Sexuality, Gender and Power

Intersectional and Transnational Perspectives

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Anna G. Jónasdóttir

> The starting point has to be the full human equality of men and women, and from this flows all the other forms of equality.
>
> (Weeks 2007: 7)

Love—or, more precisely, the concept of 'love power'—is at the center of my theoretical analysis of 'formally equal patriarchy', an attempt to explain why men still dominate contemporary western societies. I began this work in 1980, and published my *Love Power and Political Interests. Towards a Theory of Patriarchy in Contemporary Western Societies* in 1991 (hereafter *LP* or, when quoted, Jónasdóttir 1994).[1] Yet, 'love', sexual or otherwise, was not my focus at first.[2] I moved into the landscape of love through a critical and reconstructive application of Marx's method (his materialist premises and general social theory) to feminist questions that arose in many different countries from the 1960s about the persistent inequality between women and men. My use of Marx's method led me to identify love and love power as a creative/productive—and exploitable—human capacity, comparable in significance to labor or labor power. In other words, sociosexual relationships (*alias* gender relations), love practices and the struggle and control over the use of love power in the process of the production/reproduction of people comprise a particular societal dimension, distinguishable as such for studying societies and social change.

Working with Marx led me to develop a particular social and political theory domain—'political sexuality'—within which I framed and answered the more specific research question put forward above (and within which other related questions about various causes, consequences and possible overcoming of gender inequality can and should also be asked and explored). My intervention into historical materialism through the 'production point of entry' rather than through 'reproduction *per se*' (Jónasdóttir 2009a: 67) conceptualizes the economy (the production of means of life) and sexuality (the production of life) as both distinct and internally related social processes; *not* separate or only externally connected structures. Through this intervention, I have argued (Jónasdóttir 2009a) that there is room in Marx's variant of historical materialism for the assumption that not only human labor but also human love can and should be understood as '*practical*, human-sensuous activity' and a 'world-creating capacity'.[3] This claim grounds a critical feminist reconstruction of the historical materialist

production perspective (Jónasdóttir and Jones 2009b). It provides a way to theorize sexuality, gender relations and gendered interests, power, agency and politics, where these elements are seen as linked together in a general, multi-level and multi-dimensional social and political theory framework. By assessing carefully the limitations we find in poststructuralist feminist theory, so dominant in the 1980s and 90s, while not denying its strengths, Kathleen Jones and I claim that the new 'turn' we outline can help move feminist theory work beyond the claims of 'clean break' or either/or view still blocking so much of materialist versus cultural theory debates (Jónasdóttir and Jones 2009b).

My love theory has been applied empirically and developed by other researchers (see especially Jakobsen 1999; Axelsson 2009; Barriteau 2008 and Chapter 5, this volume; Gunnarsson forthcoming). It has also evoked critical questions many of which I also asked myself and have answered preliminarily elsewhere. Among these questions a common one is about my focus on women and men. Does it mean that I take the heterosexual organization of society for granted? Is it possible to account for non-heterosexual love when using this approach? As to the latter question, yes, I think it is possible, but it must be investigated concretely as must the theory's sustainability at large. My argument was and is that the patriarchal organization of heterosexuality is crucial because 'it is the dominant form of sexual organization', and as such 'it functions oppressively both internally and with respect to people who engage in other forms of sexual encounters'. I also argue that to bring in sexual love—in the sense of interactive practices relating people actually and potentially as sexes—'implies that the way sexual love is practiced influences significantly both the way other love relations are practiced, for instance those between parents and children, and also the way people tend to practice person-to-person relations in other social contexts' (Jónasdóttir 1994: 219–221).

In this chapter I draw on my earlier and more recent work to elaborate on some aspects of my theory, especially the concept of love power and the difference I think love makes both for the explanation of male dominance in formally equal societies and, more generally, for the development of a new social theory organized around sexuality broadly defined. This approach implies a complex view of how 'intersectionality' can be applied, not only to multi-faceted selves or subjectivities but also to multi-dimensional social processes and contexts. In my attempt to clarify the deep question of what kind of power 'love power' is, I also discuss 'exploitation' as a contested theoretical concept and a complex social reality.

MEN'S POWER, MARX'S METHOD AND 'POLITICAL SEXUALITY'

My work can be characterized as an empirically oriented and historically located theory. Its empirical point of departure was the (well documented)

fact that men's power positions persist, even in contemporary western societies (including the Nordic countries), where the combination of formal/legal equality, high percentage of women in paid employment and various welfare state arrangements clearly benefit women and where women are relatively socially and economically independent of individual men. My central research question, still relevant, was how to explain this historically specific form of male domination or patriarchy. The context-bound formulation of the problem was consciously chosen. Located and delimited in time and space, it does not invite analyses in terms of ahistorical principles or answers thought to be universally valid. Equally deliberate is the decision to focus on the power of men, rather than the oppression or subordination of women, as the problem that needs explanation. Although these two ways of approaching the power differences between women and men are two sides of the same coin, which 'side' a researcher pinpoints as the main focus is crucial to the research process. This is because the 'coin' here is about social relationships of ongoing creative/productive activities the outcome of which is the observable, persistent and changing, patterns of unequal power positions (and potential equalities) between women and men. This approach means that, *analytically*, I do not 'place women and their experiences center stage' as for instance Bryson does (Chapter 4, this volume). Nor are 'men' (or 'masculinities') as a group or a set of categories given that role. The central elementary unit in my theory is the concept of sociosexual relationships, and '*social* relations', in my 'method', is always also about activities. My attempt is to explain certain social processes in terms of generating mechanisms, rather than as 'the recurrence of whole structures' (Tilly 2008: 125).

My approach posits the central question as a macro-level problem, questioning the social organization of gender inequality at a systemic or context level, but searches for explanations at the meso-levels. At these levels relational activity (love practices), understood as a process of interactions, transactions (of powers) and negotiations between socially significant parties (individuals and groups or collectives in their sociosexual capacities), is situated in a specified social setting (which cuts across the family, working-life and all other spheres of society). This approach brings relational activity into focus as generating causal mechanisms. Such activity is not reducible either to individual selves or systemic contexts. Rather, the societal context (and even the self) is seen as the outcome of how relational activities are played out in different and changing settings. The overall (macro-level) context, in turn, conditions various interactive settings of social life, whereas interactions, transactions and negotiations presuppose concrete individuals using their human capacities.

Early on I became interested in the mode of thinking that saw a certain promising connection between feminism and Marxism (Mitchell 1971), where the expectation of a fruitful relationship presupposed the relative independence of each 'party'. This mode of thinking was initiated to try out

Marxism as a 'method of social analysis', or 'put [Marx's method] to the service of feminist questions' (Hartmann 1981: 11), and was seen as a 'distinctive theoretical project' (Jaggar 1983: 118), a third way to move (dialectically) through—and beyond—the opposites of self-sufficient radical feminism and a rigid, omnipotent Marxism (Jónasdóttir 1994, Chaps. 1–2, 4; 2009a). The project built on two assumptions—that 'sex' could and should be problematized as such, instead of being subsumed by 'class' and that inequality based on sex and inequality based on class could both be analysed and explained by using somehow the same 'method'. In other words, identifying gender relations and sexuality (understood broadly) as a distinct societal dimension, inherently related (intersecting) with other main dimensions of society, including the economy and class relationships, racialized/ethnic relations, cultural processes, political institutions and ideological forces, was taken to be theoretically possible and politically important.

Heidi Hartmann was particularly clear about what the distinctiveness of the 'theoretical project' meant. She argued that to explain patriarchy by using Marx's method presupposed that the 'woman question' of Marxism be reformulated to the 'feminist question' and 'directed at the causes of sexual inequality between women and men, of male dominance over women' (Hartmann 1981: 3, 5). Her ambition was to specify the basic mechanisms of patriarchy, a task she found difficult because 'the same features, such as the division of labor, often reinforce both patriarchy and capitalism [and] it is hard to isolate the mechanisms of patriarchy. *Nevertheless, this is what we must do*' (Hartmann 1981: 29; emphasis added). However, as several critics argued, Hartmann did not succeed in differentiating between the two systems' material foundations and structural characteristics (Jónasdóttir 1994: 50–51).

My critical assessment of various contributions to this ambitious project led me to conclude three things. First, the distinctiveness which the feminist historical-materialist theory project aimed at was lacking. Second, the reason was either because feminist analyses had been striving towards a total theory, covering all interlocking oppressions, too fixated on work, class and the economy, or had overestimated either the general explanatory power of sexual violence or the sole impact of cultural forces. My third conclusion was that Marx's method could be put much more and differently to the service of radical feminist questions. Concerning the method itself, I do not understand Marx's materialism as an historicist orthodoxy, or as a *theory* of history and society in any strong sense of that word, but as a research tradition, a set of ontological assumptions and methodological guidelines for the development of *specific theories* (Jónasdóttir 2009a: 62–64).

On the meta-level of research tradition and general social theory, I suggested an analytically distinct feminist perspective for the study of society and history. This view proposed a specific vantage point for the study of social existence, where production (and reproduction) of life and living people, gender relationships (the social sexes), and the organization of love take the place that production (and reproduction*)* of the means of life,

social classes, and the organization of labor hold in Marx's general social theory and view of history. (In concrete reality, according to this view, neither the social sexes nor the social classes are necessarily only two.) I see the institution of marriage as a central link between the state and society, meaning that its significance or status in my (general social) theory and view of history corresponds to the status of private property in Marx's thought. This part of my work, thus, proposed a reoriented feminist version of historical materialism seen as a relational realist research tradition, or—to borrow an important phrase from Marx—as a 'guiding thread for my studies' (Marx 1859/1977: 389).

On the *specific theory* level, I presented a draft towards a theory of contemporary western patriarchy, assuming that the basic structure of male dominance or patriarchy in formally/legally equal societies are maintained in a conflict-filled process, where unequal energy or power transactions structure relations between women and men. Although formally and socio-economically relatively equal, women and men constitute the main parties of a particular exploitative relationship, a relationship in which men tend to exploit women's capacities for love and transform these into individual and collective modes of power over which women lose control. The institution of marriage, understood as historically changing and ideologically defined conjugal norms, is a key regulator that keeps the process of male domination in action, and in this sense 'marriage' has a wide meaning. It refers not only to legally married or co-habitating couples or intimate partners in general, but also to the patterns of interaction which it establishes—and prohibits—between people as sexual beings (i.e., between women and men, between and among women and between and among men) in society at large. What is crucial is men's possessiveness vis-à-vis women, that is, men's claims to access to women. In practice, men's 'rights' to appropriate women's sociosexual resources, especially their capacities for love, continues as a predominant pattern, even if (in many societies) no longer legally prescribed. (Jónasdóttir 2009a: 62).

As is well known historical materialism inspired the development of many different feminist theories, most of which stagnated during the 1980s under the pressure of post-structuralism and the multifaceted 'war' against Marxism. Successively, however, a renewed, considerably strong interest in Marx's work can be observed around the world both among feminist theorists and otherwise.[4] '[T]he re-emergent interest in feminist conceptualizations of social reproduction' is one major example, and in the current era of global transformations in the political economy especially, transnational care work is an expanding research area in interdisciplinary feminist analyses (Bakker and Silvey 2008: 2; Bakker and Gill (eds) 2003; Young 2003). Also, Teresa Ebert's (1996) and Rosemary Hennessy's (2000) studies of desire, labor and sexual identities in late capitalism, are staking an important claim for the urgency of re-connecting feminist analyses of gender and sexuality with Marx's theory of capitalism and the problems of labor and

exploitation in the current world. However, seen from my perspective (of political sexuality), the feminist questions asked in these studies are not '[re-]directed at the causes of . . . male dominance over women', as Heidi Hartmann put it once and emphasized as an urgent task (1981: 3, 5). It is more of an interesting renewal of the Marxist 'woman question', a way of relating to Marx and historical materialism that as such is fruitful and important but does not exhaust the potential usefulness of this tradition of thought for feminist aims (Jónasdóttir 2009b).

Among the many questions raised in my theoretical project, conducted with one eye, so to speak, on the feminist matter in question and the other on Marx's method, was one about power. Exactly how is 'power' to be understood and conceptualized as a part of sexuality? In the view I was assuming power cannot be dominance only, nor is power merely the effect of discourse. Another question was about exploitation. More precisely, it was about the basic terms and key concepts most often used in materialist theoretical analyses—oppression and exploitation—where exploitation seemed the least used and developed among feminist theorists. I assumed that 'exploitation' should be applied not solely in the context of class and labor, but also in the sociosexual context.

Thinking in terms of exploitation opened a different view of the problem than did both oppression and subordination. This led to questions such as: in which capacity are women exploited, and by whom? What is it to be exploited as women? How does this particular process of exploitation work? Where does it take place? What is being exploited? In other words, what is being extracted, or appropriated, from women in their (socially and culturally shaped, and historically shifting) capacity as women—as a sex? Love and 'love power' came into the picture for me as a result of my assumption that a crucial part of the theoretical analysis of women's exploitation must be done within the field of sexuality; neither work (nor labor) nor care alone was adequate as the key concept to understand the unique '*practical*, human-sensuous activity' of sexuality. Love as a transformative power, or from my vantage point, sexual love as a particular kind of love practices, is a fundamental element of the process of production of people. In our time (time/space) also, when individuals are forced/free to make and remake themselves under continuously changing circumstances, love as a source of creative/re-creative human power seems to be needed more and more strongly.

IS EXPLOITATION SIMPLY BAD?

Marx used what is sometimes called 'exploitation proper' in his specific theory of how surplus value is extracted from labor under capitalism; thus, how capital can grow despite the fact of equal rights (also for workers) to private property. Bringing in the term exploitation, but not about the same things as

Marx did, made it possible for me to develop an explanatory theory of the formally equal, contemporary Western patriarchy. I could 'see' all the elements I had found lacking in my critical assessment of those feminist theories I related to (the distinct sociosexual *relationship*; the specific creative practical *activity*; a specific human capacity or developmental *power* the use and control of which is contested; a whole specific *structure on the level of social being* and a main, state-related *institution* assumed to be 'more relevant than others in the production and reproduction of male power or patriarchy') and I could pinpoint a *basic mechanism* which maintains gender inequality in the formally equal but still patriarchal society. In theory, 'exploitation' served as a very useful concept (Jónasdóttir 2009c) because it helped generate different questions from those coming up in approaches organized around other basic terms, like discrimination, oppression, subordination, gender hierarchy or, later, identity/difference matrixes.

What, then, does the word exploitation mean; how is it commonly—and more uncommonly—used? What does it mean to say that human powers/capacities are exploitable?

Most generally to 'exploit' means simply to use. Somewhat more specifically it means to utilize, or 'use, work or develop fully' natural resources like mines. Still more specifically, and loaded with a negative value, to exploit means to use somebody or something selfishly and unfairly for one's own advantage or profit, like exploiting child labor in factories (from *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*). Dictionaries and conceptual analyses often distinguish between exploiting natural/physical resources (something) and to exploit other persons (somebody). Commonly, to exploit coal mines, oil reserves, water power, solar energy, or other physical resources is *not* thought to be bad, wrong or unjust by definition (exploitation is distinguished from overexploitation), whereas the opposite is most often the case with some people exploiting other people. However, part of the usefulness of the term exploitation is that it is not *necessarily* loaded with immorality or injustice. It can be used descriptively, technically in a sense. To speak with Alvin Gouldner (1960: 166): 'it can be employed simply to refer to certain transactions involving an exchange of things of unequal value'.

In the most general sense, and seen descriptively, to say that the human capacities to love and labor are *exploitable* is to say that these are living sources of energy which can be released as it were in a person or a group of persons and be used as human powers in the sense of abilities to bring about developmental effects in some physical (non-human) material and/or in another person or a group of persons. In concrete social situations exploitation (of labor power, love power or other human powers like that fuelling political agency) takes various forms and differs in degree of utilization. Thus, for instance, Toby Shelley writes in his recent book *Exploited. Migrant Labour in the new Global Economy* (2007: 6): 'The subject of this book is not so much the use as the abuse of migrant labour'. And *abuse*, according to Shelley, is 'exploitation *over and above the norm*

imposed on indigenous workers' (my emphasis). Even if also among 'foreign employees', Shelley continues, there are some 'fortunate few', it is 'abuse of migrant labour as a continuum' which his book is about, and at the 'furthest extreme [end of this continuum are] the women, children and men trafficked in for sexual exploitation and disposed of when no longer profitable' (2007: 7).

In comparison with this 'seasonal slavery to minimise overheads' (Shelley 2007: 7), it may sound strange, even improper, to use the word exploitation about love practices among the 'fortunate many', which my work is about. There is seemingly no 'norm imposed on indigenous [lovers]' when it comes to sexual exploitation. Yet, I pursue, the importance of investigating not only the abusive forms of sexual exploitation but also the 'normal' forms of the use/enjoyment of love as a vital source of social existence, which comprise a basic element in the production of gender order of contemporary western societies. Although the other key concepts, mentioned above, are adequate, either to complement or as alternative to exploitation, only 'exploitation' can frame the problem as a relationship of exchange between sociosexually situated parties, where something substantial, something that matters, is taken and given, won and lost, used/enjoyed by both parties in a productive process of (an uneven) growth. In contrast: 'The discussion about sex discrimination and oppression of women often sounds as if no particular party wins anything by it' (Jónasdóttir, 1994: 95).

In my specific theory of patriarchy, men benefit in a certain qualified sense one-sidedly from exploitation of women's love power. This is made possible by complex and shifting social circumstances structured so that men can systematically take advantage of women's human resources, specifically their love power. Does this mean that women do not benefit at all from these relationships? Does it presuppose that women necessarily are victims of 'false consciousness', of male conspiracy, or have no free will? Does it presuppose that all men (and only men) today are sexual exploiters by definition? The answer is no to all three questions, and here the parallel view, built on comparison, *not* conflation, of what exploitation of freely sold wage labor under capitalism is about and what the exploitation of freely given love under the formally equal patriarchy is about, becomes so useful. In both cases exploitation is far from always involving coercion or abuse, and in both cases it most often benefits both parties (although one party controls much more effectively than the other the circumstances of differential advantages which keeps the exploitative system going). In both cases exploitation not only may benefit the exploited, it most often occurs with the full voluntary consent of the exploited. As Allen Wood puts it (1997: 13): 'Since being benefited and being exploited are often merely two sides of the same coin, and people may often be in dire need of the benefits in question, they can often be eager to be exploited'.

To summarize: to be exploited is not at all necessarily to be treated badly, used against one's will or to be unhappy. On the contrary exploited

laborers and exploited lovers alike usually become unhappy and are sometimes treated badly when they lose the exploitative labor contract or love relationship against their will. So although seemingly a contradiction in terms, my argument is that we can learn something essential about sociosexual life and the strength of love relationships by analysing them in terms of exploitative practices. Finally, then, just as not all economic activity and work relationships in societies where capitalist market economies dominate, are necessarily capitalist and exploitative by definition (for instance, cooperative firms do exist), so not all sexual activity and love relationships in otherwise patriarchal societies are necessarily exploitative. In both cases—the fields of economy and sexuality respectively—non-exploitative modes of production do exist, although on difficult conditions and as marginal phenomena. Also, because I theorize 'love power' on different abstraction levels, both as a general human capacity and as socio-culturally varying and historically shifting lived reality, nothing in this theory's ontological assumptions or methodological principles ties the position of exploiters to men as male creatures, nor delimits the exploitative relationship to heterosexual relations only.

WHAT KIND OF POWER IS 'LOVE POWER'?

Over the course of my work I have approached this question in at least three ways. First, I have tried to show what is specific about love power as compared with labor power. The second brings me *inside* the concept of love power: to what I assume is the constitutive character of sexual love, its inherent dialectic of the two elements, care and the erotic or ecstatic element, which together comprise what I call love, love as human sociosexual practice. Thirdly, then, the focal question is what kind of *power* love power is. Is it possible and reasonable to carve out a space for love as a unique human capacity among the so called 'power terms', among the many different *kinds* of power/s people think exist. The following conceptual analysis is only rudimentary. The question of the ontological and shifting, social and historical nature of 'love power' needs much more space.[5]

Comparing Love and Labor

An important part of this investigation concerns what is in the concept of *activity* in Marx, or, what he calls '*practical*, human-sensuous activity' or 'human practice' (Marx 1970: 122). What is included in Marx's specifically human 'world creative capacities', the capacities for 'changing of circumstances and . . . self-changing' (Marx 1977: 105)? How inclusive are these most central concepts about how social reality is made, how people make and remake their lives and living conditions as well as the human species? Do these key concepts refer exclusively to human labor in Marx's own

writings? My answer is no. There is quite clearly conceptual room in his main texts on method for the mode of theorizing society's sexual dimension, both as a specific, distinct, productive process of creating people/life and sociosexual existence, *and* for understanding this process as inherently intersected (confluent) with the economic dimension of society, the production of the means of life, (Marx's particular area of research interest). In this conceptualization it becomes plausible to think of material production as fundamentally dual, and to see the internal relation between the two main parts of the twofold production—the socioeconomic and the sociosexual—in an historically crucial phase of flux.

Marx defined human activity from two different aspects. The first depicted human activity as human powers in the sense of capacities, contrasted with forms of power (like money, or violence) unable fully to realize human capacities. The second defined human activity by comparing it with animal behavior, as illustrated in Marx's often cited distinction between the architect and the bee (Marx 1967/1867: 178): 'what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality'. Animals may be said to labor in a sense, according to Marx; yet what makes labor specifically human is consciousness of purpose: 'At the end of every labor-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the laborer at its commencement'(Marx 1967: 178). However, even when these two aspects are taken together, there is more to be said about what is human in human activity.

In the first aspect there is no crucial dividing line between labor and love. Money (or any other medium or form of symbolic power) cannot *substitute* for love, nor can it *substitute* for the quality of work in things. The vital difference is in the second aspect. The architect–bee paradigm does not work for capturing what is distinctive about love as a human activity as opposed to a biologically determined behavior. If individuals practice love and trust in relation to other persons, primarily as a result-oriented activity, in order to create or shape the other person into some imagined 'object', these activities become something else; they become 'impotent', as Marx (1977: 111) put it. For love to be a genuinely human activity its practitioner acts not in order to make the love object fit an 'already existing idea', but rather to enable the 'object' of love to confirm its own capacity to 'create' or 'shape' himself or herself and his or her own goals (Jónasdóttir 1994: 73). Interestingly, the idea that human sexual love relations are uniquely patterned in that they are 'at once necessary and spontaneous', (potentially) both genuinely self-fullfilling and 'other-oriented *par excellence*' (Avineri 1968: 91), is actually expressed while not elaborated in Marx's own work (Jónasdóttir 2009a: 73–78).

Saying or showing that love as a human creative practice is in at least one essential respect different from the human practice of labor does not imply that love and love power has nothing to do with work or is of no use in working life and the economy. On the contrary, and I have dealt with

this at some length elsewhere (Jónasdóttir 2009a: 77–79), precisely because the two kinds of production (both always also reproduction) processes are theorized as being internally related, changes in the conditions of love and of work respectively should be expected to have reciprocal effects. Several other chapters in this volume demonstrate such effects (see for example Bryson, Törnqvist, Zhang and Chou). Also, Jakobsen (1999), and Axelsson (2009), expanding on her, have used my theory in conjunction with a certain theory of 'work forms' (Jakobsen and Karlsson 1993), to reconstruct thoroughly the otherwise economically reductionistic and gender-blind (although empirically observant to women) life-mode analysis, developed by Højrup and Christensen during the 1980s and 1990s (Højrup 2003) for studying everyday life theorized as different life-forms.

Between Care and Ecstasy

The dialectical understanding of what characterizes sexual love is a central point in my study. The existence of the species as well as a very fundamental part or *current* in the social existence of individual persons, presuppose sexuality as an active force. At its narrowest, this is manifested in erotic links between people and a compelling erotic need for access to one another's body-and-mind. Searching for an appropriate term to refer to the specific sociosexual practices distinguishable in real life as well as in the world of concepts, I first used the term 'care'. But care alone was insufficient. What was missing was a specifically erotic sexual element. *Care* can be seen as one of love's two main components or elements, while erotic *ecstasy* would be the other. Seen in this way, then, we can grasp love's internal dynamic and contradictions.

Because of how heterosexual love relations are institutionalized in contemporary society, love's two elements—care and ecstasy—find themselves in continuous opposition (or contradiction). When (legally free and equal) individual women and men meet as sexes, the systemic conditions on which these meetings occur are not equal. Typically, in the predominant form of such 'Man–Woman' meetings, 'Woman' is 'forced' to commit herself to loving care—so that 'Man' can be able to live/experience ecstasy. For 'Woman' it is not equally legitimate to practice ecstasy as a self-directed and self-assured sexual person, *who, in doing so, needs men's caring.* (And this is a vital point!) Men's systemic position, on the other hand, presses them to limitless desire for ecstasy (as a means of self-assuredness and personal expansion; today we would perhaps say performance), while the practice of loving care in their relations to women, tends to be taken as burdens and constraints, as a spending of time and energy that must be 'economized'.

Legitimate access to and practice of ecstatic experiences seem to be a precondition for dignity and worthiness in contemporary western societies, the key characteristic of which is 'growth', or, rather, 'expansionism' (what in contemporary management philosophy is called the 'principle of performance').

In such societies individuals are historically determined in such a way as to force them to *make* themselves, so to speak, and to *take* their social places and secure their positions in hierarchies by means of personal merits. Furthermore, it seems that sexual/erotic self-assuredness, the effective ability to be a desiring individual, plays an increasingly essential role in this mode of making or producing people. The precondition, however, for this kind of expansionist sexual power to be effectively maintained and to grow, is that it be created and loaded with value the ultimate source of which is care; loving care showed to the desiring individual as a particular person. And in our social and political (patriarchal) system men are in positions of control which allow them access to this kind of empowerment while most women are not.

The important thing is that what is peculiar about sexual love—when defined dialectically as care and erotic ecstasy—is that it is (potentially) both self-interested and other-oriented simultaneously. This approach to theorizing the sociality of sexual love differs fundamentally from thinking about love in terms of altruism *vs*. egoism.

Love Power as a Kind of 'Power'

In conversation with some so called power theorists (Lukes, Wrong, Dahl, Barry and others, including Foucault) I have analysed common language on what power *is* as this has been defined in *Webster's Dictionary*, complemented by examples from newspapers and other mass media. The entry on power in *Webster* counts 26 different uses of the word. In addition to these are all the various words, so called 'power terms', such as ability, capacity, force, energy, influence, authority, dominance and others seen as close relatives to the word power (synonymous with or overlapping its uses). Nowhere on the long list of 'power terms' and phrases in *Webster* is the power of love or labor power mentioned. Of the 26 different uses the first two are the most general meanings: 1. ability to do or act; capability of doing or accomplishing something, and 2. usually powers (that is in plural) particular faculties or capabilities of body or mind: creative powers; power of speech. Then follows 24 more uses, all of them more or less specified, belonging to different areas: political, judiciary, military, technical, physical, mathematical, optic, theological and others.

Based on my reading of the richness of the uses of power terms in everyday language, I counter the *unitary* mode of defining power in the research literature, a unitary mode which comes in several guises. Instead I offer a *plural* mode of conceptualizing power, which distinguishes modes of power as different in *kind*. Thus, not only the various *forms* power may take on the level of specific areas, but also the most general human power—the 'ability to act', the 'capability of doing or accomplishing something'—may exist in different modes. This plurality is not only interesting for philosophical treatises but also for development of new social and political theories where political sexuality, love and gendered practices count as a significant

dimension of the world's societies. Such understanding might help us move on and achieve more in the many 'unfinished revolutions' going on in the 'world of sexuality and intimacy' (Weeks 2007: 7). I agree with Weeks that of them all the 'gender revolution', the struggle to undermine male dominance over women, is fundamental, also for making progress in every other (sexual) revolutionary struggle.

NOTES

1. The 1994 edition is only slightly revised. I wrote the main parts of the book between 1983 and 1988. During the same period most of the chapters were presented as papers at international conferences and also published as articles in journals or as book chapters.
2. This fact both connects my work with, and distinguishes it from, the growing number of books and articles on intimacy, sexuality and love, published in the 1990s and after, for example: Giddens (1991, 1992); Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1990/1995); Langford 1999; hooks (2000); Irigaray (2002); Bauman (2003); Evans (2003); Cixous (2005/2008); Johnson 2005). I think we are witnessing an expansion of various kinds of knowledge interests in love, which for me has justified the launching of a new interdisciplinary field of study, *Love Studies*. This field is in focus during 2010 within the Centre of Gender Excellence (GEXcel), Research Theme 10, *Love in Our Time—A Question for Feminism* (www.genderexcel.org).
3. The phrase 'world-creating capacity' is David McLellan's formulation clarifying how Marx praised Hegel for having discovered 'the self-creation of man as a process . . . [thus, history and the world] as the result of his own labour', while at the same time 'criticizing his [Hegel's] abstract, philosophical portrayal' (1977: 75, 101).
4. See Blakeley and Bryson (eds) (2005); Bryson (2004); Ebert (1996); Ferguson (2009); Harding (ed.) (2004); Hartsock (2005); Haug (2005); Hennessy (2000); Hennessy and Ingraham (eds) (1997); Holmstrom (ed.) (2002).
5. See note 2.

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