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# Carving out a Sonorous Space for Erotic Tenderness: A Deleuzo-Guattarian Reading of Björk's Becoming-Tender as Queer

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## Abstract

This article argues that through her songs and music videos *Pagan Poetry*, *Cocoon* and *Hidden Place*, versatile artist Björk is able to carve out a space for erotic tenderness. This erotic tenderness will be unearthed as a queer or minor sexuality, in the sense that it goes against a phallic and genital majoritarian account of sexuality. Tender sexuality might not be obviously queer, yet a detour through the early work of Freud will show how our hegemonic account of sexuality is built upon a repression of such a tender sexuality. Freud's psychoanalysis is only able to regard this sexual tenderness in a negative vein as a pathological symptom. Supported primarily by the works of Deleuze, Guattari and Muñoz, this article will propose that Björk's artistry is able to produce a line of flight outside of this tender-less sexuality, liberating an otherwise repressed minor tender sexuality through a visually and sonically becoming-woman, becoming-child, becoming-BwO and becoming-molecular.

**Keywords:** Björk, body without organs, Deleuze and Guattari, Freud, Muñoz, music, queer theory, sexuality, tenderness

So the best plan is to abstain from all discourse, to keep quiet, or else utter only a sound so inarticulate that it barely forms a song. While keeping an attentive ear open for any hint or tremor coming back.

(Irigaray 1985:193)

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*How important is the sexual force for you?* Extremely, it is what drives you, I think obviously it is not literally only in sex but it is vital to include it into the choreography of all things.

*How does one fuel vibrancy in life?* Listen to yourself, allow space to be heard, do what turns you on most.

*Can you unite sex and love?* Absolutely.

*Do you believe in love?* Yes. [...]

*How vulnerable do you feel one should leave oneself to remain vibrant?* [...] I feel it's a constant balancing act, to remain open enough but also not to implode. To keep a skeleton structure but stay open chested. The challenge of a lifetime.

(Björk interviewing herself, 2018: 111)

## I. Introducing Björk's Erotic

A white line divides a black surface into two perfectly symmetrical sides. On the idyllic tones of a music box, white dots slide down the line until a blurry, messy and thicker white string turns into a smudgy stain on the screen. This forms the cue for a deep electronic bass to start off a droning rhythm. The drone continues to dictate a rhythmic structure, while a harp takes over the fluid melody. The screen is now populated with formless rhythmically moving and pulsating figures, which slowly unfocus into a close-up of a singing mouth. This is how Icelandic singer and versatile artist Björk's video *Pagan Poetry* (2001) opens, the fifth song on her fourth solo album, *Vespertine*.

One has to actively search for interviews in which Björk and director Nick Knight explain the nature of these scenes. The white line appears to be a string on which beads of pearls slide down. The thicker blurry line turns out to be a cum-shot which transforms into a hyper-abstract manipulation of Björk herself performing fellatio on her then partner Matthew Barney. The adjacent scene shows us a hyper-realistic close-up of Björk's face, clearly displaying expressions of erotic pleasure, shot with a home video by Björk herself (Rock 2002).

The next time we see her face, we reach the climax of the song: Björk is belting non-lexical vocals, while tugging the dangling pearl necklaces that hang from her neck. Her facial expressions rapidly shift between innocent shy smiles, impish naughty playfulness and painful despair. When the camera zooms out, we finally see Björk's complete body. Pearls are the only coverage of her naked upper body while a long white pearl-covered gown covers her from the stomach down. Throughout, close-ups of needles and pearly strings penetrate nipples and skin, disrupting

the scenic flow of the video, culminating in the final scene, in which six metal rings pierce Björk's back, forming a bloody corset-like look sewn together with a string of pearls. Director Knight explains: 'the music video is about a woman preparing herself for marriage and for her lover. She is sewing a wedding dress into her skin' (Rock 2002).

'Cocoon' (2001), the second song on *Vespertine*, picks up the pearl trope in the last sentence: 'A train of pearls, cabin by cabin, is shot precisely across an ocean from a mouth of a girl like me, to a boy,' Björk whisper-sings. The video starts off with a multiplicity of naked Björks standing next to each other in a row. One Björk walks away, and when the camera follows her, red threads begin to stream out of her nipples. She plays with the threads, puts them in and out of her mouth, while they slowly start to encapsulate her in a red cocoon. The song forms a seemingly innocent lullaby, yet the lyrics graphically bring a poetic ode to episodes of explicit lovemaking and coital penetration: 'He slides inside, half awake, half asleep [...] gorgeousness, he's still inside me' (2001). The song is populated with warm, home-made microbeats made of sounds Björk herself gathered around the house, giving it an intimate and secretive timbre. '*Cocoon* best represents the album's sense of heavy-lidded, post-coital hibernation. Based around an exploratory bassline and beats that sound like fingertips on skin, it feels almost intrusive, like reading someone's diary as they write about a new love' (Cragg 2014).

Two songs about sexual intimacy and love—yet those are not the first words that seem to come to mind when I show these videos to friends, colleagues or students. 'Weird, she is just weird,' one of my students says and the rest nod their heads in agreement. They are right; something odd and unsettling is going on with these depictions of the erotic. Unapologetically, Björk's artistry vacillates between scenes of pious innocence and violent kinkiness, masculinity and femininity, individuation and undifferentiated mergers, form and formlessness, love and desire, ecstatic joy and painful despair, hence destabilising and escaping from these binary structures which normally found our notions of love and sex. Björk's work makes expected norms surrounding sex and love strange, and it is in this sense that her artistry can be understood as queer.<sup>1</sup>

It is no wonder that the album holding these songs together is called *Vespertine* (2001), which refers to crepuscular or blossoming at the twilight of dusk and dawn. Björk's erotic musings only hold ground in a carved-out in-between space, somewhere outside of the ordinary, between night and day, sleephood and wakefulness. Björk explains in the documentary *Minuscule* (2002) that she wanted the album to sound

domestic, introverted and intimate like a secret. All this is fittingly illustrated by 'Hidden Place' (2001), the opening song of the album. In the accompanying video, a hyper close-up camera travels between the features of Björk's face, now and then losing itself in her pitch-black hair, on other occasions following glitter-filled snot/tear/wax-like fluids that are exiting and entering the cracks and holes of her face.

In this paper, I propose that Björk's artistry rewrites and destabilises hegemonic definitions of love, intimacy and desire. Her songs and music videos both visualise and sonify a kind of erotic intimacy that is antagonistic to predominant understandings of the erotic, and in doing so open up new ways to do and think erotic desire. In this sense her artistry is queer: carving out a space for a different and minor sexuality. However, the queerness of her sexuality is not an obvious one, as certain images and words may recall heteronormative depictions of cis gender sexuality, neoliberal love, and institutionalised marriage. In this paper I nonetheless claim that Björk's work destabilises these notions. To do so, I will have to make a detour through psychoanalysis, in order to bring to light the radical potential of Björk's erotic. More specifically, I will focus on Freud's often forgotten concept of sexual tenderness or *Zärtlichkeit*, and its problematic and repressed status in his theory of sexuality. This paper claims that Björk's artistry frees this sexual tenderness from Freud's phallic understanding of adult sexuality. The main theorists who will help me make this claim are Deleuze and Guattari (hereafter referred to as D&G).<sup>2</sup>

## II. Freud and the Taboo on Adult Erotic Tenderness

Reading a book from cover to cover and having it interact with the world around you, Deleuze claims, is reading with love.<sup>3</sup> It is in this sense that I deeply love Freud's ground-breaking *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, written in 1905 (1973). But this is a love in Deleuze's definition of the word: love in a deeply problematic or always already ambivalent sense.<sup>4</sup> The motor behind my love is a limitless curiosity regarding the Freudian concept of tenderness (*Zärtlichkeit*).<sup>5</sup> It is a concept which seems to fulfil a paradoxical role in Freud's oeuvre, and especially in his *Three Essays*: on the one hand, tenderness fulfils a pivotal role in Freud's theory on sexuality, since it is the libido's first manifestation; yet, on the other hand, tenderness remains significantly underdeveloped and undertheorised by both Freud and his descendants (Koziej 2019). It is exactly because of this ambivalent status that tenderness has unfolded itself as the line of flight on which this paper

takes form. Like every line of flight, it entails a deterritorialisation, in this case a deterritorialisation away from psychoanalysis, but not at the expense of psychoanalysis as a whole, but rather to return to it with new insights and incentives to grow.

In the second of his *Three Essays*, Freud emphasises tenderness's significant position at the onset of the development of the libido. 'It is in the early tender contact between caregiver and infant—with a title role for porous orifices and capricious body fluids—that sexuality finds its roots and first polymorphous manifestation along the budding multiplicity of erogenous zones' (Koziej 2019: 3). Unlike common-sense assumptions, Freud emphasises that a mother's nursing cleaning, rocking and caressing of her baby is a source of sexual satisfaction for both mother and child (Freud 1973: 223).

Freud claims that the child's infantile tenderness might be understood as asexual, but in reality it is unmistakably sexual: 'A child's intercourse with anyone responsible for his care affords him an unending source of sexual excitation and satisfaction from his erotogenic zones' (Freud 1973: 223). He emphasises that the same goes for maternal tenderness: the mother might consider her tenderness as 'asexual pure love', but this tenderness is unmistakably 'sexual love' as it is 'derived from her own sexual life [while she] treats her child as a substitute for a complete sexual object' (223) (Koziej 2019: 3). He furthermore emphasises the desirable, healthy and necessary nature of this maternal sexual tenderness: 'She is only fulfilling her task in teaching the child to love. [...] After all, he is meant to grow up into a strong and capable person with vigorous sexual needs' (223).

Freud is very explicit: tenderness is sexual. However, in order to distinguish between this developmentally desirable non-genital sexuality played out in the mother–infant dyad on the one hand, and harmful perverse genital parental seduction that would classify as abuse, on the other, Freud makes the distinction between *tender* sexuality and *sensual* sexuality. But when it comes to a clear explanation of what tender sexuality is, and how it differs from sensual sexuality, Freud leaves us in the dark. At first glance, the distinction between tenderness and sensuality seems mainly a difference in intensity, with sensuality being fuelled by 'a full-blown libido' and tenderness by 'a damped-down' one (1973: 225). Yet, a closer analysis uncovers that tenderness and sensuality might be qualitatively different dimensions of sexuality.

Sensuality, Freud claims, is the signifier for the sexuality that should be played out between adult lovers. Moreover, sensuality is the *only* sexuality that should be played out between adults. Unlike infantile and

maternal tenderness, Freud implies that there is something pathological about sexual tenderness between adult lovers. This is suggested when Freud decides to mention adult tenderness merely as a neurotic or hysteric symptom. Freud claims that when adults desire tenderness, this comes down to a regression or fixation towards the early infantile incestuous tender objects. Freud also genders tenderness, by adding that it is usually girls whose infantile tenderness stays fixated on their caregivers, rendering them sexually anaesthetic wives (1973: 227–8).

Another difference between tenderness and sensuality seems to be the former's non-goal-orientated nature. Freud divides all sensual adult sexual behaviour into two categories: on the one hand, those who provide fore-pleasure, and on the other, those who provide end-pleasure. Non-coital activities classify as 'intermediate behaviours' providing the 'necessary motor energy and excretion' to make the body coitus-ready. On the other hand, we have 'the final sexual aim', which in Freud's heteronormative theory equates with coitus. This final aim should provide the subject with 'end-pleasure' during the final excitation through orgasm (1973: 208–10). Freud writes that one should move relatively quickly through the first kinds of behaviour. They are merely deemed 'intermediate', after all. If, however, one lingers there for too long—or worse, if one stays there without moving to coital orgasmic end-pleasure—it is considered a pathological aberration or perversion.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, unlike sensual sexuality, tenderness does not *have* to end in orgasmic ecstasy to be pleasurable or valuable. A mother's tender caress, enjoyed by the infant, is a caressing for the sake of caressing. However, when it comes to adult sexuality, Freud's teleological and reproduction-orientated sexual apparatus cannot deem such a tender touching valuable, let alone non-pathological. In other words, Freud's genital, reproductive and teleological account of adult sexuality becomes indicated as the reason for his claim that tenderness is undesirable in adult sexuality. I have named this Freud's *taboo on adult erotic tenderness*.<sup>7</sup>

What this close look at tenderness in Freud's *Three Essays* shows us is that, in Freud's theory on sexuality, tenderness is deemed sexual, yet it is only valuable or non-symptomatic as infantile and maternal. In adulthood, tenderness seems appropriate, beneficiary and desired *only* when it considers a maternal taking care of a child; but the need to either show or receive tenderness from one's sexual partner is considered neurotic, childish, anaesthetic, hysteric or perverse. In this Freudian sexual apparatus non-coital behaviour is only regarded valuable as long as it facilitates a coital end-goal. Touching for the sake of touching,

or any sexual intimacy after coital end-pleasure, does not fit in this sexual scheme. There is no space for tenderness, no kissing for the sake of kissing, no caressing for the sake of caressing, and especially no post-coital sexual play. These actions always have to be understood as preparatory acts on the path towards the final sexual aim (Koziej 2019: 4).

This account of tenderness in Freud would not be complete without a short look at a later text he wrote on the topic. In 'On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love', written in 1912, Freud clarifies his previous writings on tender and sensuous sexuality (1957). He comes up with an aetiology of the libido and claims that the libido consists of two currents: an early tender one and a later sensuous one. Due to the necessary repressions of sexuality, caused by the incest taboo, one becomes unable to bring the tender and sensuous currents together in one adult sexual object. Hence, 'where they love they cannot desire, and where they desire they cannot love' (180). As the title of Freud's essay proposes, he considers this split 'universal'. Yet this soon turns out to be a 'universal' in a phallo(go)centric and colonial definition of the word (Koziej 2019: 5). He writes:

The behavior in love of men in the civilized world today bears the stamp altogether of psychical impotence. There are only a very few educated people in whom the two currents of affection [read tenderness] and sensuality have become properly fused; the man almost always feels his respect or the man's acting as a restriction on his sexual activity, and only develops full potency when he is with a debased sexual object. (185)<sup>8</sup>

Just like in his *Three Essays*, Freud adds an aged and gendered dimension to this discussion on tender sexuality. Significantly, he adds a colonial perspective to it too. It is mostly 'civilized', 'adult' 'men' who are unable to desire both sensually and tenderly. Freud's explanation of this split and the successive repression of tender sexuality is that the tender current of these 'civilized', 'adult' 'males' remains cathected and therefore infected with the incestuous maternal object. Their adult sexuality would be ruled by impotence, without the necessary splitting of and repression of their tender sexuality.

Put differently, Freud reinforces tender sexuality as a taboo or repressed dimension of majoritarian, phallic and colonial sexuality. He equally reinforces tender sexuality's feminine, minoritarian and childlike dimension. It is in this sense that Freud sets up tenderness as an ideal candidate for a becoming-woman, becoming-minoritarian and becoming-child.

Let me conclude this section on Freud with the observation that at its onset, psychoanalysis's theory of sexuality is built upon a radical split between tenderness and sensuality. Moreover, its understanding of 'normal' – phallic and colonial – adult sexuality comes at the price of the repression of a tender sexuality.<sup>9</sup> This means that Freud's work would be unable to account for any of the scenes of adult erotic intimacy sketched in the songs and videos of Björk's *Vespertine* in any positive – let alone valuable and desirable – way.

It is in this light that Björk's choice to centre her art around post-coital musings and delaying desire is so radical. Her art refuses to obey the split between tenderness and sensuality, and hence radically refuses to obey this Freudian teleological account of adult sexuality. Björk poetically illustrates and therefore valorises and sets free this taboo on tender sexuality, this non-teleological dimension of sexuality which Freud could only dismiss as a regressive symptom of a neurotic and frigid desire.

Later in this paper I will claim that Björk's artistry is able to break free from this binary split between the tender and the sensual. She escapes and therefore negates this dichotomy so fundamental to Freud's work, and in doing so carves out a space for a coming together of tenderness and sensuality. Carving out a space for a minoritarian sexuality, which otherwise becomes repressed by majoritarian ideologies, is exactly what scholars like José Muñoz have called queer (1999). And yet, tenderness has remained significantly unexplored by queer theory.

### III. The Unrecognised Queer Potential of Erotic Tenderness

Ever since Gail Rubin's 'The Traffic of Women' (1975) and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) unearthed psychoanalysis's heteronormative definition of desire, queer theory has devoted much attention to queering psychoanalysis, but tender sexuality has not yet appeared on these critical agendas. While the word 'tenderness' does appear in the works of a substantial amount of queer authors (Anzaldúa 1987; Bersani 1987; Berlant and Edelman 2013; Huffer 2013; Berlant 2013, 2022; Nelson 2016), a substantial analysis of the term is lacking. Freud's own lack of clarity surrounding the phenomenon of tenderness might contribute to this fact. Nonetheless, tenderness seems to have a critical potential to add yet another angle to those theorists who seek ways out of a heteronormative, teleological, phallic and colonial account of sexual desire.



Let's take a closer look at three queer authors who mention tenderness: Anzaldúa, Bersani and Berlant. The first leaves the concept underdeveloped, the second critiques it as anti-queer, and the latter seems to confuse tenderness with sensuality. The first author is proto-queer theorist Gloria Anzaldúa who, in her *Borderlands/La Frontera*, calls for the cultivation of 'tenderness' as a valuable trait in culture to counter oppressive traditions and fallacious binaries of western thought (1987: 20). Additionally, she identifies 'tender men' as the only form of masculinity that does not reinforce misogyny and racism (84). Despite the fact that she is inspired by a psychoanalytic framework, she does not situate this concept of tenderness in Freud's psychoanalytic oeuvre, let alone define it as sexual or minor sexuality. Yet, I consider her faith in tenderness as an incitement for my own conviction that a closer look at this underdeveloped Freudian concept might unlock a queer potential.

The second queer author mentioning tenderness considers tenderness fundamentally anti-queer. Leo Bersani introduces a rereading of Freud's *Three Essays* as a generative tool for queer theory. 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', he asks in his eponymous article, and his answer is, yes (1987). The rectum, but also the mouth and the vagina, all penetrable orifices, have the potential to be graves in which 'the masculine ideal (an ideal shared – differently – by men *and* women) of proud subjectivity is buried' (1987: 222). And it is in this self-shattering capacity of sexuality that, for Bersani, a queer future lies.

When it comes to tenderness, however, Bersani is merciless. He identifies tenderness as one of the many power-tools of homophobia and misogyny. His analysis goes as follows: instead of embracing and celebrating the self-shattering nature of sexuality, a phallogentric culture introduces all kinds of mechanisms to save the sacrosanct self from falling apart (222). One of these mechanisms is what Bersani calls the 'pastoral impulse', an (implicit or explicit) agreement of 'what sex should be: a wholesome sexuality, a natural and healthy conjunction between sex, tenderness and love' (215, 221). This idealisation, Bersani claims, in 'the name of chimerically nonviolent ideals of tenderness and nurturing', lays down the logic behind more brutality, especially against homosexual and feminine sexuality, since it feeds into the phallogentric lie of sex as self-hyperbolic, thereby denying sexualities' self-erasing side and feeding into a splitting between passive and active sexuality, which he identifies as the origins of misogyny and homophobia (222).<sup>10</sup>

This analysis by Bersani fails to see that his own concept of the pastoral impulse – which critiques the wish to unite the seemingly distinct

phenomena of sex, love and tenderness—is unable to accommodate Freud's understanding of *tenderness as sexual*. In other words, Bersani's sexual framework is, like Freud's framework of adult sexuality, itself based upon the radical split between tenderness and sensuality. He therefore repeats this dichotomy fundamental for Freud's teleological and genital account of adult sexuality.

To put it differently, like Freud, Bersani would only be able to understand the search for adult erotic tenderness as something negative. For Freud it was hysteric, perverse or frigid, where for Bersani it is parochial and always already in function of a hyperbolic self. In doing so, Bersani is unable to recognise the queer potential of Freud's notion of sexual tenderness. Moreover, his analysis would be unable to read Björk's art as queer.

Thirdly, I'd like to take a quick look at queer and affect theorist Lauren Berlant's lecture 'Sex in the Event of Happiness' (2019) and eponymous book chapter in *On the Inconvenience of Other People* (2022). In both the talk and book chapter she formulates a similar argument to mine: that there lies a critical queer political potential in moments of peculiar sexual intimacy. Multiple times, she refers to these moments as 'tender', yet she does not situate this concept in Freud's oeuvre. Instead, she focuses on the joke, the topic of another of Freud's books that saw the light of day in 1905 (1960). However, according to Freud the joke follows the teleologic economy of *sensual* desire. Again, due to Freud's under-recognised work on tenderness and the split between sensuality and tenderness, this important distinction remains absent in Berlant's work. As explanation for critical theory's neglect of sexual intimacy as a blind spot for critical theory, she points a finger at the current 'erotophobic climate' (2019, 2022). I would agree and add my analysis of a deep-rooted 'taboo on adult erotic tenderness' at the foundation of western notions of sex, subjectivity and sociality (Koziej 2019).

Hence, where Bersani's analysis excludes the possibility that a tender sexuality has its own self-erasing aspects too, I claim that Björk's art illustrates that sexual tenderness is equally self-erasing, yet in a different—because not antisocial—way. I will emphasise how Björk's artistry does not depict a self-hyperbolic tenderness, but rather a tenderness which results in desubjectification. Yet, this kind of subjectification results in a particular kind of tender sociality, made possible by this desubjectification.<sup>11</sup> In order to make these claims, my analysis needs the theoretical framework of D&G and Muñoz.

#### IV. Björk–Deleuze and Guattari–Freud, a Line of Flight Named Tenderness

Deleuze's relationship to psychoanalysis can, at the very least, be called tumultuous. He engaged with it extensively at the start of his intellectual career, in order to finally radically critique it at the end of it, significantly in his works with Guattari. My own work shares many of D&G's deep disappointments with psychoanalysis, and mostly its hegemonisation of Oedipal and genital desire.<sup>12</sup> I especially disagree with psychoanalysis's recurrent trouble in recognising symptom-formations in any positive vein as lines of flight out of these one-dimensional ways of life, love and desire.

This paper follows the thinking of those philosopher-psychoanalysts like Tomas Geyskens and Leen De Bolle, who walk the complicated line between Deleuze and psychoanalysis. De Bolle argues that the conjunction Freud–Deleuze is not a polemic critique, requiring one to pick sides, but rather a productive line of flight, a 'stammer', allowing both sides of the conjunction to shoot roots and grow (De Bolle 2010: 9). Geyskens's work takes a closer look at Deleuze's analyses of masochism and hysteria and argues that the psychoanalytic clinic should learn from Deleuze's positive redefinitions of both masochism and hysteria (Geyskens 2010a, 2010b; Deleuze 1987, 2004; Deleuze and Guattari 2004). Geyskens applauds Deleuze's emphasis on art and his insight that what psychoanalysis can only deem as negative symptoms are sometimes actually lines of flight out of repressive sexual ideologies, which take form through works of art. On the one hand, Deleuze offers a rethinking of masochism through the literary work of Sacher-Masoch. Geyskens emphasises Deleuze's positive understanding of masochism as a kind of sexuality that's able to liberate itself from a genital and phallic sexual framework, while at the same time carving out a space for a non-phallic masculinity (Geyskens 2010a). On the other hand, he applauds Deleuze's rereading of hysteria in an equally positive vein. Through the analysis of Bacon's paintings as hysteric, Deleuze is able to free hysteria, emancipating it as an expression or non-discursive speech of the body as meat (Geyskens 2010b).

What Geyskens does not mention, however, is that it is tenderness which brings together hysteria and masochism. Both are, in Freud's framework, expressions of tender sexuality and are therefore pathological. As examined above, Freud's *Three Essays* considers a search for tender sexuality in adulthood to be a symptom of hysteria. Furthermore, in his 1919 text 'A Child is Being Beaten', Freud brings

masochism back to a need for tender sexuality from one's parent (Freud 1955: 186).<sup>13</sup>

Although D&G did not explicitly write about tender sexuality either, this article follows their logic. Exactly as Deleuze redefined masochism and hysteria in a positive vein through the analysis of masochistic and hysteric works of art, I argue that a similar move is required to free tenderness from a phallic and genital psychoanalytic framework. I have picked the work of Björk as an artistic example of someone whose work is able to render a positive approach to tender sexuality. I claim that it is through her sonorous and visual art that she is able to redefine tender sexuality as valuable. In other words, Björk visually and sonorously carves out a space outside of the phallic order. Here, sexuality can finally be both sensual *and* tender. I will establish this argument especially with the help of the concepts D&G offer us in their *A Thousand Plateaus* (2004).<sup>14</sup>

Let us first turn our attention to Björk's music video *Pagan Poetry*. This music video opens with pearls sliding down a piece of yarn, shortly followed by a close-up of a sperm-shot. While in Freud's account of adult sexuality sexuality needs to end in the culmination of 'end-pleasure' through ejaculating sperm, Björk's sexuality only *begins* when phallic sexuality deems all pleasure over (Freud 1973: 208–10). Where Freud closes all doors to any sexual action after sperm is spilled, Björk's song is woven and constructed through this sperm. While in Freud's teleological and genital account, sperm is abjected wastefulness after 'the real deal' is over, this abjected sperm becomes reterritorialised as the *stuff* of Björk's performance. Or put differently, Björk valorises what is impossible to valorise in Freud's phallic framework. Yet, one could ask, is it not a strange choice to use sperm, a masculine signifier par excellence, to de-phallicise this framework?

Here, we have to turn to feminist theory, in order to show the critical potential of Björk's work. In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz repeats Irigaray's question: 'Why does [...] psychoanalytic theory censor the fluid, the seminal?' (Grosz 1994: 199). Grosz explains that psychoanalysis purposely neglects to attribute masculinity with the connotations that are inherent in sperm: fluidity, seepage, uncontrollability and formlessness. A phallic framework, like that of psychoanalysis, is therefore able to reduce masculinity to the solid, and establishes boundaries which congeal and hence phallicise masculinity, while attributing instability, un-form and affective instability merely to femininity (199). Hence, through the elaboration of this fluid and formless sperm Björk is able to free her work from a phallic framework.

Or, in the words of D&G, we can claim that Björk is able to use sperm as a line of flight outside of the phallic binary-machine of gender.

Throughout *Vespertine*, a reterritorialisation of masculinity as tender, vulnerable and soft takes place. Shown in my analysis of Freud, these categories are usually allotted to the infantile and feminine. Yet, in *Cocoon*, Björk describes her man as a ‘sensitive’ ‘boy’, ‘caressed and cradled in her bosom’ (2001). This becomes extra-emphasised by the lullaby character of the song, rendered through Björk’s whisper singing and the strong presence of music-box-like sounds. This lullaby is not directed to a child, however, but instead to a grown-up lover. In D&G’s words, we can say that through her sonorous poetry, Björk deterritorialises masculinity through a becoming-child and a becoming-woman. The same counts for *Hidden Place*, where she describes her man as ‘fragile’ (2001). Yet, in Björk’s non-phallic universe, sensitive and fragile do not mean weak. She sings: ‘He is the beautifullest, fragilest, still strong, dark and divine’ (2001). Through her art, Björk is able to set masculinity free from the rigid binary-machine of weak/fragile/sensitive versus strong, and it is in this sense that we should understand her rendition of masculinity as a becoming-woman, becoming-fluid, a becoming-tender. Would this come close to Anzaldúa’s call for more ‘tender men’ (1987: 84)?

It has to be emphasised that although Björk refers to a fragile and sensitive masculinity, and although she muses about caressing and cradling in a lullaby-like style, these expressions do not deny that this is a song about *sexual* love. This is illustrated by lyrics like ‘he slides inside, half-awake, half-asleep’ in *Cocoon*, or the explicit sexual scenes portrayed in the *Pagan Poetry* video (2001). It is especially here that the signifier ‘tender *sexuality*’ or ‘*erotic* tenderness’ are most appropriate. Where Björk uses sperm as a line of flight outside of the phallic binary-machine of gender, it equally functions as a line of flight outside of the phallic economy of desire as merely genital and reproductive. Starting with the sperm-shot, Björk’s sexuality only *begins* when phallic sexuality deems all pleasure over. Her song, like her sexuality, unfold themselves as post-coital – but therefore not post-sexual – musings.

Spilled sperm, often shied away from as waste, becomes the vehicle of this post-phallic, post-coital, post-reproductive sexuality. In other words, Björk’s lyrics and visuals carve out a space in which sexual aftercare can finally become valued. In sum, throughout *Vespertine*, a reterritorialisation of masculinity as tender, vulnerable and soft takes place, but this goes hand in hand with a reterritorialisation of sexual desire as tender. Put differently, Björk’s desire does not follow

the hegemonic phallic, reproductive, genital economy of desire Freud referred to as 'sensual'. Björk depicts a kind of desire that is both sensual *and* tender. Hence, Björk's rendition of sexuality radically parts ways with Freud's phallic claim that when tenderness and sensuality come together this can only be understood in a negative vein. Instead, Björk defies the taboo on adult erotic tenderness and offers us a pre-coital, coital and post-coital musing of a sexual intimacy that vacillates between sweet caresses and penetration, and none is hierarchically more valuable than another.

I now turn to performance art and queer theorist Muñoz, in order to frame Björk's becoming-tender as queer.<sup>15</sup> In *Disidentifications*, Muñoz takes a closer look at performance artists who are able to disidentify with hegemonic ideologies (1999). Through the over-the-top and subversive use of symbols and codes that make up majoritarian scripts, their disidentifying performances rewrite anti-queer hegemonic scripts from within, carving out a space for a counter-public in which minoritarian identities and sexuality are finally able to thrive (31).

In these words, I propose that Björk's songs are examples of queer disidentifying performances.<sup>16</sup> Her work is effective, especially because it uses sperm—a phallic signifier par excellence—in an over-the-top way. Sperm becomes the *stuff* of her performance, but is used to do the opposite of what a phallic signifier is 'supposed' to do: Björk's sperm/pearls tenderise instead of phallicise. Doing so, she is able to effectively bring attention to the problematic phallic ideologies that construct hegemonic accounts of both sexuality and masculinity. Similarly, it is through this performance that she both deterritorialises phallic sexuality and masculinity and reterritorialises them as tender. In doing so, her art rewrites the phallic script from within, carving out a queer space for this minoritarian tender sexuality deemed impossible and invaluable in psychoanalytic theories on sexual desire.

Something curious happens to the sperm/pearl trope in *Cocoon*. In the last line of this song, the sperm/pearl trope returns: '[a] train of pearls cabin by cabin, is shot precisely across an ocean, from the mouth of a girl like me, to a boy' (2001). Sperm/pearl here no longer refers to masculinity. First of all, it is the woman who ejaculates, yet, this is not a mere reversal of the gendered binary-machine, opting for a phallic femininity. Sperm here symbolises the *bridge* which connects both lovers. And yet, calling them *two* lovers would not be accurate neither. These lovers have both dissolved into each other, into an undifferentiated merger or pure intensity and un-form.

Where I first emphasised the becoming-woman and becoming-child aspects of Björk's performance, I will now emphasise the becoming-BwO (body without organs) and desubjectifying aspects of her art. In the video *Pagan Poetry*, we see this poetically illustrated in the opening scenes when the sperm-shot slowly dissolves into formless moving lines. As I explained before, these are hyper-abstractions of Björk and her lover actively involved in explicit sexual acts of oral sex (Rock 2002). In this sexual embrace these lovers stop existing as two phallic entities, rigidly divorced from each other. Instead, we see a formlessness intensely moving and jerking on the rhythm of the music. In this tender sexuality, both lovers have dissolved into pure intensity, or, to say it in the words of D&G, they became formless bodies without organs on which now pure intensities flow (2014: 149–66).

This emphasis on a becoming-tender as radically non-subjective, but instead an intense merger of non-differentiable bodies, shows that Björk's rendition of tender sexuality is not parochial, in the Bersanian sense of the word. Björk's tenderness is not a naive asexual depiction of love, and it certainly does not perpetuate a definition of proud, wholesome subjectivity. Instead, it carves out a space for a rethinking of the subject as fluid and tender.<sup>17</sup> Yet, I cannot emphasise enough how this tender sexual desubjectification – unlike Bersani's self-scattering sexuality – results in a kind of tender sociality or relationality, be it a radically desubjective one. Why not coin this relationship between de-subjects a tender inter-desubjectivity? Could we maybe understand this strange tender sociality as utopian, in Muñoz's complex sense of 'an anti-antiutopianism [...] not about a merely affirmative or positive investment in utopia' (Muñoz et al. 2006: 826)?

I propose in this vein that Björk's art is able to depict a kind of tenderness and intimacy that is both sweet, poetic and meaningful, without losing the violent and self-scattering dimensions of sexuality Bersani emphasises. In other words, I claim that Björk shows how tenderness can be both sweet and self-demolishing at the same time. A self – at least in the sense of a phallic, rigid and bounded self – needs to become tenderised in order to form an undifferentiated merger with another 'self'. As with the tenderising of meat, there is a violence inherent in the making-soft. It is a tenderness in this literal sense of the word. Yet, D&G warn us that such a desire is a hard-to-achieve balancing act, and certain preconditions have to be in place for it to succeed.

In D&G's words, we can say that creating a desiring-machine, a body without organs on which intensities flow, happens in two stages. First one has to *make* oneself into a BwO, one has to 'sufficiently dismantle

the self', like the careful preparations undertaken by the masochist and his/her mistress. But secondly, one has to make sure that this BwO does not become emptied out, but instead is filled with intensities (2004: 151,152,156).

This two-step plan towards desire is illustrated by Björk in *Pagan Poetry*. Here we see Björk sewing the pearls/sperm into her skin. This, she explains, symbolises a woman getting ready for her lover, sewing herself into her wedding dress (Rock 2002). These piercing scenes culminate in the closing scene where six metal rings penetrate Björk's bloody back, strung together by a string of pearls and forming a corset-like look. When asked about this, Björk explains that these are sado-masochism (SM) references, yet she clarifies that it is not a song about SM, but about the love of a woman for her man (Rock 2002). How are we to understand this response?

As emphasised earlier, Geyskens explains how Deleuze rectified Freud's misunderstandings regarding masochism. Deleuze emancipates masochism and offers a positive definition of masochism as a non-genital kind of sexuality. 'Masochism is not a sublimation or a desexualisation, but an internal transformation of sexuality. Sexuality is degenitalized in favor of another sexuality' (Geyskens 2010a: 112). In other words, masochism is not a symptom, but a line of flight out of a hegemonic, genital and phallic definition of desire, able to create a kind of sexuality other than the one usually allowed. In another of Bersani's works, *Intimacies* (2008), co-written with Adam Phillips, he make a similar argument, referring to masochism as a kind of queer intimacy, which radically rethinks sexuality and love.

Yet, D&G warn about how the masochist courts the ever present danger of emptying out the BwO, instead of filling it (2004: 152). This is due to the cold and cruel nature of the intensity their sexuality desires, in which the ideal of a cold and severe mother/mistress beats the phallus out of the masochist's sexuality (Deleuze 1987; Geyskens 2010a). This is a *kind* of masochism that goes too far, maybe the kind we could understand in the sense of Bersani's antisocial scattered self.

Yet, this is not the nature of the intimacy and sexuality Björk's art depicts. Björk's lover is tender, warm and intimate. In SM culture, a technique used to prevent this emptying out is aftercare: acts of care, like cleaning and caressing, follow the masochist's self-loss or sub-space (Weiss 2011). Aftercare is hence a crucial dimension of this sexuality, but aftercare both escapes and refuses mere reproductive, phallic and genital sexual apparatuses, since it happens after the assumed end-goal has been reached. Freud, as emphasised before, links masochism to a search for



tender sexuality, but due to his taboo on adult erotic tenderness he is unable to value the tender dimension of masochism and is only able to pathologise it (1955a).

Björk's songs, I suggest, are musings of such aftercare, where the tender, careful tending of one lover to the other allows these lovers to desubjectify, but equally prevents them from emptying out completely. I suggest we understand Björk's visual SM references in *Pagan Poetry*, and her emphasis to understand them as love, in this complex sense. After all, this music video *starts* with a cum-shot, and just like in scenes of aftercare, tending to the spilled fluids becomes the vehicle of shared tenderness.

These abject-like fluids are not limited to *Pagan Poetry*, but equally appear in the video *Hidden Place*. Here we see an extreme close-up of Björk's face. The camera moves from one feature of her face onto another. At one moment the camera seems to playfully lose itself in her hair. It is almost as if we ourselves are having a pillow-talk moment with her, in which we are invited to lose ourselves in Björk's hair, orifices and skin-cracks. It echoes the mood of the song, where she sings: 'Can I hide there too, hide in the hair of him, secretalest, sanctuary' (2001)? As D&G claim at the end of *A Thousand Plateaus*, the desire of the BwO takes place in close vision-haptic space (2004: 493). This is a precarious place, always ready to collapse into striated space. Yet it is here that form can dissolve in un-form and pure intensity, and faces become dismantled into black holes (171).

In a similar vein, *Hidden Place* emphasises the peculiar topology of this minor tender sexuality. Only in a carefully carved-out space can one take a line of flight away from phallic subjectivity, masculinity, sexuality and sociality. I have illustrated how Björk's art tenderises sexuality visually, through the use of phallic, fluid and aftercare visuals. In what's next, I will look at the sonic material that allows her to move away from the phallic taboo on erotic tenderness. Or, put differently, I will take a closer look at some of the aspects in which Björk's art carves out a sonorous space for erotic tenderness.

In the documentary *Minuscule* (2003), Björk gives us insights into the making of *Vespertine*. She explains how the songs are populated with tiny 'microbeats' which Björk and her collaborator Magnus collected around the house:

You would have the tiniest beat in the world, and you couldn't stop there. You had to sort of make a microcosmos of 30 or 40 beats, interacting. So I started collecting all noises that were tiny, and literally we had a library.

I was working with programmers, and we would just basically gather together lots of lots of sounds and found out that sort of the key we were looking for, was taking something very very tiny, and magnifying it to big and it sort of gave you a sensation that you've been told a secret, the same way as if when you see a picture of a cell in the body, magnified very big. Yeah, you get this feeling that you are being trusted for some inside information and I guess this whole album is very much like this. (2003)

There is indeed a warmth and intimate timbre that characterises these beats. Music critic for the *Guardian* Michael Cragg poignantly describes how the beats on *Cocoon* 'sound like fingertips on skin', able to sonically capture 'the album's sense of heavy-lidded, post-coital hibernation' (Cragg 2014).

In 'Abstract Time and Affective Perception in the Sonic Work of Art' (2014), sonic theorist Eleni Ikoniadou elaborates on D&G to argue how the digital sound 'artist stretches our understanding of auditory perception to include barely perceptible, transient microsonic events, occurring too quickly to be grasped by "normal" timescales and thresholds and perception' (2014: 144). Digital manipulations of sound, she writes, are able to capture 'trans-subjective' and shared 'threshold experiences' like the interface of self and other, experiences which 'extend bodies beyond themselves' (146), experiences she describes as occurring outside of 'clock-time' (151).

It is in a similar sense, I propose, that Björk's self-proclaimed 'microcosmos' of microbeats sonifies the rare tender erotics between non-phallic, desubjective—or in the words of Ikoniadou, 'trans-subjective'—tender lovers, resulting in scenes of undifferentiated merger (Gestsdóttir 2003). Not only are these tender moments hard to experience due to the general taboo on erotic tenderness and hence their minoritarian position; they are similarly hard to capture due to their transient quality beyond striated binary distinctions like self–other, masculine–feminine, adult–child and love–desire. Like the title of the album *Vespertine* itself indicates, these tender moments move in an in-between space, vacillating between night and day, self and other and so on.

Through her microbeats, Björk seems to suggest that an attention for tender sexuality requires a hyper-focusing, a zooming in on these tiny, hardly perceptible fleeting moments. As emphasised before, tenderness takes place in a peculiar space, which D&G help us indicate as 'close vision-haptic space' or 'smooth space' (2004: 493). Here, they insist, 'the eye itself has haptic, nonoptical functions: no line separates' (494). In other words, eyes touch, they caress. And when they do, self and other

merge. Think of the crepuscular qualities of pillow-talk, those stolen moments between night and day, where time seems to slow down, and lovers lie so close to each other their faces seem deformed. No one else can come *this* close, because here looking becomes caressing. This is the space of un-form, of pure intensities, BwOs and desiring machines.

It is the 'cosmic artist', D&G claim, who turns her attention to the microscopic to render visible non-visual forces, and render sonorous non-sonorous forces (337, 342–3). The becoming-molecular move of Björk is apparent in her decision to use microbeats. Yet another essential part of the technique of this cosmic artist, D&G claim, is a childlike sobriety (344). Björk's childlike characteristics are apparent throughout her whole art. One perceives it visually in the unapologetic playfulness of her music videos,<sup>18</sup> or sonically in the seemingly childlike way in which she talks and explains her music process in interviews. We find a good example of this in the documentary *Minuscule*. Here we are introduced to sound-duo Magnus, who were asked by Björk to accompany her on her live tour in order to live recreate, record and play domestic microbeats on stage with her. This simultaneously playful and ingenious idea results, for example, in one musician shaving the other, while recording it, in order to use it seconds later as a beat to accompany Björk's singing. It is through this sonification of domestic microsounds that this cosmic artist becomes 'artisan', in a very hands-on way, creating her own 'homemade', microscopic and original symphony to accompany her odes to tenderness (345).

Finally, another crucial and peculiar music instrument in this *Vespertine* symphony is a custom-made music box, yet another example of the childlike sobriety of Björk's vision. But again, what could easily be misunderstood as childlike or light-hearted melodies become quickly juxtaposed with dark, deep and penetrating beats—for example, at the start of *Pagan Poetry*. Again, it is through unapologetic sonic vacillations like this one that Björk's cosmic art is able to sonically carve out a space in which a cosmic sexuality of the future becomes audible: a sexuality which moves between sensual and tender, soft and hard, love and desire—denying and therefore undoing these binaries at the foundation of hegemonic phallic notions of sexuality.

## V. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued how the music and music videos in Björk's album *Vespertine* sonically and visually carve out a space for erotic tenderness. I have suggested that her emancipation of tender

sexuality should be recognised as a queering of the hegemonic phallic sexual script. Since the onset of psychoanalysis, tender acts have fallen outside of the sexual apparatus. Queer theorists have critiqued the subordination of all kinds of minor sexualities, yet tenderness's critical queer potential has remained unrecognised. Freud emphasised tenderness's long-standing connotations of effeminate, infantile and unmasculine, and added hysteric, perverse and uncivilised to the list. I argued that Björk uses these negative connotations to her advantage, and turns them – in perfect Deleuzo-Guattarian style – into positive lines of flight outside of the hegemonic phallic sexual framework.

I highlighted how it is exactly through a becoming-woman and a becoming-child that Björk emancipates and values non-reproductive tender moments like pillow-talk or aftercare as sexual. She does this visually through the disidentifying use of sperm, whose liquid qualities allow her to subvert this phallic signifier from within. She shows that *if* there is a masculinity present in these moments of sexual tenderness, then this is a non-phallic kind of masculinity, more of the nature of a 'boy'. Yet, this childlike-ness is still explicitly sexual, be it of a non-phallic, because non-genital and non-reproductive, nature. Other waste-like extra-reproductive liquids, like snot and tears, are utilised by Björk to render subjects into desubjective BwOs. SM references are used to illustrate this non-parochial side of tenderness, yet they are unproblematically juxtaposed with warm and care-like visuals which reassure that these BwOs remain full, resulting in an inter-desubjective kind of sociality.

Sonically, Björk's music is populated with microbeats, which represent the becoming-molecular dimension of her artistry. Deploying a childlike, close-vision, sober and hands-on approach to the creation of digital microbeats, Björk proves herself to be a 'cosmic artist' in D&G's sense of the word – an artist who is able to render visible, yet invisible powers. One of these invisible powers is the ideological taboo on adult erotic tenderness, at the foundation of western phallic and reproductive notions of sexuality – but equally, the peculiar crepuscular features of tender erotic moments, with their in-between status, in between night and day, self and other, feminine and masculine, child and grown-up.

It is especially for its inherently non-phallic, non-reproductive, fluid, in-between and sexual nature that tenderness offers itself as an ideal queer figure, refusing to congeal itself in stratified identities, categories or sexualities. And it is through such a visually and sonically becoming-tender, I suggest, that Björk's cosmic art is able to open a cosmos towards a new and more queer sexual and tender future.

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## Notes

1. In 'Thirty-six Thousand Forms of Love: The Queering of Deleuze and Guattari', Verena Conley emphasises the dictionary definition of queer, 'To deviate from expecting norms, to make strange', and elaborates Deleuze and Guattari's work on desire as queer, in the sense that it enables sexuality and desire to break free from hegemonic binary-machines, setting free otherwise impossible forms of love. It is in this vein that my article elaborates Björk's work as queer, as it enables a tender sexuality, otherwise impossible in a genital and phallic hegemonic sexual frame (Conley 2009).
2. This article contributes to authors like Chrysanthi Nigianni, Merl Storr and Frida Beckman, who see Deleuze and Guattari as contributors to queer theory (Nigianni and Storr 2009; Beckman 2011).
3. 'This intensive way of reading, in contact with what's outside the book, as a flow meeting other flows, one machine among others, as a series of experiments for each reader in the midst of events that have nothing to do with books, as tearing the book into pieces, getting it to interact with other things, absolutely anything ... is reading with love' (Deleuze 1997: 8–9).
4. 'Deleuze conceives of the problematic as an aspect of being itself, which constantly poses its problems and questions. The problematic concerns all the great questions of life and death, love and hate pleasure and pain, sexual difference, and so on. According to Deleuze these are questions that cannot be reduced to oppositions or dialectic structures. The problematic consists of all the differences, the embryonic and generative elements, the intentions of desire and unconscious wishes that install themselves in between two terms of the opposition. Instead of the clear and distinct position of oppositional terms, the problematic is populated by a variety of unconscious forces and constellation. It produces a phantasmagoria of figures and forms that replace the dualist representations and never refers to an ultimate solution or representation' (De Bolle 2010: 11).
5. In the original German text, Freud uses the word *Zärtlichkeit* to refer to the phenomena in which I am interested. Strachey translates this term as 'affection', and according to the Oxford Dictionary this is technically a correct translation, but 'tenderness' would be an even better representation of the extensive and underlying meaning of the word *Zärtlichkeit*. It includes the word *Zart* which means 'soft, delicate, fragile, weak' and even 'youthful, effeminate and womanish' (Scholze-Stubenrecht and Sykes 1999). All these connotations are closer to the English word 'tenderness' than 'affection'. 'Tenderness' also refers to 'fragile, breakable, vulnerable', connotations that 'affectionate' does

not have (Klein 1971). Additionally, the German word *Zuneigung* would be a more accurate way to translate the English 'affection'; and *Zuneigung* does not appear even once in Freud's *Three Essays* (Koziej 2019). Additionally, due to tenderness's connotations of infantile and feminine, it already contains traces of D&G's concepts of becoming-child and becoming-woman.

6. 'The connection between fore-pleasure and infantile sexual life is however, made clearer by the pathogenic part which it can come to play. The attainment of the normal sexual aim can clearly be endangered by the mechanism in which fore-pleasure is involved. This danger arises if at any point in the preparatory sexual processes the fore-pleasure turns out to be too great and the element of tension too small. [...] Such is in fact the mechanisms of many perversions, which consist in a lingering over the preparatory act of the sexual process' (Freud 1973: 211).
7. For a more elaborate analysis of Freud's taboo on adult erotic tenderness, see my article 'Towards a Tender Sexuality: From Freud's implicit Taboo on Adult Erotic Tenderness, to the Unexplored Tender Critical Potential of Mitchell and Perel's Clinical Practice', in *Psychoanalytic Psychology* (2019).
8. See note 5 above.
9. I would also argue that tender sexuality is a non-Oedipal account of desire. Elaborating this deserves a paper of its own, and exceeds the scope of this paper.
10. 'Our culture lies about sexuality. As if in secret agreement with the value that support misogynist images of female sexuality, women call for a permanent closing of the thighs in the name of chimerically nonviolent ideals of tenderness and nurturing' (Bersani 1987: 222).
11. Berlant too points at the specific sociality made possible through intimate sexuality's rendering non-sovereign of its subjects. She too seems to emphasise that this is not a parochial kind of sexual intimacy, but one that moves to the discomfort of unlearning and disorganisation of familiar forms of being, loving and relating (2019).
12. However, a decline is happening, especially with the move to relational psychoanalysis and its focus on the long-neglected pre-Oedipal phase. My work aims to add a political dimension to this relational turn. In order to do so, I argue that a critical return to Freud's original concept and repression of tenderness is necessary (Koziej 2019).
13. 'The affections of the little girl are fixed on her father, who has probably done all he could to win her love, and in this way has sown the seeds of an attitude of hatred and rivalry towards her mother. This attitude exists side by side with a current of affectionate [tender] dependence on her, and as years go on it may be destined to come into consciousness more and more clearly and forcibly, or else to give an impetus to an excessive reaction of devotion to her' (1919: 186, translation modified). As a reminder, I have not followed Strachey's choice to translate *Zärtlichkeit* into 'affectionate'; instead this paper opts for the word 'tender'. See note 5 above.
14. A word on terminology is necessary. The word choice 'tenderness' was carefully made. The etymological roots of tenderness lie in the Indo-European *-ten-, -tan-*, to stretch and be stretched (Onions 1966). It shares this root with the words 'intensity' and 'tantra', two concepts D&G use to describe their new, non-Oedipal understanding of desire. For example, in *A Thousand Plateaus* they define the BwO (body without organs) as a 'tantric egg' which 'can be occupied, populated only by intensities' (2004: 153). Another etymological affiliation with tenderness is 'tendency', the concept Conguillhem preferred above instinct. Conguillhem was Deleuze's teacher, on whose work he later based his first analyses of desire and love (Kerslake 2010).

15. Like De Bolle and Geyskens, Muñoz too opts for a rereading of psychoanalysis through Deleuze and Guattari, and the field of affect theory that was inspired by the latter (Muñoz 2009).
16. It is important to add that Muñoz's work focuses on the disidentifying world-making performance practices of queers of colour. Björk is of course not an artist of colour. I am therefore in no way proposing that her work attributes to a queer of colour critique per se. However, as I noted before, Freud's 1912 text on the prevalence of 'universal' debasement in the sphere of love shows how the taboo on adult erotic tenderness is implicitly and complexly interwoven in the colonial binary between civilised and uncivilised sexuality (1957: 185). Due to the restricted space of this paper, I am limiting my scope the queer-potential of Björk's art as a minor tender erotics. My future work will look deeper into how the taboo on tender sexuality lies at the foundation of colonial sex, subject and sociality formations.
17. Significantly, *Cocoon* starts with a multiplicity of Björks. Björk makes clear she moves away from individuality towards multiplicity. Because of a lack of space, I will not further elaborate on this.
18. Without exception, playfulness appears in every one of the three music videos. In *Hidden Place* she lets her tongue play with the abject-like fluid coming out of her nose. In *Pagan Poetry* she plays with the necklaces around her neck. And finally, in *Cocoon* she plays a string game with the red threads streaming out of her nipples.

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### Non-Print Media/Discography

- Cocoon*, music video, directed by Eiko Ishioka/produced by Thomas Knak/performance by Björk. London: One Little Indian, 2001, available at <https://youtu.be/M1Wwbw2gCcA> (accessed 26 June 2018).
- Hidden Place*, music video, directed by Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin/co-directed by M/M Paris/produced by Björk/composed and performed by Björk. London: One Little Indian, 2001, available at <https://youtu.be/cpaK4CUhxJo> (accessed 26 June 2018).
- Minuscule*, DVD, directed by Ragnheidur Gestsdóttir, London: One Little Indian, 2003.
- Pagan Poetry*, music video, directed by Nick Knight/produced by Marius de Vries/composed and performed by Björk. London: One Little Indian, 2001, available at <https://youtu.be/LVHpBCjUu8M> (accessed 26 June 2018).
- Vespertine*, CD, directed by Björk, London: One Little Indian, 2001.

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