

MEN MEETING WOMEN, WOMEN MEETING MEN

1. “Once upon a time” men and women met with each other in structures and rules. From the onset it was clear who you were, being a woman, a man, who were suitable partners, how, ritually, you had to behave yourself, how to behave when things went wrong. How courtship was done, if there was any. It was clear how to behave with your husband, your wife, how with relatives, with neighbours, with strangers.

2. There are, of course, still rules, rituals, something like structures; How to behave when courting, on the marriage day. What does it mean that you are a girl, a woman, a boy, a man. What is done when you are a wife, a husband and so on. All these realities are still much deeper in us than we know. In the same time, out of many, often contradicting reasons, we do away with structures, rules and rituals. Probably by far the most important reason, more or less underlying all other reasons, is, that because of the disappearing transcendence (the reality “above us” us, whom or what we all obey) we all need to be gods, being the master over everything, life itself included, in order not to perish. In the same time, doing this because transcendence is disappearing, waning away, we again make transcendence more unreal.

Group work about this could be very important: What is structure and its meaning? Why were there “once” rules? What is the function of ritual? What is ritual doing for us? This is very much true for rituals, because they can be taught and learned. Rituals are very important to keep people together. They might be deciding when big decisions, with much unclarity around them, have to be taken, and in situations in which disagreement and conflict arise. It could, eg. Be very important to teach violence and abusing family’s rituals, which bring peace, dissolving havoc.

3. Nevertheless, structure, rules rituals, gender structures especially in this context are extremely important, are dwindling. That means in fact that differences and boundaries between women and men, boys and girls are destroyed. They are in many manners, and more and more, at the mercy of each other. Each has to fight, with everybody, in ever changing alliances, against everybody, to remain, to have a place in life.

4. Of course there are still “havens” in which people are safe. They still are safe. They still are in some families, in some circles of friends. They are remainders of old structure, rules and rituals. There real love and real freedom is known. It may grow in some relationships, old memories becoming alive again, with the help eventually of new meetings with love and freedom. Or it may come new in lives totally unexpected, because people meet love and freedom for the first time. In other people, in Jesus. But certainly this is not in public life, generally not outside of the house or narrow circle. They are islands in a big sea.

A very big question of course: How to help these islands to survive? What to do when new islands come into existence? How can we ourselves be and become such islands? A very big point and extremely important. Maybe our only hope, for us, for the next generation.

5. And generally, the fighting is going on, always new fights and always the same: they all have the form of rivalry, in model-rival and model-obstacle forms. The issue is

always: Who wins? Everything is used in the fight: Remains of old structure, used against women to put them down, they very often putting themselves down in the first place, physical strength, beauty or what looks like strategies of seduction, intellect, brutal power which needs not be physical caresses, morality a.s.o. Everything is good, is useful and used if the goal is reached to win. To be the god, the goddess.

6. There are certain forms of relationships, which, in this fighting, always come back. There are people who find a place in one of such forms, staying the rest of her/his life in it. Others are changing continually, with the same people or with other people. Probably there too are changes because of the changing, the further disintegration of culture, some forms appearing more often, others less. The most important forms might be:

6.1 The rivalry is, more or less, in equilibrium. Life is existing. Relationships in which this equilibrium is endangered are mistrusted and shunned ("I don't like her, him", which means: He, she might win). Steady relationships, marriages can go on in this manner (quite) a long time.

Or/and

6.2 There is an equilibrium with a very clear division of the power-roles: She has the power inside of the house, about domestical things, clothing, the young children: he has the power outside of the house, the world of work, of business, of politics. At least it looks like that. In fact it is mostly much more complicated, getting much more to the situation, described below, under 6.3. The reason of that is that this quite traditional division of power-roles is deeply endangered and disappearing because of many different changes, both link the position of the women and of the men.

Or

6.3 There is an equilibrium, one taking the one-up position, mostly but certainly not always the man, one taking the one down position, mostly but again certainly not always the women. The positions can incidentally change dramatically, but on the whole they are steady. In a sense the situation is quite paradoxical. The one-down position is, as such, too the position of the scapegoat of the relationship, with all the aspects of it: being a sufferer, being the bad one, the one who is always failing, and being the god, the goddess, the saviour, the adorable. The deeper this one-down position in the same time is the position of power (because of the scapegoat) very often the person in power cannot cope with the situation. They are the relationships in which violence is endemic.

This is an extremely complicated theme. Aspects of it are described in the papers about abused children and about violence in the family.

6.4 Another possibility: Always changing the partner, letting the incidental partner drop as soon as things become too dangerous, as the powerfight, the relationship settling down, becomes too complicated, provoking too many difficulties. Another one: Not daring to begin a partnership at all, either hetero or homo.

7. All (young) men meeting (young) women, women meeting men, are exposed to those possibilities and to other, much more complicated, because of the intertwining of the different possibilities. What makes the situation again more difficult and in the same

time eventually more predictable, even in some cases, maybe easier, is that we all are contaminated children. We were conceived, born, we grew up with parents living already in these circumstances. Often we are all too keen to imitate our mother, our father, because that is the human possibility we know. We try to be as they were, being in the same time very afraid of being so or, worse still, we try desperately not to imitate them and so more surely doing the same. And just because we are in this impossible situation we long back, with the whole of our being, to the safety of childhood, seeking back the idealized mother, father, landing nowhere or stranding everywhere.

8. So, old gender-distinctions disappearing or, out of which ideology or lack of ideology ever, being destroyed, structures dwindling, rituals thought as belonging to the past or seen as a nuisance, an obstacle to reach the goal as soon as possible, men and women, girls and boys very often cannot find a place where they really can be. They fly backward and forward, trying out all possibilities and impossibilities, are fascinated by and so afraid of each other, try to seduce in order to win and let themselves be seduced, in order to win via the losing. For the onlooker it is both chaos and fascinating. For the participants very often it is quite clearly the same. The outcome, both for us and for the next generation is, however interesting life might be, probably bleak.

9. Is there anything that could be done to change the cultural landscape? There is no way back. Trying to let people go the way back ends up in tyranny. Warning against this is generally no possibility either. It deepens the rivalry with the person who warns and so the fascination by the fame continues.

9.1 Certainly it is most important what people see around them and most of all for young people that is the case. So it is extremely important that people know the ways to love and trust and to find ways back to love and trust. That we find ways out of the hypocrisy in which we are living. This means learning what human love, human relationships really mean. What forgiveness means. Of course, there are many questions here: How to go further together? It might make sense to spend time on these questions.

9.2 I think it is very important that we mix up people: Older people, grown-up people, and younger people. To be together in groups, talking about these things, to be friendly together. I suppose generation-segregation in this case is dysfunctional.

9.3 In groups, residential and non-residential (and, if there is no other possibility, only consisting of people out of one age group there can be talked about and told about what relationship, respect, love means. About the wonder of being together, not threatening each other. About human meeting. All this can only be learnt in mimesis. This means that those responsible for the group are extremely important. They give space, freedom, to say with the others and so finding ourselves, without fears and desires. How are we, how can we become these leaders?

10. The paper “Knowing the other”, dd.8.11.90 is very relevant for this whole theme. The Old Testament uses for the “sleeping with each other”, for “copulating”, the verb “to know”. We only know in an existential sense, in a sense, which is important for our lives, by really meeting. It is an all-encompassing knowing, about life itself, about the other, about myself. For the Old Testament the being together in this manner is a sign of really meeting, really being together and really knowing in a very deep sense altogether. Of course, sleeping together does not automatically mean that we really know each other.

And we can know by meeting, very intimately, without that. And we can use the sleeping together in the feats of seduction or in the flight out of life and responsibility, without anything happening. Both can be very exciting and probably we are seeking very often just that excitement, the other hardly being seen and almost immediately forgotten. It is then a bout having, possessing, about metaphysical desire. Real life is about meeting and knowing, existentially, in the sense of the Old Testament. Not to have, but to give oneself.

11. I could think that this paper is at best a very first concept for a more useful one. We can consider to try to make it.

8.11.90