

PERVERSION OF SEXUALITY/ PERVERSE SUBJECT

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Under this title, I wish to speak to you about two aspects of human sexuality which, if one does not distinguish the one from the other, may give rise to misunderstandings.

The first one, which I call 'perversion of sexuality', is that of perversion as universal human characteristic. This perversion has to do with a structuration of human sexuality whose original character, different from any other living creature reproducing itself in a sexuated way, is circumscribed by the fundamental Freudian concept of the sexual drive. There is thus a perversion which has to do with the drive as such, but the drive is not perversion in the sense in what we call, in psychoanalysis, perverse structure, when we distinguish it from the other two structures of subjectivity, namely neurosis and psychosis. In perverse structure, the term 'perversion' refers to a specific position of the subject in his relation to *jouissance*, and so it is this second aspect which is indicated here under the term of 'perverse subject'. Each of you will have realised that the referent of the term 'perversion' is different in these two registers.

In the first one, the perversion in the drive implicitly refers to the norm of instinctual functioning of reproductive sexuality, as defined by ethologists in its organisation and its operating modes. The drive is not the human sexual instinct but precisely that which is substituted for it where the human sexual organisation fails. Besides, this substitution introduces not only a perversion of the sexual in so far as for the animal it is integrated into the need for reproduction but also a perversion of all needs in the sense that it sexualises them. Hence the relevance of the concept of partial drive which denotes the fact that, for the human being, both in the expression of needs and in their natural satisfaction, there is something lost because, in a way, it is perverted. Thus, another type of organisation is substituted for it, the primary basis of which is the drive, but which also includes that which we call demand, desire and fantasy.

In the second register, the perversion in question refers to a very particular specification of the functioning of the drive, notably with regard to that other phallic structure of subjectivity which is neurotic structure. It is in this specification that a position of the subject appears as indicating a singular relation to the drive.

Let us note, at the level of these references to the term 'perversion', that the second register logically supposes that the first one be initially established. This is exactly how Freud proceeded, he first outlined what the drive was about, starting from the child and that which he calls its predisposition to polymorphous perversion; only then did he pose the question of the perverse subject. These are the two moments we will respect, in returning, in the first place, to the drive.

Let us start from what it is that it perverts, namely need. Need is, first of all, a tension in the organism which gives rise to a certain discomfort, even pain. This tension conditions what appears to us in the guise of an intention, the intention to suppress it. To satisfy this intention born from need is to find the object adequate for dissolving the tension. There is, for the animal, a total dependence with regard to the information which guides it in this process, that is to say with regard to a mode of biological programming which is inscribed, whether innately or through acquisition, and which constitutes, following Lacan, an acquaintance [*connaissance*] without knowledge [*savoir*]. This aspect of instinct supposes that there is another one: that there be, because of the selective process of evolution, a continuity, a correspondence, between this information inscribed in the neurological organism and certain signs present in the environment. It is this correspondence, as well as the adequate functional corporal means which guide the animal towards the satisfying object, which allows us to perceive there a harmony, a connaturality. There is no fault here, apart from the possible rarity of the object.

By contrast, for the 'homo sapiens' mammal, there is a fault [*faillie*], a deep and intrinsic defect in this instinctual organisation, a break in the connaturality. Not only is the instinctual information weak, without integration, the reflex patterns not being very selective, but, further, the possibility of using them functionally is so reduced that it [instinctual information] will regress. There is, following Lacan's formulation, a 'gap in the real' for the new-born baby due to his prematurity. It is this prematurity, with its important and prolonged discordance between the advanced maturation of the sensorial nerves and the belated one of motility, which introduces a lasting hiatus between the expression of need and its

autonomous resolution, and which will open the human being so overwhelmingly to what is pre-established [*l'acquis*]. Such a hiatus, in the operativity of intention born from need, creates the condition not only of an intensification of certain sensorial phenomena, notably hallucinatory ones, but also of a privileged insertion of the signifier and of visual forms in relation to the Other which makes up for [*supplée*] the instinctual fault [*défaillance*], generally the mother. In the same place, a drift [*dérive*] is instituted at the level of the needs, which produces a dependence in the infant that has more to do with this Other than with the object of satisfaction.

It is in this drift, in this dependence that the intention born from need will hence hook itself onto the signifier carried by the Other, will articulate itself with it, and, in return, the register of need will be transformed, converted into a new register: that of the drive. In other words, by way of introjection of the structure of language, the organism and its needs becomes what we understand when we speak of a body, that is to say a 'drive-body' [*corps pulsionnel*]. But, more precisely, how is this operation of signifying alienation of need in the Other realised? It is the knotting of the drive with the emergence of demand which is the basic modality through which the speaking being manifests an intentionality implicating another subject. The emergence of the register of demand involves two logical moments, the second one completing the basic structure of the drive.

The first moment, or first state of demand, corresponds to the moment in which the tensions, the sensations correlated to the real needs of the organism, hook themselves to the signifier in order to resolve themselves. This moment is that of a first distancing, a first detour in relation to the 'innocence' of the natural exercise of the organic function. Its paradigm is the change of status of the infant's cry when it becomes a call, which it is not to start with. This moment, contrary to the behaviourist theses on the acquisition of language, is not the learning of a sign, since the subject-to-be already possesses it in the physiological expressivity of various organic states. What is in question is a moment of signifying retroaction on this sign.

Let us be precise: it is with what the Other does with these cries, with the way in which he interprets them, in which he scans them with his presences and absences, with his care, with his voice, that at a given time the infant will hear that they have a signifying value relative to the presence of this Other, and that he will detach from this Other the signifier acting upon him in order to incorporate it, thereby transforming his cry into a call, a primal demand. By the same token, in the same handling of the cry, the emergence of a subject capable of making himself recognised, of making something intentionally recognised, is indicated. Of what order is this intention? No doubt, there is something of the order of need, but no longer only this. First of all, because the care of the Other, underlaid by desire and love, has already had an effect of eroticisation in various functions of the organism of the infant, and this eroticisation is capable of sustaining the exigency of a repetition. But also, this detour, *via* this mediation, *via* the retroactively inscribed signifier as the loss of immediate satisfaction of need — solely in the real — elevates it to the status of lost *jouissance* and installs a lack-of-enjoyment [*manque-à-jouir*] that is different from the tension linked to need. This irremediable lack-of-enjoyment, also the cause of a structural lack-of-being, gives the signifier a two-fold primary status: on the one hand, it commemorates a loss, but, on the other hand, it is the tool of a possibility to overcome it, hence its status of mastery (master-signifier) and of primordial matrix of the Ego-Ideal.

This lack-of-being will henceforth inhabit any intention arising from need, so that what will be searched for will not only be the object of satisfaction of need, but also, as its correlate, something lost, a state, an object of another order, capable of filling this lack, this being done *via* the signifying path of demand. Such is the first fundamental moment of the structuration of the drive in its intimate articulation to demand. This moment — it may be a point of arrest, notably if the signifiers that the subject extracts from the field of the Other assure him of his mastery over it — demonstrates that the subject becomes [*se fait*] the being of the lack in the Other while pretending to be [*en faisant*] the object obturating his own lack, to wit an incestuous logic, that which, in essence, animates the demand. In this point of arrest, where psychosis finds its basic register, the subject freezes himself as identical to the signifier and the symbolic system is but a code where the word and the thing correspond to each other. For neurotic structure, this logical moment does not constitute a point of arrest.

What restarts primal demand is the fact that it is, in principle, frustrated; it is even this very frustration which maintains its insistence in subjective structure. It is frustrated because it does not encounter a purely symbolic Other, an Other which could be handled following a pure code; it encounters an Other which is not only also subjected to a non-symbolisable lack-of-being but also an Other which, while attributing to the child a place as satisfying object, does not confer upon him the function of suturing this lack-of-being, no more than upon the other objects of his investment. In other words, the primordial demand is frustrated by the desire of the Other. Another start is thus operated, which initiates

an indefinite displacement in the set of the signifiers of the Other, a symbolic set which is not structured as a code but rather as a knowledge that is always under construction, continuously being rehandled, never closed, open to all the creations of the signifier, subjected to its never fixed denotation, and thus to its slidings, its equivocations.

In accessing this second level of demand, *via* the enigmatic desire of the Other, the subject will nonetheless continue to attempt to make the object of his ultimate satisfaction — that which would fill his lack-of-enjoyment and which he supposes can only be in the Other — graspable in the field of the signifier, where he knows how to make himself recognised as subject. But no signifier will assure him of mastery over the Other, over his desire and, beyond, over the drive-object of the Other which he seeks to capture in order to fill his lack. Since the latter is not symbolisable, there is an impossible gift from the Other — a gift of the signifier which would allow the subject to control his presence, to symbolically suture his lack-of-being by obtaining a purely signifying recognition. This gift, were it to exist, would be that of an absolute love, and this is why, amongst other things, Lacan calls this demand a demand for love. In fact, in this quest, the subject will indefinitely be 'in displacement', from signifier to signifier, and this allows us to say that the first division of the subject lies between two signifiers.

If this demand does not encounter the signifier of the desire of the Other, it nonetheless encounters, in its insistence, selected signifiers, those that, in the very demand of the Other, aim at, implicate the body of the subject as sexualised. This occurs through care and other eroticised manifestations. It is those selected signifiers which mark, which cut out certain anatomical zones of the body as erogenous zones, which make their real rims signifying and which constitute the signifying rims of the source of the drive. Note that this intimacy with the drive will assure them of a privileged destiny in repression and idealisation.

To this signifying division is added a division of the subject between, on the one hand, the signifiers of the Other — through which the subject attempts to fix his identity, and with which he will possibly identify — and, on the other hand, the object which he is in the desire of the Other, the drive-object, the part-object. At this level, the Other does not recognise the subject as subject, but annuls him, objectifies him, faces him with his own fragmentation as being of the drive — the so-called erogenous zones. He thereby undoes his imaginary unity, and this is the fundamental momentum of anguish and horror for any subject. It is also there that we may grasp that this tension, this thrust introduced in the subject by the lack-of-being and which will be oriented by the drive-objects coming in the place of the lost *jouissance*, cannot be envisaged without there being some repulsion from the subject. Indeed, these drive-objects, in so far as they are circumscribed by the field of the Other, in so far that to enjoy the Other equally implies making oneself the object of the drive-*jouissance* of the Other, face the subject with this annulment, with an already mentioned source of horror and anguish.

If the structuration of demand implies that of the drive, if demand and drive are articulated with each other, they are not to be confused. Where demand aims at some subjective *jouissance*, the drive aims at some *jouissance* as object without a subject; demand does not desire the *jouissance* that the drive wants. But the drive is truly what gives its intentionality to demand, its implicit exigency of *jouissance*, its dynamics. Demand is the signifying side of the drive, and its silent thrust is its signified. If the drive aims at, and misses, the forever-lost share of being, and substitutes for it an infinity of objects, the demand never obtains the signifier of this share of being.

Let us return to the universality of human perversion, such as the drive-structure represents it with regard to the instinctual organisation, in order to underline here six of its characteristics.

The first one is the constant thrust of the drive, the pressure of which is only ever assuaged partially. More precisely, the structural lack-of-enjoyment at work in the drive cannot be filled through obtaining any object whatsoever, and destroys this rhythmicity which can be observed in the pressure of the sexual instinct in mammals.

The second characteristic is that while the sexual instinct has a typical, preformed object in the drive, there is an infinite variety of objects, a substitutability of objects between various drives — in short, as Freud notes, the object is indifferent.

The third one is that while, for instinct, the object seems to guarantee the satisfaction that is, if one may say so, 'expected', the drive always leaves a double residue of dissatisfaction: firstly, that which has to do with the discrepancy between the lost object responsible for the lack-of-enjoyment and the drive-objects which make up for it; then, that which has to do with the limit beyond which the subject, in his use of the concrete objects put into play in his sexual activity, can no longer bear the unveiling of their proximity with the drive-objects. In other words, the subject can no longer bear the moment where *jouissance* encounters anguish and horror.

The fourth characteristic is referring to the rupture in the unicity of the sexual tendency at the service of instinctual reproduction. The drive-structure fragments this tendency; it not only delocalises it in various points of the body with different partial objects but it also gives autonomy and independence to each of these drives *vis-à-vis* one another and *vis-à-vis* reproduction. This is the foundation for the predisposition to polymorphous perversion of the child as well as for eroticism in general.

The fifth one has to do with the way in which the subject mediates, elaborates his relation with the drive-object, the source of an anguishing *jouissance*. This is the function of the fundamental fantasy, the latter being the choice of an imaginary staging of this object, a bearable and desirable *jouissance*-scenario. This choice reduces the previous polymorphy to that which we call a perverse trait.

Finally, the sixth characteristic is the following: not only is the drive a function without a subject, and even without an Other in the proper sense of the word — it is a partial object which is implicated in the partner — but, moreover, the expected satisfaction, the *jouissance* hoped for, is not the one, as is the case for instinct, of the act of copulation as such but that of the body proper. The sexual drive is fundamentally auto-erotic. Hence Freud's paradigmatic illustration of the kiss: the aim of the drive at play there could be circumscribed by saying that what is sought is not so much the lips of the other as one's own lips, thus the image of lips that would be kissing themselves.

This being said, we will now specify some characteristics of perversion, this time with regard to their particularity. The perverse structure, to take a global view, supposes a modification of the previous logic of the drive which is in a certain way a blind logic, in the sense that it is without subject and therefore out of reach of any mastery as such. The subject is only reintroduced there secondarily by way of the demand addressed to the Other or through the illusion of imaginary scenarios which are in fact by-products of the fundamental fantasy.

This modification of the organisation of the drive is not a prevailing fixation of a partial drive prior to Oedipal structuration. There is no supposed archaism of this kind here. What is at stake in this modification concerns the place of the subject. In the insistence of the drive, its trajectory from its source to its satisfaction, the subject, if one situates oneself in the register of neurosis, is not positioned. What defines the pervert, on the contrary, is the way in which he tries to position the subject according to various modes. He stages, to use Freud's expression, a new subject, whom he locates in a partner. All his effort will then aim at making this new subject present to his *jouissance*, a *jouissance* beyond the drive-satisfaction as lived, experienced by the neurotic, that is to say by his slipping away from it at a given time.

Let us take a short example at the level of the scopic drive and therefore of the *jouissance* of the look. In exhibitionism, in the sense of a simple perverse trait in neurosis, the fact of 'showing oneself', the pleasure of 'making oneself seen', concerns the simple return of the drive to see, the scopic drive, onto the body itself. Here, seeing and making oneself seen go together, and, in the same neurotic subject, voyeurism can accompany exhibitionism, as it is the same thing, although identifications in both cases differ.

In the exhibitionism of the pervert, what is important is, no doubt, to show oneself in order to be looked at by the other but in the sense that what interests the subject is not to make his organ seen but what really takes place, what is realised in the look of the other. But not only this. In what is thus being realised in the other, in his look, what is aimed at by the pervert, what he seeks to provoke, is the beyond of the scopic drive-satisfaction that the other supports. The neurotic is usually supposed to stop short of this *jouissance*, as it becomes unbearable, because it is beyond pleasure as such. And the sign for the perverse subject that this operation succeeded, the sign that he keeps watch for in the look of the partner, is that of a subjective pain, that of a danger felt by the subject beyond the pleasure he could experience in seeing. This sign is thus the signal of anguish.

One understands here why the perverse subject does not go through what always mediates — apart from in certain passages to the act — the relation to *jouissance* of the neurotic, namely the demand for love. He substitutes for the latter, in his will to enjoy, a forcing which excludes love. This does not mean that, beyond this perverse logic, perverse subjects are incapable of loving. In exhibitionism, this forcing is effected in an act which surprises the 'partner against his will', which must catch him unaware.

The signal of anguish in the partner is for the perverse subject the sign that he reached the point at which, in the relation to his lack-of-being, the other subject does not want, no longer desires a complement, of *jouissance*. It is there that, on the contrary, the *jouissance* of the perverse subject takes its ground, and one understands that it is correlative to the moment where the partner-subject transgresses his own ethical limits, his own law. In this sense, the pervert makes appear in his forcing a division in the other subject and does so by turning himself into the object that would fill his lack-of-being

by means of the *jouissance* which he cannot bear. The ethics of the pervert is the following: by wanting at all costs to fill in this lack-of-being he demonstrates his faith in absolute *jouissance*. In exhibitionism, one can say that the perverse subject attains himself as a subject that would be identical to a look, in that he attains his own look through the forced *jouissance* of the look of the other subject. He will make himself appear at one and the same time as subject of the drive and as the pure object aimed at by the drive. This last point gives him the status of subject petrified in *jouissance*.

Translated by Véronique Voruz and Bogdan Wolf

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