 1999) (Bersani 1995) (Dollimore 1991).

For Eribon it all begins with an insult. He writes:

The insult that any gay man or lesbian can hear at any moment of his or her life is the sign of his/her social and psychological vulnerability... Insults are verbal aggressions that stay in the mind. One of the consequences of insult is to shape the relation one has to others and to the world and thereby to shape the personality, the subjectivity, the very being of the individual in question. (Eribon 2004: 15)

Gay identity, which Eribon following Foucault, (Foucault 1978) does not regard as some transhistorical truth, but instead a historical construction, is nevertheless constrained by the impact of the insult that partly constitutes it. Theorists such as Foucault and Eribon see the historical production of gay identity as offering the very possibilities for countering the force and potentially paralysing effects of insult. They propose its modification through political action, through individual and collective reinvention. And this must partly be true; we have seen in the clinical vignette some examples of such actions resulting in the recognition in law of same-sex partnerships and changes in the dominant discourse that enable the setting-up of police practices that fight homophobic hate crime. We have also seen the positive effects of these on a life of one gay man and there are doubtless many others. However, there are clear limitations to this strategy, since it does not sufficiently address the constitutive nature of insult on unconscious aspects of the victim's subjectivity. As the clinical vignette illustrates, the insulted party is never simply a victim of the discourse of the other, but comes to be implicated in the promulgation of the insult that is directed towards both self and other. Foucault, more than most, contemporary writers on the subject repeatedly reminds his readers that the subject is implicated in the very power it also tries to oppose. (Foucault 1978: 152) For example, D's glorification of aggressive and violent forms of masculinity, shows, I think, the paradoxical nature of wanting to forge a less damaging sense of identity. Instead of proposing any naïve quest for liberation, I have attempted instead to unpack the paradoxical aspects of his position and throw some light on its genealogy. He must wrestle with this himself but the psychoanalytic exploration enables this mode of self-enquiry and shows up the division in his subjectivity. The analysis continues to highlight the limitations of solely conscious and deliberate acts of resignification such as his attempts to produce a neologism, 'homoguy' and directs our attention to aspects of his traumatic past—which he is unaware or barely aware of acting out—such as the belief that the force of law is not there to protect him. Hopefully this opens up the possibility for deeper awareness of the constraints that come to be self-imposed, even if they originate in others, and increases a sense of agency in refusing the designated place of the one who has to bear and tolerate the other's sadism.

Finally, the really useful argument offered by queer theory is closely linked to its claim that identity is/remains constitutive of the subject in contrast to the position of Lacan or St Augustine, both of whom regard it as already constituted. In Lacan's terms identity is an effect of the pre-existing order of language and/or what Lacan terms the 'Symbolic'; for St. Augustine a man's identity depends on 'the prior ordering of selfhood' (St Augustine 1966: 479). Both positions are based on a theological impulse and should be regarded with great distrust since they result in the normalisation or to coin a word in an 'inevitablisation' of the existing social order, inseparably bound up with homophobia, and the pathologising of homosexuality. Thus Lacan can blithely refer to *the* homosexual desire as if there is only one shared by all, and for all time to come. To claim however, that identity is constitutive, to refuse the past tense, is at once to acknowledge the limits with which we come to occupy any given identity but also to acknowledge a far more dynamic relation with that power (in our case the power of insult), the power to resist and oppose it or re-direct it to serve the purposes it never intended—such as using the power of psychoanalytic discourse to show up and deconstruct the many levels at which homophobia can operate, insult and try and silence the voices of dissent.

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<sup>1</sup> Didier Eribon is a contemporary French writer on literature and popular culture, who is best known for his biography of Foucault.