

Maculate Conceptions

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Abstract A refreshing ambivalence at the heart of psychoanalysis makes it straddle both modernist and poststructuralist narratives, shielding it from its penchant for universalism. Similarly, when phenomenological and heuristic styles of research are held lightly and critically, and no longer constricted by subjectivism and a philosophy of consciousness, they can be more effective in navigating the intricacies of human experience and open the exploration to postqualitative investigation.

Key words postqualitative, phenomenology, counter-tradition, heuristic research.

Conquest and adventure

A clear-cut distinction is often assumed between modernism and post-modernism, each of them represented as standing for something specific: reliance on grand narratives in the case of modernism; perspectivism, or even ‘relativism’, in the case of post-modernism. This assumption, however, may betray an inherently modernist narrative (Jameson, 2019). While we are busy diagnosing the end of ideology and the dawn of an age of difference, we may unwittingly affirm ideology in its most powerful guise – hidden, pervasive, heralding the triumph of pluralism-as-consumer-choice, of perspectivism as anything-goes-philosophy, and affirming, rather alarmingly, via a generic postmodernist stance, the ideology of ‘the market’, of neoliberalism and of what has been recently called *vectoralism* (Wark, 2019).

These reflections came up when reading the seemingly optimistic embracing of postmodernism in Brook’s paper ‘Looking like a Foreigner: foreignness, conformity and compliance in psychoanalysis’, where the reader is invited to understand postmodernism as “a name for an attempt to escape from and think about ... assumptions and convictions”, or as an effort “to come to terms with the ‘limits and limitations’ of modernism” as a manner of

staying with “doubts, uncertainties and anxieties” (Brooks). This invitation to think critically and deconstruct the universalizing axioms inherent in psychoanalysis is attuned to the ‘critical existential-analytic psychotherapies’ project sketched in the Editorial (Loewenthal, 2020). It is analogous to the critique found in Critical Theory, but without the invaluable caveat found in the latter: critique of reason does not entail abdication to the irrationality and closeted-theology found, for instance, in Heidegger and in those ‘postmodern’ stances promoting a jargon of authenticity (Adorno, 1964/2002). We do not find critique of reason *tout court* but trenchant critique of reason’s chief enemy, i.e., *rationalization* (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/1997). For Adorno and Horkheimer, what often passes for reason is not the clearing of clouds heralded by the *Aufklärung*/Enlightenment, nor the maturity of thought praised by Kant, but its opposite, *degeneration* of reason, which in my view is precisely what a generic postmodern stance has promoted and substantiated.

But what *is* postmodernism? Can its troubled, many-sided and sedimented histories since Lyotard’s book in the nineteen seventies (Lyotard, 1984) be condensed in one formula? Is the postmodern really continuous with the preoccupations highlighted by “Sophocles through to Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein” (Brooks)? And what is the connection, if any, between postmodernism and deconstruction, or postmodernism and poststructuralism?

Brooks’ paper presents telling and convincing illustrations from clinical practice and everyday experience; it mounts an engaging critique of the universalizing tendencies in psychoanalysis, seen as part and parcel of a generalized ‘modernist’ project which assumes western culture’s epistemological superiority against the alleged credulity of cultures arrogantly perceived as subaltern and even accursed. I’ll leave aside the argument that modernism in art, literature, and culture has given birth to a tidal wave of experimentation, innovation and daring of the sort our profoundly acquiescent age cannot even dream of. Brooks’ argument is convincing when it alerts us to the alarming levels of conformity and

compliance present in psychoanalytic training (and, I would add, in most psychotherapy trainings)

It is not really possible, as Brooks offers to nominally do in passing, to dismiss Freud's claim, in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess, of "not being a man of science, not an observer, not an experimenter, not a thinker [but] by temperament, nothing but a conquistador" (cited in Winter, 1999:341n). On the contrary, Freud's claim must be accurately read and understood, and the author's invitation to do so is timely. The term 'conquistador' rings alarm bells, insinuating blatant similarity, allegiance and complicity with the proficient criminal pillaging perpetrated by Spanish and Portuguese plunderers and mercenaries who exploited human and natural resources between the sixteenth and eighteenth century. It would have been good, however, *not* to omit, as the author does, the very next thing Freud writes in his letter. He says "I am by temperament nothing but a conquistador — an *adventurer*, if you want it translated" (Winter, 199:341n). Freud is conquistador *and* adventurer, colonizer *and* dissenter, bringing forth a perspective/praxis that is both conventional *and* subversive, both loyal to and discontented with civilization.

One way to understand the dichotomy between conquest and adventure is intrapsychic. Take for instance Freud's gnomic dictum *where it was, there I shall be*. With psychodynamic therapists now busy, in our times of "hypertrophied consciousness" (Bollas, 2017:81), with the delusional endeavour of making the unconscious conscious, the dictum may be read as the attempt by an essentially reactive, 'symptomatic' faculty, i.e., consciousness, to conquer the multiplicity of *psyche* and the complexity of becoming within which it is embedded. Conversely, a reading that were to take poststructuralism and deconstruction to heart may edit Freud's motto to *where it was, there others shall be*, a notion that is inspired by the remarkable work of Laplanche (1989, 1998, 1996).

‘I shall be’ may have set off the therapy enterprise on the wrong foot, establishing the primacy of the self, leading us to believe that the unknown can be known, that the enigma of psychic life can be translated, and what is other can be reduced to the same. Despite their official protestations, all therapeutic approaches followed suit, via appeals to ‘evidence-based’ claims, the wild-goose chase for ‘authenticity’, or the fashionable delusions of integration and regulation. ‘Others shall be’ may on the other hand help us reveal the essential *heteronomy* present in the heart of autonomy (Bazzano, 2020b), the profound influences of concrete others in our life, whether alive or dead

Brooks’ critique of Freud, though not new is still urgent; it applies to psychotherapy as a whole and the “various gurus” (Loewenthal, 2020) on which current therapy trainings are based. Freud emerges in Brooks’ paper as the advocate of a methodology of conquest upholding a monolithic view of his creation, with obvious and highly questionable blind spots in relation to race, culture, class and gender – views which then predictable fossilized through tedious internecine and sectarian wars within the psychoanalytic church. At the same time, the other aspect, equally present in Freud, e.g. psychotherapy as experimentation and adventure (Russell, 2017; Bazzano, 2019a) is conspicuously absent from the investigation. One immediate association to Freud as adventurer relates to what Lacan heard *viva voce* from Jung:

Thus Freud's words to Jung – I have it from Jung's own mouth – when, on an invitation from Clark University, they arrived in New York harbour and caught their first glimpse of the famous statue illuminating the universe, 'They don't realize we're bringing them the plague,' are attributed to him as confirmation of a hubris whose antiphrasis and gloom do not extinguish their troubled brightness. To catch their author in its trap, Nemesis had only to take him at his word. We could be justified in fearing that Nemesis has added a first-class return ticket". (Lacan, 1977:116).

‘They don’t realize we’re bringing them the plague’ are, arguably, not the words of someone carrying the tables of the law to the superstitious, but those of a subversive adventurer instilling the Schopenhauerian worm of perplexity and pessimism in a societal fabric built of

blind positivity and positivism (the ‘American dream’). The anecdotal statement chimes with the first generalized reception of psychoanalysis in the US. Jacqueline Rose (2011) reminds us of the story of the American woman who during a lecture by Ernest Jones on dreams, objected that Jones could speak only for Austrians; in her case, as with her fellow Americans, all dreams were positive and altruistic.

‘They don’t realize we’re bringing them the plague’ are the words of a *European*, of someone who, schooled in European high culture, was deeply sceptical of the commercialism and superficiality of the official American way of life. It is true, as Brooks writes, that Europe has “plundered, massacred, enslaved and dominated the foreign others it has encountered”. It is also true, if one is to believe Adorno (1951/2005) and Said (1979), that at the heart of European high culture there was (is) that *transcendental homelessness* that became painfully tangible through the horrors of the twentieth century. One could argue that the very notion of ‘Europe’ is specious: not only does Europe have deep roots in the East and the Middle East (Said, 1979), but the flowering of European culture is itself the product of exiles (Adorno, 2005; Bazzano, 2006, 2012), rather than the straightforward manifestation of an imaginary European identity. In Freud’s case, the rabid anti-Semitic prejudice he was subjected to, in France and elsewhere, also reminds us of the way in which his creation was inextricably associated with otherness and the attendant fears of contamination.

There is in my view one crucial aspect (half-concealed and barely articulated in Freud; conspicuously absent from current psychotherapeutic discourse) – which would make psychoanalysis immediately relevant to any project aspiring to be post-existential. This is Freud’s brief, tentative admission of the *primacy of the other* present in his discarded theory of seduction and in his unachieved Copernican revolution (Laplanche, 1996).

Primacy of the other runs parallel in poststructuralism and deconstruction to a *decentering of the self*. There is no serious move away in psychotherapy from grand ‘modernist’ narratives

without instituting these two crucial aspects: primacy of the other, decentering of the self. Without these, all talk of ‘post-existential’ critical-analytic psychotherapies is just that: empty talk, hazardously lenient to the platitudes of a facile and utterly vacuous ‘pluralistic’ approach to psychotherapy. Equally, there is no significant shift away from the modernist, biological pieties of Attachment Theory (a universalized grand narrative if there ever was one, supinely accepted by *all* psychotherapies) without a thoroughgoing reinstatement of the primacy of the other and a decentering of the self (Bazzano, 2020).

I would add to the mix a third element: *ontology of actuality*, a concept alive in Critical Theory, one that Foucault (1983) rightly saw as necessary antidote to the inherent trappings of that philosophy of consciousness (Dews, 1986) within whose precincts existential phenomenological therapies seem to enjoy wallowing in. Bluntly put: by focusing on the deed rather than the doer, on history rather than an imaginary fall from being, on situational, progressive and subversive action rather than abstract ontological ethical principles, we may at least avoid varnishing the same old *cogito*. Actuality, history and at times even contingency are blissfully and ignorantly absent from existential phenomenological therapy, an approach that would have greatly benefited from Hegel, in whose writings the ontology of actuality figures prominently:

An individual cannot know what he is until he has made himself a reality through action. However, this seems to imply that he cannot determine the end of his action until he has carried it out; but at the same time, since he is a conscious individual, he must have the action in front of him beforehand as entirely his own, i.e. as an end (Hegel, 1977:240).

Good players and bad players

Actuality, deed, and more specifically *gesture* (and its relation to language) are at the heart of Julia Cayne’s investigation, ‘Language and Gesture in Merleau-Ponty: Some implications for method in therapeutic practice and research’. Vividly recounted through the vignette of playing with grandchildren, the paper initially presents a stimulating and refreshing take on

Winnicott, his notion of play, its connection to creativity and the spontaneous gesture. Winnicott valued *play* as an activity that is not dissimilar from being itself, as “a type of doing that being is” (Russell, 2017:105). Play may also be understood, *contra* the dominant view, as an expansive and generous notion of ‘wellbeing’ that far exceeds the miserly view of mental health currently in vogue, as mere avoidance of illness. This is a reactive notion – the stance of a *bad player*. What makes a bad player? A calculating stance, playing in order to win, arbitrarily assigning purpose, unity, and meaning to an unfathomable existence, a pervasive fear of becoming and its intrinsic innocence, the latter understood as “the truth of multiplicity” (Deleuze, 1962/2006:21). What makes a *good player*? Well, for one thing, disposing of notions of loss and gain when throwing the dice; actively accepting the limitations of our Promethean will to control, measure, and quantify everything under the sun. Can then a phenomenologist be a good player? Yes, if she no longer sees phenomenology as mere prelude and propaedeutic to the study of abstractions such as ‘Being’, but is capable of actively partaking in the play of multiplicity. A phenomenologist can be a good player if he/she is able to appreciate *phenomena* as semblance/emergence rather than ‘mere’ appearance, without assuming the existence of *noumena*, essences, or ‘the things themselves’. But this would require a momentous shift; it would involve abandoning notions of purpose, evolution and *telos*; it would involve “substituting the venerable old pair of probability/finality with the Dionysian pairs of chance/necessity and chance/destiny” (Bazzano, 2019a:20).

Simplistically put, it would also involve, I suspect, holding (very) lightly the structuralist view of language common to Saussure and early Lacan and move the investigation further, spurred by that openness to difference already present in Merleau-Ponty who, as I read him, understood language less as a sum of signs and more as an orderly way to single out each sign from another, thus weaving a *multiverse*, never bypassing the importance of subjective

difference in the name of universality. This essential move into difference – and differentialism – is greatly hindered, as Cayne rightly points out, by seeing qualitative phenomenological research “as stemming from the dominant discourse around a positivist paradigm”. Is the researcher’s need to respond to the inevitable “disorientation and uncertainty” of one’s “engagement” and “intermingling with others” doomed to be narrowed down to cosily dim and wearisome positivist narratives? Sadly, the general trend in psychotherapy trainings appears to confirm this. Perhaps a shred of hope in a landscape dominated by obsessive measurement disorder (Bazzano, 2020c) may exist via the first attempts towards developing postqualitative research. Despite being very tentative and sporadic, these significantly gesture towards, among other creative uncertainties and disorientations, the unreliability insubstantiality of the subject.

The notion of language as gesture cuts through the solipsism of self-reflection; it presents us with a language able to retrieve those voices that rationalization cannot hear, making possible a “remembrance of nature within the subject” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2003: 32). From its initial babbling and its onomatopoeic beginnings language *sings the world*, expressing an emotional essence that resonates in the human *weatherscape* (Stern, 1985, 1992). Having capitalized on Merleau-Ponty’s work and the notion of language-as-gesture, the next stage of an exploration of language which were to embrace poststructuralism involves absorbing Artaud’s (and Deleuze & Guattari’s) notion of the *body without organs* (Artaud, 1976; Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1982), describing a world of intensities-in-motion, a primal order of language that is already there before the infant can begin to grasp words and sentences, the perception of a voice endowed with the dimensions of language but not its meanings (Deleuze, 1969/2004). It also provokes phenomenologists, habitually confined by the intrinsic limitation of their ideology to an aseptic notion of experience as a contemplative, irremediably Kantian connection with the world, to the tragic and potentially emancipatory

meaning of experience as liberation from a body-subject that is subjected to interpellation (Althusser, 2005) and the surveillance and cataloguing of medicine and biology (Foucault, 2008). It is this more overtly political aspect of experience – politics of the gesture as much as politics of experience – that may afford the researcher with a glimpse of a more objective *Stimmung* outside the Cartesian cocoon within which existential phenomenology remains arguably trapped. This, rather than appeals to ‘the body’, a term which cannot itself “escape the reproach of reification” (Jameson, 2013: 31). This, rather than Gaston Bachelard’s psychoanalysis of the elements and its attendant anthropomorphism.

The private screech of wild birds

It is hard to resist the romantic notion that imagines ‘experience’ to be raw, immaculate, full of richly entwined complexities which elude us because we have been so fatally obstructed by synthetic methods and theories. It is even harder when the theories/methods in question are gimmicky, put in place in order to subtly coerce researchers into complying with the various transactions that keep that commercial enterprise going that we grandly call ‘university’. And it is nearly impossible to resist the seductive image of “screeching wild birds” removed to an “aviary” and not wanting to preserve and defend their wildness, which is the wildness of sensual meaning against the dullness and imposition of mechanical theory and evidence-based conformity.

All the same, the notion that by “being phenomenological we are less likely” to become “caught up” (Author(s) 3) in the constrictions of a research method, must be resisted. The view of phenomenology as a method and a theory which apparently escapes “‘given’ meanings” and is more in touch with the “contextual origin [of] sensual meaning” (ibid) is at best naive, and at worst delusional. If anything, the ‘method’ makes us painfully aware of our inevitable biases and (equally inevitable) estrangement from supposedly raw and immaculate

sensual meaning. This error, I suspect, is inbuilt in the apparatus assembled by Husserl's followers, old and new, with its unwavering Cartesian itch towards the so-called 'things themselves', setting back the phenomenological endeavour to Kantian psychology. It would be incongruous for any self-styled 'post-phenomenologist' to advocate the undoing of all "layers of knowledge and metaphysics and [arriving at] the final unveiling of a natural substratum" (Bazzano, 2019a:103). From Nietzsche – and from post-structuralism – we have learned that there is no natural substratum; that the 'naked' body is not the ultimate ground; that there is no 'ground', ultimate or not. What we can hope for is to weave a garment that better fits, rather than constrain and distort, the contours of the human body.

Nevertheless, McSherry, Loewenthal and Cayne make a convincingly subjectivist defence of the art of healing. The context – the mental nursing milieu – and the theoretical frame – Amedeo Giorgi's own singular adaptation of Husserlian methodologies – are the background on which their argument is built. They are politely critical of Giorgi's translation of the research participants' words "into *transformed meaning units* of accepted psychological language" (emphasis in the original). They see this process of translation (rightly, in my view) as losing an essential component of phenomenology: the loss of the 'sensual', understood as the subjective landscape in the name of obeisance to "'given' psychological meanings". Translating is traducing; translating is betraying; it is oversimplification, banalization, and inevitable repression of subjective experience. What McSherry et al do not consider is that what is commonly understood as 'subjective experience' is in turn a 'meaning unit', a 'given'. The subjective sphere is itself an oversimplification, an essentially repressive banalization of *affect* and of pre-subjective subjectivities (Combes, 2013). I see this as a failing that is constitutive of Husserlian phenomenology. It is certainly a *creative* failing, strategically valuable in shielding the "absolute *solitude* of the *existent* in its *existence*" (Derrida, 2005, p. 110) from the onslaught of data and those mechanical generalities that are

now the staple of neoliberal therapy training and ‘research’. But it is a failing all the same, for it hampers the enquiry through an *a priori* form of sensibility and a *private logic*, Adler would say, (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964), that is inimical to common sense, a.k.a. shared wisdom.

Subjectivism breeds objectivism; how to steer clear of this epistemological trap? One way out is offered by Gilbert Simondon who in *L'individuation psychique et collective* (Simondon, 1989) writes:

If knowledge rediscovers the lines that allow for interpreting the world according to stable laws, it is not because there exist in the subject *a priori* forms of sensibility, whose coherence with brute facts coming from the world would be inexplicable; it is because being as subject and being as object arise from the same primitive reality, and the thought that now appears to institute an inexplicable relation between object and subject in fact prolongs this initial individuation; the *conditions of possibility* of knowledge are in fact the *causes of existence* of the individuated being (cited in Combes, 2013: 7-8, emphasis in the original).

The task of ‘post-phenomenology’ is to go beyond hermeneutics, a science which, championed by Husserl and glorified by Heidegger, entirely relies on givens, “on a *prior pre-comprehension* or proto-comprehension” (Laplanche, 1996:7, emphasis added), or on notions such as *habitus* and the “abidingly” arché of the “Ego” (Husserl 2013: 66). McSherry et al cogently call into question the imposition of “theoretical [and] evidence-based ideas”; they importantly remind us of asymmetry and openness but the investigation does not go far enough into questioning the very nature of what they call a “sensual (private and unfolding) meaning”. We may need to listen again to the screeches of those wild birds clamouring through the trees.

How to kill a frog

Elizabeth Nicholl as lead author in ‘Finding my voice: telling stories with heuristic self-search inquiry’ reminds us of the intrinsic value of subjective experience over and above the

stigmatizations and objectifications of (often crude applications of) science. Tacit knowledge, self-discovery and self-dialogue are (alongside other aspects of first-person heuristic inquiry) paramount in (self-) understanding the first person experience of those diagnosed with ‘schizophrenia’. Heuristic inquiry – or, for that matter phenomenological research – are not inimical to science but only, I would argue to naive *scientism*, i.e. the transforming of scientific discourse “into a vast reservoir of metaphors or ‘models’ for the hard-pressed theoretician” (Derrida, 1974:62). The task in (Merleau-Pontian) phenomenology is not to abandon science but momentarily *forswearing* it (Merleau-Ponty, 1964) by comparing it with other facets of human experience of which science is but one aspect. In the past (Bazzano, 2011), I have personally found one potential way out of an almost inevitable and sterile opposition between ‘science’ and ‘heuristic’ experience through the findings of *neuro-phenomenology*, a method championed by Chilean scientist Francisco Varela. A key method consists in combining *first-person report* with *third-person description*.

Unlike the allegedly ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’ procedures used in mainstream science, this time the person experiencing and observing a particular phenomenon is fully in the picture, rather than left out. However, the investigation does not stop here; if it did, the enquiry would be merely subjective. Instead, the first-person account is described and further clarified by a third person description of the same phenomenon (Bazzano, 2011:22).

The process sparks a dynamic feedback which takes the enquiry beyond both mere subjectivity and the objectivism of hard science. The above is not only compatible with both Moustakas’ (1990) formidable template and with Sela-Smith’s (2002) update and critique of the former; it also offers one possible way out of a defensive subjectivist position.

At the same time, for some of us the time has come to exit not only the stifling dwelling of quantitative research and its attendant reliance on the McNamara fallacy (Yankelovich, 1972), but also the formulaic vagaries of qualitative research whose touchy-feely lingo barely hides what truly runs the show: *algorithms*, *impact factor*, tribal waving of shibboleths (‘I’m being truly person-centred, I have mentioned the word ‘empathy’ ten times’) and so forth. A

five-year stint as editor of a humanistic psychotherapy journal has cured me of any illusion on that front. What to do? One interesting field of investigation is currently offered by postqualitative research (Le Grange, 2018). Still in its infancy and despite possible misgivings (e.g., excessive reliance on the tenets of the posthumanism), the latter offers a prospective way out of the stiffness of quantitative research and the indulgent preciousness of qualitative research. Among others, its strong points are, as I see it: (a) deconstruction and critical re-evaluation of the subject/researcher to include the nonhuman in the field of an awareness not bound by a philosophy of consciousness; (b) due attention paid to ongoing decolonial conversations and to the findings of poststructuralism.

The narrator/researcher is an unreliable subject, and one deconstructing means may be offered by humour – something which, as Patricia Talens remind us in their rather humourless paper, can help “facilitate relational desires which may not feel acceptable or appropriate to vocalise within the therapeutic relationship”. For not only is it impossible to dissect humour without killing it, as one would a frog; it may also be unworkable to write about it in an academic paper. In deciding to do so, we join the *tradition* from Plato to Freud and also find that in the therapy room humour may have remedial properties and come in handy when handling totemic subjects like sex and death. When, that is, humour is not superiorly dispatched as defense, catalogued as coping mechanism, or patronized as social lubricant.

Interestingly, Bergson, Bataille, and Plessner and are conspicuously absent from the discussion. All three had many interesting things to say on the subject, and from a *counter-traditional stance*. For Helmut Plessner (1970), one of the exponents, with Max Scheler and others, of *philosophical anthropology*, “the human position” is seen as inherently “eccentric” (p 36). We do not coincide with ourselves but inhabit a gap between a physical and a

psychological dimension. This is where laughter stems from – from our originary inauthenticity (Critchley, 2008; Bazzano, 2012)

Embedded in the animal kingdom, we have deliberately placed ourselves outside it via an act of *Abgehobenheit*, or apartness. In this peculiarly human situation of “mediated immediacy”, the human being experiences herself *as* and *within* a thing, a thing differentiating itself from all other things because she is herself that thing. She finds herself sustained and surrounded by something that keeps resisting her. To fully recognize this condition liberates us from the obligation to tag along the latest epistemologies and invites us to accept the ambivalence between presence and apartness, proximity and remoteness, objectivity and subjectivity. But this acceptance implies an exit from the edifice of the tradition, to which Plato, Freud and Husserlian/Heideggerian phenomenology firmly belong, and embracing instead the *counter-tradition* (Bazzano & Webb, 2016).

Think Again

Yana Trichkova, Del Loewenthal, Betty Bertrand and Cath Alston’s paper ‘What gets in the way of working with clients who have been sexually abused’ stopped me in my tracks. Not only because of the shocking, disturbing and painful content directly evoking a range of feelings within me. Not only because of the crystal-clear clarity, competence and attention to detail with which the article is written. The paper is also a great example of the effectiveness of heuristic inquiry when done properly. The latter point forces me to rethink my own stance around research. My eagerness to abandon qualitative research methods has justifiably fed on years of reading and assessing formulaic, box-ticking exercises that pay lip-service to ‘experience’, ‘felt-sense’, ‘empathic attunement’ while promoting a conformist agenda that in its convenient and at times cynical adoption of humane/humanistic lingo is as far removed from the tragic joys and tribulations often at the heart of the subject being explored. This is

eerily similar to parody: using right-brain style of speech to advance left-brain agendas. Or, closer to the topic discussed by Trichkova et al: it reminds me of the way some of us men have for years paid lip-service to feminism, all the while displaying a peculiar blindness to women's subjectivities (Bazzano, 2019b).

What gets in the way of working with clients who suffered sexual abuse? Well, virtually everything, from feeling overwhelmed to experiencing “anger, repulsion, and hatred, fear and helplessness, confusion, puzzlement, even shock and horror, grief and sadness, anxiety, guilt and shame”. What responses are unhelpful? Most of the usual ones: from questioning the content to voyeuristic interest, to the usual array of (nevertheless useful) countertransferential responses. All but *one* response are a long way from being even adequate. The heart of Trichkova et al's paper is the letter to their client. This is what presents us with an incredible mixture of disarming honesty, profound insight/hindsight, appropriate personal disclosure, and thorough self-reflection. It *shows* directly – rather than merely telling – what heuristic research can accomplish. In questioning the researcher's own responses and the author's general sense of self, it also presents me with a fitting reminder, at the conclusion of this brief foray, that alongside the critique of heuristic and phenomenological styles of research I have expressed throughout this piece, there is room for discovering anew their inherent and implicit value.

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