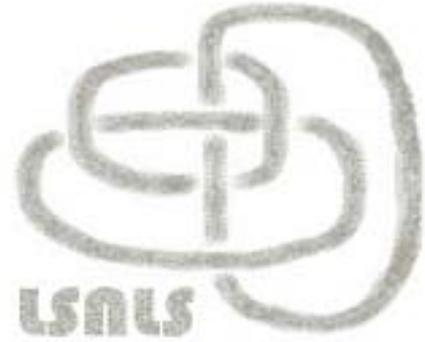


From Psychoanalytical Notebooks 5, 2001: Fantasy and Castration



To let oneself be maltreated: event and fantasy

Pierre Naveau

Is it that one is maltreated or, which introduces a nuance, that one gets oneself maltreated? In the latter case, what are we saying? Is it even possible to feel that one is letting oneself be maltreated? Then comes the moment when one decides not to accept to let oneself be maltreated. To let oneself be maltreated or to decide not to let oneself be maltreated — this is some kind of ‘decision of being’ that concerns the relation to the *jouissance* of the Other.

The will of the Other

The subject can use its castration in different ways. With regard to this point, one must read repeatedly page 826 of the *Écrits*.¹ As indicated by Lacan, one of these possible uses consists of offering one’s castration in sacrifice to the Other with the aim that the Other would make use of it as an instrument. But, Lacan points out, this is precisely what the neurotic subject does not want; “What the neurotic does not want, and what he strenuously refuses to do, until the end of the analysis, is to sacrifice his castration to the *jouissance* of the Other by allowing it to serve that *jouissance*”.² What, indeed, gives consistency to the Other is that the Other could enjoy [*jouir*]. It would be the last straw if the Other were to *enjoy*. However, it does happen that the Other *enjoys*. This, at least, is what the neurotic subject imagines. The Other does not exist but, as Lacan stresses — and this is precisely the neurotic’s dread — if by chance the Other were to exist, then the Other would *enjoy* the subject’s castration that was offered in sacrifice.

Therefore, the neurotic subject’s dread produces the emergence of a will to *enjoy* that finds its source in the hypothesis of the existence of the Other. If the Other happens to *enjoy* it is because, so the neurotic subject supposes, it is the Other’s will. In actual fact, *jouissance* cannot be conceived without the impulse of will: “To whomsoever really wishes to confront this Other, there opens up the way of experiencing not only his demand, but also his will”.³

In order to discuss the question posed in the above terms of the relation of the subject to the *jouissance* of the Other, we suggest referring below to the dialectic between event and fantasy.

Event and fantasy

In his article *Theatrum Philosophicum*, published in the journal *Critique* in 1970,⁴ Foucault, reading Deleuze, gives this key to reading Deleuze: *event and fantasy*.

Event, he says, is what escapes the representation of the fantasy. Here he uses the metaphor of the battle and of the sword’s thrust given in the thick of the fight.

Fantasy depends on representation. In the metaphor that Foucault uses, the fantasy is represented by the battle during which thrusts of swords are exchanged by the opponents. The fantasy consists in the sound and the fury of the encounter between bodies, the tumult, the clamour of cries, and the clash of weapons.

The event, happening in the very thick of the fight, is not the sword's thrust in itself but the effect of the thrust: the wound, the fracture, death. The mark on the body, the wound in the opened flesh, the break endured by the bone — is what provokes a discontinuity. The event is embodied [*prendscorps*] between flesh and bone. It cuts the flesh and breaks the bone. The thrust is then counted, it enters the field of a counting. It counts via its effect. The event is embodied but the mark detaches itself from the body, it is somehow extracted from it. It is then reduced to the thinness of a trait, to the fineness of a cut. The fault is extracted from the compactness of the field in which it is inscribed. In itself, the fault is unspeakable. The effect of the encounter, of the hit, of the shock in the body, cannot be said. The opening of the fault corresponds purely and simply to a pulsation. The event is not a narrative. In other words, says Foucault, the event is not a state of affairs that could constitute the reference for a worded proposition. It is purely and simply the effect of the encounter between bodies. The cause is corporal and the effect, he says, is *incorporeal*.

To Foucault's approach we can oppose the powerful and elegant pages 61 and 62 of *Radiophonie*⁵, also dated 1970, in which Lacan emphasises the incorporeal function of the symbolic and indicates the mode according to which the separation between body and flesh is operated.

However, the value of Foucault's approach seems to me to reside in the articulation that he suggests between the event and the fantasy, and in the distinction that he introduces at that point between the thinness of the event and the thickness of the fantasy.

The relation to the tongue [langue]

Now, as Lacan put forward, there is no event but through *asaying* [*undire*]. From this point of view, the missing notion in Foucault's approach is that of the *subject of enunciation*. The stumbling point of such an approach is precisely the point of enunciation — what Lacan calls 'the enigma of enunciation'.⁶

The fantasy is not to be said. To use a term used by Foucault himself, the fantasy is avowed. However, this avowal follows from a construction that is accomplished during this experience of speech that is a psychoanalysis.

Regarding the event, stressing *thesaying* [*ledire*] implies that one questions what Jacques-Alain Miller called 'the relation to the tongue'.⁷

This starts with the *effect* produced on the subject by the fact of learning one tongue amongst others. As indeed Lacan states: "there is only the learning that the subject underwent of one tongue amongst others".⁸ In this respect, Jacques-Alain Miller remarked that the true trauma is constituted by the relation to the tongue. Moreover, he makes reference to Joyce on this: "Joyce renders manifest the true traumatic kernel: the relation to the tongue".⁹ Taking on board the point of enunciation is the place from which Lacan criticised the philosophers and their philosophical approach.

The practice of interpretation, he says, proves that "there is something in the signifier that resonates". Philosophers do not know, he advances, that "the drives are

the echo in the body of the fact that there is saying"¹⁰ and that, he adds, "for this saying to resonate, to be consonant, the body has to be sensitive to it".¹¹ He concludes that the body is indeed sensitive to *saying*, that this is a fact.

What is discovered in the experience of analysis, remarks Jacques-Alain Miller, is the fact that the subject essentially suffers from things that have been said to him: "the subject is sick from some wordings".¹² In part, a psychoanalysis consists, he indicates, in finding again the wordings that made the subject sick.

What is the echo in the body made of?

The woes of Stephen Dedalus

Lacan evokes the fact that Joyce wrote about the effect that having been maltreated had on him. One finds traces of this particularly in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.¹³ In *A Portrait* Joyce, let us remember, gives himself the name of Stephen Dedalus.

The following three examples can be recalled:

The Mockery

First Joyce relates Stephen Dedalus' dealings with a certain Wells.

Wells asks a question that, to our ears, evokes what Proust and Gide said in confidence on the same subject: "Tell us, Dedalus, do you kiss your mother before you go to bed?" Dedalus answers yes. Wells then turns towards his fellows and announces "O, I say, here's a fellow who says he kisses his mother every night before he goes to bed". Dedalus is mocked by his fellows. Stung to the quick, he blushes and rectifies his answer. No, he does not kiss her. Wells turns towards his fellows and says this time: "O, I say, here's a fellow who says he doesn't kiss his mother before he goes to bed". Then his fellows laugh about him even more.

Dedalus is perplexed: "What was the right answer to the question?" He has given two different answers successively. Nevertheless, Wells and the others have laughed at both of them.

At this point Joyce writes: "*He felt his whole body hot and confused in a moment*". The accent has to be put on *hot and confused*. The effect of the laughter of his fellows on his body — *hot and confused* — is an effect of burning.

Here is the event in Foucault's sense: *his body is burning* — burning caused by the mockery.

The Injustice

A bit later in the *Portrait*, Joyce realtes a scene of castigation.

Dedalus has broken his spectacles. Father Arnall, his Latin teacher, has therefore authorised him not to write. However, meanwhile, Father Dolan, the prefect of studies, comes into the class. The latter does not believe a word of the explanations that the boy gives him (this is something that Joyce experienced himself when he was six years old). Father Dolan believes that this is the lie of a *lazy little schemer*. Father Dolan says something to the boy that prompts his perplexity: *I know that trick*. Dedalus lifts his eyes *in wonder* towards Father Dolan's face: *Why did he say he knew that trick?* Then Father Dolan starts shouting: *Lazy idle little loafer! An old schoolboy trick!*

Then Father Dolan asks Stephen Dedalus to hold out his hand with his palms upwards. He first hits him with a ruler on his right hand: 'A hot burning, stinging, tingling blow'. We find the burning again: "His trembling hand crumpled together like a leaf in the fire". At the pain, Joyce writes, "scalding tears were driven into his eyes. His whole body was shaking with fright." Joyce writes: "His crumpled burning livid hand shook like a loose leaf in the air". After which the prefect of studies gives him another blow with the ruler on the left hand: "A fierce maddening tingling burning pain made his hand shrink together with the palms and fingers in a livid quivering mass". The effect on the body manifests itself under the shape of the mark of the affect: *His body shook with a palsy of fright.*

From the pain felt deep down in the flesh, the subject becomes Other to himself:

"Stephen knelt down quickly pressing his beaten hands to his sides. To think of them beaten and swollen with pain all in a moment made him feel so sorry for them as if they were not his own but someone else's that he felt sorry for."

The event, in Foucault's sense, is the *corporeal cut*. The cut provoked in the body by the burning of the pain makes the child feel that his hands are not his own; that they have detached themselves from him, that they have separated from his body.

The Quarrel

A quarrel breaks out between Stephen Dedalus and Vincent Heron about their favourite writers: "Who is the greatest writer?" asks Heron. Dedalus answers: "Newman, I think". Then a question is posed by Boland: "And who is the best poet, Heron? Lord Tennyson, of course, answered Heron." Dedalus objects: "Tennyson a poet! Why, he's only a rhymester! And who do you think is the greatest poet?" he is asked. He answers "Byron, of course". Heron gives the lead and with Boland and Nash, joins in a scornful laugh. "What are you laughing at?" Stephen asks. "You", says Heron. And he adds: "In any case Byron was a heretic and immoral too". To which Dedalus replies: "I don't care what he was!" Now Heron calls out "Here, catch hold of this heretic". In a moment Stephen was a prisoner. Heron cuts at Stephen's legs with his cane. This is the signal of their onset: "Nash pinioned his arms behind while Boland seized a long cabbage stump, which was lying in the gutter. Struggling and kicking under the cuts of the cane and the blows of the knotty stump Stephen was borne back against a barbed-wire fence". Heron asks him to admit that "Byron is no good". He refuses. He finally wrenches himself free: "His tormentors set off towards Jones's Road, laughing and jeering at him, while he, half blinded with tears, stumbled on, clenching his fists madly and sobbing."

Joyce, as Lacan remarks, says here something in confidence. Here is how he reacted to 'that malignant episode': "... while the scenes of that malignant episode were still passing sharply and swiftly before his mind he wondered why he bore no malice now to those who had tormented him. He had not forgotten a whit of their cowardice and cruelty but the memory of it called forth no anger from him. All the description of fierce love and hatred which he had met in books had seemed to him therefore unreal".

And Joyce adds: "Even that night as he stumbled homewards along Jones's Road he had felt that some power was divesting him of that sudden woven anger as easily as a fruit is divested of its soft ripe peel".

Not only did Stephen Dedalus' anger abate immediately but, more importantly, he felt that his anger parted from him as easily as a ripe fruit is divested from its peel.

Lacan comments on this, stressing that Joyce ponders on the fact that he did not hold a grudge against Heron. He underlines the corporeal sensation that Stephen Dedalus felt after having been beaten with a stick: "It does not want but to go away, to fall like a peel". Lacan considers that this is a metaphor of the subject's relation to his body: *it is like a peel*.

The affect's destiny (anger in this case) and the way the subject reacted, in his body, to the blows constitute the event in the sense of Foucault. The metaphor of the corporeal sensation which Lacan highlights 'it is like a peel', designates the event deducted from the body.

Therefore, it appears that the question about the *posture* consisting in *getting oneself maltreated* by the Other implies taking into account the subject's reaction.

Masochism or moral cowardice

Stephen Dedalus' reaction poses the question of masochism, says Lacan: "did he enjoy it?" Lacan wonders, foras "The thing passed, he bore no malice (to Vincent Heron)". His anger abates. The fact that the whole quarrelling matter had been evacuated in a trice, is as if Stephen Dedalus had consented to let himself be maltreated, to get himself beaten. If Joyce was neurotic, the corporeal sensation that he felt — i.e. the affect of anger detaching itself from his body like the peel from a ripe fruit — could be linked to a masochistic fantasy.

Lacan remarks that the feeling that something detaches itself from oneself like peel, — "like someone puts something aside and dismisses a bad memory (from one's memory)", he specifies¹⁴ — proves that this experience did not give him pleasure, but caused displeasure and even some repulsion vis-à-vis his own body: "This time he did not enjoy [*jouir*], he had a reaction of repulsion towards his own body".¹⁵

Lacan stresses the fact that Stephen Dedalus did not feel any *jouissance* at the moment of the hiding. He draws the consequence that Joyce, as he puts it, was not a pervert: "We are left to believe that the reason Joyce was so interested in perversion may be that perhaps after all he was disgusted by the hiding. Perhaps he was not a true pervert".¹⁶

The question of perversion should therefore be posed with reference to *jouissance* and to the relation to one's own body.

Joyce sensed that his anger abated, parted from him, in the same manner that one lets something down far from oneself. In this respect, Lacan stresses that 'the form of the "letting-down" of the relation to one's own body is highly suspect to an analyst".

This corporeal sensation of a letting-down indicates, according to Lacan, that in the relation to one's body it is experienced as if it was alien. This indication of Lacan shows that we should link the fact of getting oneself maltreated to the articulation between perversion, *jouissance* and the body that Lacan highlighted.

The mode according to which the subject reacts to the blow given to him designates the subjective position of being in its relation to the Other. From this point of view, the neurotic subject is not a pervert but uses its perverse fantasy to "keep the Other's desire in suspense".¹⁷ The subject, says Lacan, is busy sustaining the Other's desire, 'nourishing it', he specifies.

We can qualify the fantasy as 'perverse' because "perversion is in the neurotic's unconscious as fantasy of the Other"¹⁸, i.e. as fantasy in which the subject changes position, in which it 'imagines' itself to be the Other. The subject does not enjoy [*jouit*]. It is the *jouissance* of the Other that is concerned. In this respect, as we are to understand from Lacan, the body has the function of the Other for the subject: "The Other's locus is not to be found elsewhere than in the body".¹⁹

The articulation between event and fantasy is manifest in the affect, in the mark on the body, as we have shown. Such a mark has the characteristic of being both invisible and legible: "The mark that one cannot see is to be read".²⁰ "The body is not intersubjectivity", Lacan says.²¹ It is the locus of inscription where the mark is read. The 'letting-down' that Lacan mentions with regard to Stephen Dedalus' reaction to the hiding, constitutes this mark on the body — invisible but proved to be legible. The metaphor of the scar accounts for the legibility of the invisible mark.

The way that the subject seems to consent to let itself be maltreated is not a matter of a kind of masochism.

Actually, Lacan states that it is rather a question of this term used by Joyce about the Heron, Boland and Nash trio: cowardice.

To let oneself be maltreated is not of the order of a *jouissance* that one tries to steal from the Other because it is forbidden. This way to 'let down', to see to it that it is dropped, that it detaches itself, that it falls, is rather to be situated in the line of an avoidance, an escape, a jib.

To let oneself be maltreated is a certain relation to the body that, without fail, leads to shame.

Translated by Vincent Dachy

1. J. Lacan, *Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire* in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. A. Sheridan, Routledge, London, 1977, p. 323-4 [p.826].
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. M. Foucault, *Theatrum Philosophicum* in *Critique* No 282, Nov. 1970, p. 885-908. Also published in *Dits et écrits*, tome 2, 1954-1988, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 75-99. English translation by D.F. Bouchard and S. Simon in M. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice — Selected Essays and Interviews*, Cornell University Press, 1977, pp. 165-196.
5. J. Lacan, *Radiophonie* in *Scilicet* No 2/3, Seuil, 1970, pp. 61-62.
6. J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire XXIII: Le sinthome* in *Ornicar?* No 6, p.9, 1975-1976.
7. J.-A. Miller, *Lacan avec Joyce* in *La Cause Freudienne* No 37, Paris, 1998, p. 11.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire XXIII: Le sinthome*, *op. cit.*, p. 7-8.
11. *Ibidem*, p. 8.

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12. J.-A. Miller, *Freud, l'interprétation*, a conference given on Descartes, Saturday 3rd May 1997.
13. J. Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, chapters 1 & 2.
14. J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire XXIII: Le sinthome*, *op. cit.*
15. *Ibid.* p. 7.
16. *Ibid.* p. 8.
17. J. Lacan, Résumé of Seminar *La logique du fantasme* in *Ornicar?*, No 29, p.17.
18. J. Lacan, *Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire* in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. A. Sheridan, Routledge, London, 1977, p. 322 [p.825].
19. J. Lacan, Résumé of Seminar *La logique du fantasme*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
20. E. Solano-Suarez, *Désir de passe* in *La Cause Freudienne* No 33, 1996, Paris, p. 144.
21. J. Lacan, Résumé of Seminar *La logique du fantasme*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

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