

Running Wild

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Abstract

The paper takes its cue from Freud's short text "Observations on 'Wild' Psychoanalysis" (1910), where Freud considers the advice that presents sex as the universal cure for anxiety and ultimately all psychic troubles. The advice, dispensed by a non-analyst but also circulating in general opinion, is presented as supported by the psychoanalytic scientific discovery. The paper follows Freud's steps arguing that sex is not an entity that can be located, but rather resides in a dislocation; that it doesn't have predictable effects that would follow the path of somatic causality; that sexual satisfaction is not the cure for neurotic disorders; that one has to take into account the specificity of the Freudian notion of the unconscious; that sex is neither a fact nor a cause, but nevertheless produces effects. Freud's argument is pitted against the Anti-Sexus machine, presented by Platonov as a device that rests on the mistaken assumptions about the sexuality Freud was fighting against.

Keywords

Anti-Sexus, Platonov, psychoanalysis, sexuality, "wild" analysis

In his 1910 paper “Observations on ‘Wild’ Psychoanalysis” Freud discusses a rather bewildered patient who came to ask for his advice (1981[1910]: 219–27). She was in her forties, good-looking, and suffered from anxiety attacks that were triggered by her recent divorce. She first consulted another young doctor who explained to her that the reason for her anxiety was her sexual frustration and if she wanted to alleviate that and cure her anxiety she should either go back to her husband, take a lover, or else masturbate. Sex was presented as a sure cure for her troubles since the lack thereof was clearly diagnosed as the obvious cause of her predicament. Moreover, this advice was presented by the young doctor as firmly supported by state-of-the-art scientific evidence, namely the recent discoveries made by Dr. Freud. Science had recently made great progress in this domain, a great leap forward called psychoanalysis (this is 1910), so now the authority of science was pushing her to have sex, no matter how and with whom, husband or lover, or failing that, at the very least by masturbation. This piece of scientific advice put the poor woman into an even greater state of anxiety, for she was now convinced she was quite incurable. Namely, she had no wish to go back to her husband and her moral and religious views prevented her from either having a lover or masturbating, the prospects of which filled her with additional horror. Given these new scientific advances, her case seemed hopeless. So she eventually decided to consult Dr. Freud himself, the source of this new scientific wisdom, to convince herself that this was indeed the case and to see what, if anything, could be done. For this visit she was supported by the company of another elderly divorced lady, “a dried out woman of unhealthy appearance,” who was adamant that this couldn’t be true and urged Freud to confirm her views. She had been divorced a great many years and suffered from no such trouble, either anxiety or the lack of sex. So Freud’s scientific authority was at issue, and along with it the nature of this new scientific discovery, psychoanalysis.

Freud was rather bemused by this, for he was confronted by the fact that some ten or fifteen years after its inception, psychoanalysis was already running wild. It was around not merely as a doxa (as were the rumors about the new discovery that inevitably made it to the zeitgeist and the yellow press, seasoned as they were with scandal and spicy sexual innuendo), but also as a scientific doxa, to use this oxymoron, an incontrovertible piece of quasi-scientific objective knowledge, dispensed by young doctors to the general clientele. Science is about finding the proper causes for any strange phenomenon, so lack of sex was now reputedly the universal cause of psychic trouble, according to the new gospel of psychoanalysis. Although this could hardly be seen as some staggering new insight, for this is the kind of advice that has been murmured across millennia through folk-wisdom, and now psychoanalysis allegedly provided hard scientific evidence to substantiate it. It had been scientifically proven that having sex is good for you, otherwise you will run into

psychic trouble. This is what Freud here calls “wild” psychoanalysis, first by the fact that this advice was given by a doctor who was clearly not an analyst and had no training in this new therapy; furthermore, that it was given as a universal clue regardless of the singularity of the particular case: like one prescribes aspirin for headache, so one prescribes sex for anxiety.

“Wildness” consists, then, in some pieces of psychoanalytic knowledge running amok, being slung around by any layperson as a truism, out of the controlled laboratory situation of a psychoanalytic session, its tête-à-tête, hence with incalculable results. But also, this “wildness” is the very opposite of wildness, since the psychoanalytic piece of knowledge is thereby actually deprived of its wild, untamed nature; it is pressed into the mold of a scientific fact, verified by the authority of science, like a firm cause providing sure effects. It’s not that psychoanalysis is running wild, but rather it is domesticated into the framework of the established and the predictable. Wildness is what gets lost with “wild” psychoanalysis.

Freud had some doubts as to whether the reported advice was accurately rendered, for he had ample experience with patients distorting the doctor’s suggestions to fit their own projections and fantasies. Nevertheless, he was sufficiently upset by this incident to write a paper on it and try to get some basic assets straight. In the first instance his concern was not so much with the advice itself but with the particular way it was delivered, for he saw in it a fatal lack of tact and discretion. It was not that psychoanalysis should go straight to crude facts about sex, or, to call a spade a spade, to the naked truth,¹ so in his first remarks he saw this as a question of bad rhetoric and manners. This is in line with the inaugural definition of psychoanalysis as a talking cure (proposed by the very first patient, Anna O.), which brings sex into intimate connection not just with talking, but with the proper ways to talk, with what Lacan would call *l’éthique de bien dire*, the ethics of saying well, coterminous with what was being said (as a counterpoint to the absence of any rule on the part of the free associations which are supposed to run wild and encouraged in their wildness—but then there is the rule that emerges from the very impossibility of them running wild). There is, one could say, an ethics of circumlocution (as the dictionary puts it, “the use of too many words to say something, especially in order to avoid saying something clearly”²). Speaking around, as it were, speaking obliquely, is the proper way to speak

¹ One should recall the case that Nietzsche made out of the expression “the naked truth,” with the supposition that truth is a woman, where philosophers with their heavy earnestness and clumsy ineptitude would hardly be able to seduce a woman. So Nietzsche saw it rather as a fatal lack on the side of rhetoric and persuasion than on the side of cognitive powers; truth being on the side of sex rather than cognition.

² *Macmillan Dictionary*, s.v. “circumlocution,” accessed 18 November, 2015, <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/circumlocution>.

about sex, not because of prudishness or for fear of being offensive, but because obliqueness is actually truer to the real nature of sex such as it is addressed by psychoanalysis; something gets lost in the directness of alleged facts, something that cannot be quite spelled out by bluntness. To extend this further, looking awry, to employ Shakespeare's expression used by Žižek to title one of his books, or rather looking sideways—this would be the more appropriate way of looking if one wants to catch a glimpse of something elusive that doesn't quite have the consistence of crude facts. There is something anamorphic in sexuality, anamorphosis as the distortion inscribed in the picture, something one cannot get when looking at it directly—but then again, can one get the clear picture even by looking sideways, can one ever see clearly this picture within the picture? However, there may seem to be something significant with Freud urging discretion, of all things, first focusing on the way of saying rather than on what is conveyed.³ In a curious echo, when presenting the advertisement for this new Anti-Sexus device in his introduction (ironically?), Platonov first of all deplors that "it is so completely devoid of sense and lacking in basic tact" (2013: 48). There is a subject to ponder: sex and tact. And the first thing to say against the presentation of this device is that it is tactless.

But this is just a passing remark, although not unimportant. The crux of the matter and the ground for the fatal misunderstanding is rather the spontaneously made assumption about what sex is. Sex is commonly assumed to involve a sexual act or any activity leading to orgasm, but psychoanalysis has extended its meaning far beyond that, both higher and lower, so that it has lost the value of factuality that can be pinned down, circumscribed, and well defined. Direct sexual aims can be rather easily replaced by non-sexual ones, and this replacement is not just an ersatz,

³ It is purported that psychoanalysis boils down to calling a spade a spade, that is, to reduce everything to the crude reality of the sexual as an ultimate real, to make explicit the implicitly sexual. But the point is rather the opposite: that sexuality is intimately bound with discretion, with something that cannot be plainly displayed but only implied, hinted at, left unsaid. Not simply the unsaid of sexual innuendo, implied obscenity, but something "genuinely," inherently, unsaid. There is a way in which coming out misses the mark and nudity is anything but natural. There is a lacking word that cannot be spelled out, a bodily part which cannot be displayed, and which makes the fabric of intimacy of human relations. The centrality of the phallus, to take the most notorious and controversial term, is not about "showing it" as the exhibit of some ultimate "real of sex," but something that introduces the very necessity of displacement, the impossibility of ever "showing it," thus counteracting phallogentrism by the phallus itself. "The explicitation of the implicit" is the formula by which Brandom (1998) attempts to spell out the secret of the Hegelian enterprise, the driving force of dialectics. But the object of dialectics, in this completely different setting, is precisely what cannot be made explicit in all the strenuous attempts of explicitation, rather it is produced by them. Is there also a theme of "dialectics and tact," the respect for the implicit?

surrogate, stand-in for sexuality proper, but this capacity for substitution rather stands at the core of the sexual. Thus, it loses precisely the nature of some basic cause determining everything else, it could be more appropriately described, to push Freud a bit, as an endless series of effects without proper cause, not grounded in incontrovertible facts and unquestionable activities. If this is a new science of sexuality, then it is a science that has to put into question the very notion of fact and cause, the two absolute cornerstones of any science. The nature of its object pushes it on this path of questioning factuality and causality.

Freud makes another move to explain this hard-to-limit notion of sexuality: “We use the word sexuality in the same comprehensive sense as the German language uses the word *lieben* [to love]” (1981[1910]: 223). So he seems to be saying that what is at stake is not sex but love. The linguistic extension of love, in all its facets, is an argument that Freud will also use elsewhere:

Even in its caprices the usage of language remains true to some kind of reality. Thus it gives the name of “love” to a great many kinds of emotional relationship which we too group together theoretically as love; but then again it feels a doubt whether this love is real, true, actual love, and so hints at a whole scale of possibilities within the range of the phenomena of love (Freud 1985: 141).

If linguistic usage stretches from sexual love to love for one’s parents, one’s neighbor, for a master, for one’s country, for a cause, for art, or for God, then this wide extension in all directions—this linguistic caprice—is actually true to the extension of sexuality, its propensity to reach far beyond what is commonly understood by sex. There is no hard core of sex that could be separated from these extensions as a true base for all other phenomena, and the extensions have no lesser reality than the supposed hard core, although they can never be detached from it. Sexuality would thus rather reside in this passage, in the very in-between, between sexual activities as commonly narrowly understood and their seemingly far-removed spiritual extensions. Or briefly, between sex and the soul (to evoke Platonov’s wonderful wording, “to solve the global human problem of sex and the soul.” [2013: 50]), where love is seen as the handy operator which by its semantic slide presents this passage in common usage. Also by the indicative doubt, equally inscribed in usage, as to which of these varieties of love is “real, true, actual love,” shifting the accent up and down the Platonic ladder. Love is an operator of both detachment and attachment, detachment from sex in the localized and limited sense, attachment as “excessive investment,” a “pathological” fixation, the anchorage in singularity that exceeds both the natural and the spiritual universality: the bondage of the unbound, as it were. The logic of detachment-attachment introduced by love displaces the polarity of sexual-non-sexual and

the question of extension. But, it also introduces the danger of the “praise of love” as the topic in vogue which tends to circumvent Freudian paradoxes.⁴

If the advice of the young doctor was true, that sex could be a universal cure, no psychoanalysis would be needed, says Freud: “Oddly enough, the three therapeutic alternatives of this so-called psychoanalyst leave no room for—psychoanalysis!” (1981[1910]: 225) First, people don’t really need this kind of advice and it’s preposterous to think that the woman in her forties wouldn’t know about lovers and masturbation, or that she would need a doctor’s order to engage in either. It is not that people fall ill because they ignore basic facts or scientific findings, and their trouble cannot be remedied by providing information. Or more pointedly, the unconscious is not based on ignorance of something, and the missing unconscious repressed information they ignore cannot be delivered so that the patient would take cognizance of it: “If the knowledge of the unconscious was so important for the patient...then it would be sufficient for the cure if the patient would listen to lectures and read books. These measures have just as much effect... as the distribution of menu-cards in the time of famine has upon hunger” (Freud 1981[1910]: 225).⁵ Although in this image, Freud shies away from extending this to the implication that the simple distribution of food would be equally insufficient to remedy this kind of famine—sexuality is rather between the menu and the food, no food without the menu of fantasy. Second, it is not that psychoanalysis would have to step in to lift the inhibitions people usually have so that they could finally enjoy sex, it is rather that sex is not a cause to be restored, or it is “a limping cause”⁶ that cannot be allotted an appropriate place so that it could vouchsafe for the removal of psychic trouble. Just as the unconscious is not some missing bit of information to be restored, a missing signifier to be recuperated, so sexuality is rather structured around a missing cause, a deviation from the merely physiological causality, a cause that cannot be quite recuperated, or more generally and massively it is structured around a missing link which affects being itself—

⁴ For the Company that Platonov is talking about, things are clear: “Love, as contemporary science has proven, is a psychopathic condition that is characteristic for certain constitutions predisposed to nerve degeneracy, not for healthy, practical men” (2013: 52). They want to amply provide for sexual pleasure liberated from all the fuss of love and its psychopathology, the non-pathological pleasure without some “beyond the pleasure principle.”

⁵ “...the idea that the patient suffers from ignorance [*Unwissenheit*] and if one would lift [*aufhebe*] this ignorance through clarification,.. he would have to be cured.” (Freud 1981[1910]: 225)

⁶ “There is a cause only in something that doesn’t work,” says Lacan (1986: 22). “*Il n’y a de cause que de ce qui cloche*” literally means “there is a cause only where something limps or goes wrong.”

hence the topic of sexuality and ontology that Alenka Zupančič has so magisterially written about (2008). If we are endowed with the unconscious and with peculiar sexual trouble, something is askew in the very order of being. Science is called upon to set straight what is askew, to repair it, to fill in the missing bits, to maintain the ontological chain (also in the sense of maintenance and repair, when things go astray), but then psychoanalysis is a curious kind of science that upholds and honors all scientific ideals, pursuing them to the end, to make them cover even the slightest slips, only to circumscribe a spot where something cannot be quite covered and recovered, but which is inscribed in the very order of being. It is like a slip of being at stake in the most innocuous slip, the Freudian slip of being itself.

Freud says even more pointedly, pushing it to the paradox: “it is correct that psychoanalysis maintains that the sexual non-satisfaction is the cause of neurotic trouble” (1981[1910]: 223). So the advice of the young doctor was correct, technically in line with what psychoanalysis is indeed saying, so that this advice somewhat has the structure of the notorious Jewish joke—you are telling me what is ultimately true, so why are you lying to me? It is a lie in the form of, if not quite truth, then at least of correctness (*richtig*). Although technically correct it misses the truth of it: there is a lack of sexual satisfaction at the bottom, but a lack that cannot be simply filled by sexual satisfaction. Or there is something in this alternative between non-satisfaction and satisfaction that misses the point, the crucial bit, the real in the sexual that is not quite covered by the seemingly exhaustive options (nor by introducing the grading scale of “partly,” or “more or less”). Freud also pushes the paradox at the other end, in seeming contradiction: neurotics actually may have sexual lives. It’s not that having sex prevents them from being neurotic, it’s “just” that something in their sexuality is out of their reach, unavailable to them, there is a repression inherent in sexuality that they don’t quite manage, and since it is inherent—not simply an external prohibition imposed by society from the outside—it cannot quite be lifted by having sex. Neurotics are rather the harbingers of what in sexuality is structurally unavailable.⁷ So the contradictory argument would be: true, sexual non-satisfaction yields

⁷ This is where Freud’s rather scandalous idea comes in—more scandalous than the alleged sex craze—namely, that there is something in sexuality that resists satisfaction: “Sometimes one seems to perceive that it is not only the pressure of civilization but something in the nature of the [sexual] function itself which denies us full satisfaction and urges us along other paths. This may be wrong; it is hard to decide” (1985: 295). If something in sexuality itself opposes satisfaction, then one may say that sexus is actually “always already” antisexus. It is not society that represses sexual drives, they are always giving a helping hand to this repression; prohibition can only draw its strength from the alliance it forges with the drives.

neurosis, and yet having sex doesn't preclude neurosis. This is why psychoanalysis is needed.⁸

The advice of the young doctor didn't have to wait for Freud. If authority was needed to support such advice, he could already have relied on the authority of Plato. Hysteria traces its genealogy back to Plato, who in *Timaeus* says the following:

A woman's womb or uterus, as it is called [*hysteron*, hence hysteria], is a living thing within her with a desire for childbearing. Now when this remains unfruitful for an unseasonably long period of time, it is extremely frustrated and travels everywhere up and down her body. It blocks up her respiratory passages, and by not allowing her to breathe it throws her into extreme emergencies, and visits all sorts of other illnesses upon her until finally the woman's desire and the man's love bring them together, and, like plucking the fruit from a tree, they sow the seed into the ploughed field of her womb... (Plato1997: 91c-d).

The theory of the travelling womb had its adherents as late as the nineteenth century. Plato, in a rather psychoanalytic fashion, saw the masculine/feminine distinction as a distinction between localization and non-localization: masculine enjoyment is localized in a particular organ (unruly and self-willed, yet confined), while the organ of feminine enjoyment is travelling, hence omnipresent, ubiquitous, with no proper place, and thus dangerous by being unplaceable. Plato is the source of this commonsense advice that sexual satisfaction is the way to cure hysteria—it will fix down the unplaceable, as it were. In this way, sexuality would step in into the place of the missing cause, it would fill in the gap of the missing link, it would re-inscribe the problem into the chain of the causality of nature, and we would arrive at a comforting image: the absence of sex causes the whole hysterical circus, and its presence will put things back into their rightful natural place. The advice of the young doctor is Platonic, where the idea of Platonic love extending beyond sex, ultimately to a realm untainted by it. It is counterbalanced by assigning sex a proper place so that sex and the soul, to use Platonov's wonderful formulation, support and supplement each other. The inscription of sexuality into the order of being—for Lacan the major problem of ontology—would thus at

⁸ The revolutionary leftist version of the young doctor is Wilhelm Reich, with his firm belief that the lack of sex causes not merely individual neurosis but structural neurosis subtending the subjection to capitalism, and that the best or the only cure is sex. In his *Sex-Pol Manifesto* he presented demands for free divorce, free contraception, free abortion, free childcare and medical care, sexual education, lifting the ban on homosexuality, etc. (Reich 2014). For him it was absolutely clear that these demands cannot be realized in a capitalist state. Eighty years later, it is obvious that this idea of sexual causality didn't quite work.

the bottom end involve the advice to have sex, that is, procreational sex with children as the goal to cure any unruliness, and at the top end the Platonic ladder leading in a seamless progression from beautiful bodies to ideas, from sex to soul. Procreational sex *avec* spiritual elevation: this is the official formula of a Christian paradigm, the clear delimitation and mutual support, and it is enough to look at the Christian iconography to see that this cannot work for a moment. From Plato to Platonov: the aim of the Anti-Sexus device is “to abolish the sexual savagery of mankind,” since “an unregulated sex is an unregulated soul,” so to provide full and guaranteed sexual satisfaction would “recall man’s nature back to an advanced culture of peace, and to a regular, calm, planned tempo of development” (Platonov 2013: 50). Hence Platonov’s utter ambiguity: of course this is an ironic ploy, with the mocking indignation at the equally mocking description, and with mocking commentaries (irony, by Quintilian’s vintage definition, *contrarium eo quod dicitur intellegendum est* [1996: 400], where one has to understand the contrary of what is said, or what is meant is the contrary of what is said, so one never knows whether A or non-A is actually meant), where both the presentation and its furious critique (and the commentaries) are all struck with ambiguity, in both indignation and praise one is left with both A and non-A. The Anti-Sexus is both the monster and the utopia, the utopian monster, and not quite one or the other. Something would have to be done about the unruliness of sex—Lenin’s question “what is to be done?” sooner or later in some of its facets runs out into the question of “what is to be done with sex?” Look at Plato, look at Christian morality, look at both conservative and revolutionary morals, something would have to be done with sex, either emancipate it or repress it, it cannot be left as it is, there is no *Gelassenheit* (releasement), no letting be in matters of sex, nobody can ever say “it’s just fine the way it is.” There is both the necessity and the impossibility to regulate it, and furthermore, it never just “is.”

For Lacan all ontology was deeply sexualized, and this was its major flaw, the flaw of not admitting the flaw. “No knowledge was conceived that wouldn’t participate in the fantasy of the inscription of the sexual tie” (Lacan 1973: 76). Thus, the Aristotelian ontology makes some not so hidden sexual assumptions about *hyle* and *morphe*, matter and form, which it considers on the model of the opposition between the feminine and the masculine.

Let us consider the terms active and passive, e. g., which dominate everything that was thought about the relationship between form and matter, this fundamental relation to which every Plato’s and then Aristotle’s step refers concerning the nature of things. It is visible, palpable, that these pronouncements are supported only by the fantasy by which they attempt to supplement [*suppléer*] what cannot be said in any way, namely the sexual relation (Lacan 1973: 76).

Ultimately ontology is always premised on the hidden assumption about the relation, ultimately the sexual relation, sexual relation as the paradigm of relation as such. So the thesis that “there is no sexual relation” by which Lacan tried to counteract this through the simplest of slogans, implies paradoxically a desexualisation of the universe, so that the alleged pansexualism of psychoanalysis amounts to its opposite: to debunking the pervasive ways of thinking that inscribed sexuality into the order of being as its secret (or even overt) clue, as the key to conceiving the basic relation. The impossibility of such an inscription stands at the core of psychoanalysis.

But let us go back to the “wild” analysis for two further points. First, Freud seems to have been really annoyed by this offhand advice by an anonymous young doctor, with his own authority being the scientific guarantee. Not only was he interpellated to the point of going to the trouble of writing a paper triggered by this very minor incident, but at the end of the paper he presents a rather major response to the dangers involved in this advice, namely the response consisting of nothing less than establishing a psychoanalytic association—an organization or party—to safeguard the assets of psychoanalysis against their vulgarization. Freud feels quite uneasy about setting up an organization that would monopolize the use of this new therapy (requiring “exclusive rights” for its practice by people adequately trained), but nevertheless,

In view of predictable dangers that the practice of “wild” psychoanalysis entails for the patients and for the psychoanalytic cause, no other option is left to us [*bleibt uns nichts anderes übrig*]. In the spring of 1910 we have founded an international psychoanalytic association, whose members subscribe to it publicly by their names, so as to be able to avert the responsibility for the actions of those who don’t belong to us and who use the name of “psychoanalysis” for their therapeutical endeavors (Freud 1981[1910]: 226–27).

So “wild” psychoanalysis is not a matter to be taken lightly. There has to be a guarantee and a control, certified expert knowledge to counter unqualified amateur knowledge. This entails the drama of a set of paradoxes: there has to be the Other to vouchsafe the absence of the Other, to warrant that “the Other doesn’t exist,” the demand for the inscription of what cannot be inscribed. Psychoanalysis is thus threatened not so much by its opponents and the resistance it provoked as by its own success. Psychoanalysis “running wild” has to be countered by protected wilderness, like natural preserves (or game preserves), the shielded enclosures, with all the ensuing rather spectacular failures of psychoanalytic associations that we witnessed throughout the century to follow. They have either run into endless splits and quibbles or else presented the face of codification and neutralization that destroyed its wildness. Psychoanalysis kept run-

ning wild, or rather couldn't be quite domesticated by either doxa or the expert initiation.

But in another remark Freud says that "wild" psychoanalysis can do more damage to the psychoanalytic cause than to patients. It may well be that the amateurish intervention has positive consequences. In this particular case, "the wild psychoanalyst may have done more for his patient than some other respected authority telling her that she suffered from 'vasomotoric neurosis'. He focused her attention on the right causes of her ailment or into their vicinity, and despite the resistance of the patient this intervention will not remain without beneficial consequences" (1981[1910]: 227). It is unpredictable in what way "wild" analysis can actually work, it may at least have the positive consequence that it shatters the assumptions of the patient, producing a shock, pointing in the direction of sex, so even by being wrong it can work (*Ex falso quodlibet sequitur?*). Sex is not the cause, as the advice implied, but nevertheless it has effects, incalculable as they may be. It is not quite an existent entity that one could localize or totalize or substantialize, but it infallibly produces effects. The Anti-Sexus device, proposed by Platonov with all the unplaceable irony, is an offspring of fantasy, the fantasy of how to objectify it and keep in check its effects, the fantasy of how to put an end to its disorderly nature.

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