

In Condensation  
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by Miriam Stoney for Evelyn Plaschg

Let me paint a picture for you. We're sitting around a long, rectangular table with our notebooks and print-outs, a couple of books and a tablet – one bottle of wine in tow. We have come together to find out what sex is. Does it start with talking? *The point that Lacanian psychoanalysis makes is paradoxical: the activity is different, yet the satisfaction is exactly the same.* Talking is one thing, but the problem with reading together, I find, is that the text always seems to get in the way. In the discussion, ideas I once clutched in an embrace of understanding seem to evaporate. They are revealed as someone else's words, slipping through my grasp to form alliances with another. In the end, we have all been foreplayed by the text, and the question of satisfaction must turn away from the paper to consider the flesh of shared company.

The four-letter word I'm trying to avoid starts with a W and ends with a K. The more I think about it, the more convinced I am that everything is sex and yet everything is w\*\*k. That evening, my peers offered me a provisional replacement: *Sinnstiftung*, something like sense-making. Now, if we paint another, slightly different picture, one in which the substances are harder and the accessories more playful, is the *Sinn* so differently *gestiftet*? The hands that grapple with one another are toying with their function; one figure seems to carry the weight of another – the clenched buttocks and splayed chests trade corporeal energies between bodies. All of these motions have been played out and taken up as motifs, that once bore witness to the machinations of a clandestine, social encounter. Is this *Sinnstiftung* made to w\*\*k? Such questions might seem arbitrary, but I think about them when I look at Evelyn's pictures and when I read out loud an extract, like the following, without irony: *The non-relation is not a simple absence of relation, but refers to a constitutive curving or bias of the discursive space – the latter is "biased" by the missing element of the relation.*

Now, I'm not talking about real subsumption taking place in the blurring of lines between w\*\*k and what some might call "life." Rather, I ask myself what kinds of sense and sensuality are produced when we put our shared time into the service of artmaking as *Sinnstiftung*. When we take the very constitutive curving of the discursive space as the starting point of our artistic endeavours, the result is bound to be a distorted image of the other, the fragmented, split subject onto whom we project the best and worst. The Big Other in the background glows like a bright, bleeding celestial body. To picture them is to transpose them into a discursive space in which the impossibility of any relation is sealed. Yet picturing is also to give form, to create antagonisms and to adhere oneself to the scene in which we might all otherwise simply dissolve. The w\*\*k is a means of condensation: coming together to find out what sex is.

Citations are taken from *What is sex?* by Alenka Zupančič (MIT Press, 2017)

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