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The body and its plural jouissances

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Paraules clau

feminine sexuality, jouissance = libido + death drive, Name of the Father, the pleasure principle: a banner to jouissance, good =/ well-being, lack of the object, supplementary jouissance, irreducible otherness, logic of the phallus and castration, the phallus: symbol of jouissance

First of all I would like to thank the colleagues of the Freudian Field Seminar for this invitation to participate in your activities. It is the first time I will try to give a Seminar in English.

The body, in singular, - and its jouissances in plural. This plural indicates that there is a diversity in the ways of jouir, that jouissance is not an unified or homogeneous field?

But what is jouissance? The term is not evident; it is so little evident that we need to keep the French word in English in want of a convincing translation and it remains as a sort of neologism, as a term of the Other in your language, perhaps as a term of the Otherness itself in your own language.

Perhaps this is finally an advantage: when we speak about jouissance in English, we do not have a previous signification or meaning of the term in the code of the language, we do not have a previous referent or identity of this term. Therefore, "jouissance" designates what cannot be translated with a signifier from the English language.

In fact, what we call Jouissance is mainly impossible to translate to a signifier, to translate into the symbolic field of language.

Therefore, we may question: Is jouissance the figure of Otherness in language? Is jouissance Otherness for every subject?

I will not conclude with just one answer to this question, but the question itself leads us to the knot of what jouissance is for every subject.

What is jouissance? We will give two minimal answers to introduce the field of jouissance:

1) Jouissance is the satisfaction of the drives.

The drive is what demands a satisfaction to the subject, an immediate satisfaction. The drive does not admit a delay; it demands immediate satisfaction, by any means, and very often independently of the object.

2) An equation. $\text{Jouissance} = \text{libido (the energy of desire)} + \text{death drive (the limit of every drive)}$: that's to say, jouissance is not pleasure, it is beyond the pleasure principle.

We have a classical clinical example of this equation in the Freudian case of the Rat Man: the subject's expression when he explains to Freud the famous rat torture: "the expression in his face of an ignored pleasure". An ignored pleasure beyond pleasure itself, an ignored pleasure that is anchored not in the signifiers used to relate the torture but in the body, where this torture is experienced.

(You also know the famous reference of Lacan Seminar "Encore" to the Bernini's sculpture of The Santa Teresa's Ecstasy in Santa Maria della Vittoria church in Rome: we meet there also "the expression in his face of an ignored pleasure", the body's jouissance in the ecstasy experience of the divine love.

But the limits between ecstasy as pleasure on the one hand and jouissance on the other are not so clear, and it is interesting to note that this sculpture served to consecrate Bernini, but in time it also contributed greatly to his disrepute because in the opinion of the critics Santa Teresa pretends to be experiencing an orgasm more so than divine love. Thus, moving away from the classic ideal.)

In this sense, the field of jouissance (what Lacan himself called the field named "jouissance") has as a starting point something different than the signifier, that is the symbolic structure of language stated by Lacan in the 50' as the foundation of the Freudian unconscious. The starting point of the field of jouissance is not the signifier but the body, the body as the place where the subject experiences the beyond of the pleasure principle, the body as the place of the experience of the drive and its limits. This was indeed the strongpoint of Jacques-Alain Miller orientation when he began in the 80' to order diachronically the teaching of Lacan, for example in his conference in Buenos Aires in 1981, "Teoría de los goces", - "Jouissances theory", where we can read:

"Jouissance is not at first jouissance of the Other. To be able to formulate that jouissance is the jouissance of the Other, it is necessary an enormous construction, it is not by any means a starting point as it is in the case of the desire [where we may always say that desire is the desire of the Other]. When it comes to jouissance, the starting point is the body. What takes the place of desire is the desire of the Other. In the case of jouissance, it is only apprehended through the body. Only a body can or cannot jouir".

But to understand the field of jouissance beyond the pleasure principle it is necessary to place ourselves in a new ethical principle raised only by psychoanalysis, a principle that does not assume that the subject wants his own well-being. The subject of psychoanalysis knows that Good and well-being are not necessarily the same, that he may feel "good" in his own malaise, and he even knows that he may feel good in evil, as Lacan states in his text "Kant with Sade" when he reminds of Kant's ethical formulation and the difficulty in the translation of: "Man fühlt sich wohl im Gutten" – Human being feels good in good –in English translation with an homonymy that German does not admit. Perhaps we could say to break the homonymy: "There is well-being in Goodness", well-being as the pleasure principle and Goodness as the satisfaction of the drive. The pleasure principle is the law of well-being, the German word "Wohl", but it does not necessarily agree with Goodness as the object of jouissance, the German word "Guten", which is the principle of Kant's ethics.

Indeed, in the path of the subject's *jouissance* searching, he finds more and more his malaise, in what we know as his symptom. Symptom is precisely that form of *jouissance* in the body that the subject cannot admit as a pleasure. In fact, if we take into account satisfaction as goodness from the point of view of the drive, then well-being can definitely not be promised to the subject.

And vice versa, if you take a pleasure, any pleasure, and you bring it to a certain limit you will sooner or later find that this pleasure has become a displeasure, even a torture – and sexual experience is the best example to understand that.

Therefore, *jouissance* and goodness are not in agreement in psychoanalytical ethics. This is what Lacan means when he says that the object of goodness is lost, that the field of *jouissance* is always ordered around a lack of the object, the lack of “das Ding”. And correlatively, well-being is only a fragile barrier in the *jouissance* quest, a homeostatic limit, a precarious balance that cannot be taken as an ethical principle or an ethical aim.

At this point it is very important to point out that in Lacan teaching, the limit to *jouissance* is not given by the moral law, as the neurotic phantasy wants to maintain. The limit to *jouissance* is not the symbolic law, not even when we state it as the oedipical law.

It is indeed when Lacan introduces the field of *jouissance* that he interprets Oedipus as a Freudian dream, as the neurotic fantasy that symbolic law in itself is a limit to *jouissance*. No, Lacan already states in 1960, in his text “Subversion of the subject and the dialectics of desire...”, that the barrier to *jouissance* is the pleasure principle. (I quote the “Écrits”, p. 821):

“But it is not the Law in itself who bars the access of the subject to the pleasure; it (this law) only makes of an almost natural barrier (d'une barrière presque naturelle) a barred subject (un sujet barré). Because it is the pleasure which brings to *jouissance* its limits, pleasure as a link to life...”

Then, we may write this equation:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Pleasure} \\ \text{-----} \rightarrow \text{Law : } \$ \\ \text{Jouissance} \end{array}$$

Pleasure is the limit of *jouissance*. This limit will be inscribed as an interdiction by the symbolic law. The result is the split subject, the barred subject. The split subject (\$) is the effect of the symbolic law, the symbolic inscription of a limit that the subject finds in the pleasure principle as an “almost natural barrier” to *jouissance*. This symbolic inscription is indeed what we call “castration”, whose law was not a Freudian dream but the symbolic inscription of the lack of that object which is in the ethical principle of psychoanalysis.

The body as the singular experience of this limit is a body already constructed by what Freud discovered as erotogenic zones: the mouth, the anus, the genitalia, - but also the look and the voice, the two other objects added by Lacan to Freud series.

This limit is structurally identical to the lack of the object as goodness, to the lack of a predetermined object of the drive. It is what Freud discovered as the multiplication of the erotogenic zones that are in the basis of the so called “polymorphic perversion” of the infant, the lack also of a unique and normative object of *jouissance*.

And from this perspective the question of the diversity of *jouissances* will be the research of Lacan in the 70', especially in his Seminar “Encore”.

Now, we may ask ourselves: masculine and feminine sexuality, are they different forms of jouissances? And if so, why?

In fact, in the unconscious there is no inscription of the difference of the sexes. For the unconscious, the difference is between phallic and castrated because the only symbol of jouissance is the phallus. The “sexuated position” (la position sexuée) of the subject of the unconscious is founded in another difference which Lacan explored in his Seminar XX, “Encore”, as an opposition between a phallic and a non-phallic position.

When it comes to the unconscious and when it comes to jouissance, there are not men and women “created by nature” or created by God, - men and women are only signifiers for identifications, they do not designate different beings of jouissances. You know the myth of Tiresias and the enigma of which one of the two sexes experiences more jouissance in sexual relations. Only the blind Tiresias knows and can say something about the enigma of difference in jouissance because he (or she) has been in both and each part of this relation: the masculine and the feminine side. But this is only at the price of blindness, that’s to say at the price of castration, what brings us once more to the logic of the phallus and castration that commands the question of jouissance in the Freudian unconscious.

Therefore: when it comes to the Freudian unconscious the plurality of jouissances would have his starting point in the difference between a phallic jouissance – a jouissance ordered by the phallus as a signifier – and a non-phallic jouissance, a jouissance beyond the phallus, what Lacan considered in a first stage the jouissance of the Other, or jouissance as Otherness itself, the jouissance that cannot be represented by the signifier, impossible to be said or impossible to enunciate.

The phallus as the symbol of difference becomes the only symbol of jouissance in the Freudian unconscious and this will have important consequences in the Freudian theory of Oedipus and feminine sexuality. What Freud calls the Oedipus complex can be understood as a way of placing the incidence of the phallus as a signifier in sexual jouissance and in the different sexual positions.

Lacan states that the logic of the phallus as the only way of symbolising jouissance found a limit when Freud tried to locate feminine sexuality and its jouissance in the body. You know the outcomes that Freud distinguished in feminine sexuality following the phallic logic: 1) the abandonment of all sexuality, for example in the frigidity; 2) a masculine identification, in the different forms of phallic identification in lesbianism and homosexuality; 3) the so called “normal” outcome, very “complex” and difficult, always under the oedipical norm, that consists of taking the father as an object and following through towards motherhood where a woman symbolizes the phallus and the phallic jouissance in the body of the baby. These three outcomes are, in fact, non-outcomes if we consider them from the point of view of feminine jouissance, which is a jouissance that cannot be reduced to frigidity, homosexuality or maternity. You already see that the question is how to meet a definition of Woman as a field of jouissance different from the phallic jouissance.

Lacan, once more, will take this Freudian impasse to its limits and will conclude: it does not exist any feature that can identify woman as a field of jouissance, there is no identification feature of woman as a universal. Or, as Lacan says in a more impressive formula: “The Woman (as a universal) does not exist”. We have to take every woman as a particular in the field of jouissance, one by one, but following this way we will never find a set of features that would tell us what Woman is as a universal.

On the other hand, what is thought as a normal outcome following the phallic norm will lead us

to an essential ambiguity that Lacan will translate in an ambiguity in French: the “normal” is the “norme-mâle”, the “male norm”, the phallic norm, the norm of the “normal” man, so normal man that we may diagnose him as a “normopath”, someone sick of the “male norm”.

But not only men may be normopaths. There are also women who are sick of the “male norm”.

I would like to refer to that Spanish little girl who went home after a school day where he had received a lesson in the so-called “sexual education” and told her mother that she had learned that “boys have a penis” (“los niños tienen pene”). And girls? – asked her mother. “Las niñas tienen pena”, she answered: “Girls have pain”. It would be difficult to explain her answer without referring to the phallic logic and what Freud called the “penis envy”: “to have”, which here is what is at stake, touches the structural point where the phallic norm plays with the ambiguity of the language in a surprising way.

Therefore, there are also “normopath women”, in fact, this is the more usual discourse about and for women, but this is not obviously the last word about the feminine position for Lacan. The normopath subject is the subject who identifies himself or herself with the phallic norm, it is the subject that wants to maintain by all means his phantasy in being or having the phallus as the only reference of jouissance. They may be very “normal” subjects, with a very normal ideal of an only form of jouissance that has to be a global one. And you know that our world is nowadays governed by this logic and these “normal” subjects.

Only to put another example which discusses a very controversial and up-to-date issue concerning the plurality of jouissances in our world, I would like to quote the Iranian historian Janet Afary who studies the imposition on women of the Islamic fundamentalist laws. What catches one’s attention in her article is the willingness with which some women embrace Islamic restrictions in order to acquire a power position within a community which traditionally awards women very little freedom. From a western point of view it could seem a paradox. Some middle and low class women who accept to wear the traditional veil called “hiyab” can become valued and powerful members within their communities, can also become valued members within political organisations, be more protected against sexual harassment, be able to finish their studies and even go to University. However these women become more radical Islamic militants, they are responsible for more arrests of lay upper class women who do not comply with Islamic prescriptions, and are feared by these other women.¹

You can see that it is no so easy to cure oneself of “normopathy”. In fact, there is something irreducible in the phallus as a “semblant” (appearance?) in the field of jouissance, something irreducible in the fact that symbolic structure of language has taken this part of the body to symbolize jouissance. And perhaps an analysis may be defined as the particular work of each subject to isolate this “semblant” in his own way of jouissance in order to cure himself or herself of his own normopathy.

But to do this, it is necessary to follow Lacan logic in the 70’ when he studies the difference and the plurality of jouissances as a logical and even topological problem. I will take here a simple reference to place the structural difference between two logics and two sets in the field of jouissance:

a) First of all, we have those who are in the “male norm” side, those under the phallic and who make a set, a class. In this set we may define very clearly who is in the set and who is not, who has and who has not the identification feature:

$1, 2, 3 \dots n$

It is the “normal” class that works with universal logic, that’s to say in the logic of the “All in

One”, if you want to say. You define this set with the addition of natural numbers: $1 + 1 + 1$, that makes its series: 1, 2, 3... It is an infinite series but it can be numerated. The lack itself is symbolized in this set with the “void” symbol, \emptyset , the symbol of the phallus as the symbol of the lack (you know that this fundamental lack in freudian theory is the lack of the phallus in the mother’s body). Therefore, with this symbol of the void we can close this set and say who is in and who is out, who has and who has not.

b) On the other side, (the side that Lacan puts as the feminine side, but feminine in a very peculiar sense, precisely in a non phallic sense) we find a paradox, we find the class of what cannot be classified, “the community of those who do not make community”, as Maurice Blanchot said. We do not find here Universal logic but Particular logics that work with another conception of the One. It is not the “all in one”, it is “not-all” logic, not-all in one. It is the One that never makes an All and that only works one by one: 1×1 .

One by one you will never arrive to the all one.

1, 1, 1...

This set cannot be closed, it is an open set – or also an open space in the topological terms used by Lacan in the Seminar XX – it is an open not-all set. It does not exist the feature that can tell when an element belongs to the inside or must be excluded outside. Each element needs to be taken into account one by one, in its own particularity. In this set we do not have a symbol to designate lack, and we can only let the set open to evocate this lack.

What kind of lack are we talking about when we are facing this set? In fact, the invention of Lacan’s “small a” object, the object cause of desire, is the invention of a letter to designate this rest, an object that is always a minus (a lack) or a plus (a rest that Lacan qualified as “fécond”, fecund) and lets the set always open.

We would have to distinguish here another kind of infinite, and we would have to make reference to Cantor, for example, to investigate the different infinities implied in this topological space as a real space, or the space of real numbers.

I will not follow right now this path but I will point out that we have here another kind of jouissance, the feminine jouissance beyond the phallus, jouissance as irreducible otherness, a jouissance in the body but that cannot be symbolized in any “part” of the body, neither in the phallus.

Lacan gives a very pretty reference, in addition to the Bernini’s Santa Teresa or San Juan de la Cruz (yes, there are some man, as Lacan points out, that can be in this feminine part and say a lot of things “impossible to be said”). You may find this reference in a small text that is a preface of the play “L’éveil du printemps”, “The Awakening of the Spring” by Franz Wedekind, when he evokes the figure of the White Goddess, the mythic figure of the goddess that would have existed before patriarchy, in the hypothetic era before the Name of the Father, and that was studied by Robert Graves. I quote you this pretty ending paragraph:

“How to know if, as Robert Graves states, the Father himself, our eternal father of us all, is only a Name between others of the White Goddess, who according to his opinion is lost in the night of times, because she is the Different one, the Other for always in her jouissance, - these are those forms of the infinite that we only begin to enumerate knowing that it is this enumeration

that will suspend us”.

There are a lot of interesting points in this paragraph. There is this open set or open space with this particular infinite that lets us “suspended”, that’s to say suspended in an enumeration that will never tell us if an element is inside or outside the set. And this “suspension”, that evokes also death, even the death drive that nourishes jouissance, is the otherness of jouissance itself, the difference itself in the field of jouissance.

But a non less important question is that Lacan says that the Father himself, that’s to say the Name of the Father as the symbolic father, the oedipical father that operates symbolic castration in the field of jouissance, that perhaps this Father is only a name, - we may say also a “semblant” -, a name between others of the feminine jouissance itself. We cannot know it and I will try to explain why.

From the phallic side, we could answer with an universal “No”, and say: the symbolic father is different from feminine jouissance, because we have the closed set with the elements inside that belong. But, from the other side, within the not-all set, we cannot answer this question. We would have to reach the end of this field and to traverse it, counting all the elements; we would have to cover “all the field”. But precisely we cannot have “all the field” in this side, we only have the one by one of its elements.

We can understand now why the Lacan teaching of the 70’ finished with the singular Name of the Father and pluralized it in the “names of the father” that we also have to enumerate one by one.

It is important to underline that it is from the question of feminine sexuality and its logic beyond the phallus that this important turning point was made. There is not a singular Name of the Father, there is not a singular kind of jouissance neither, but a plurality.

The new object of jouissance that is isolated in the non-phallic logic will give us another conception of plurality, a plurality that does not search for a “all in one” field of jouissance, a plurality of complementarities – between the sexes, between “cultures”, or any other way of jouissance. It is a plurality that understands this other jouissance not as complementary but as “supplementary”, as Lacan says in the Seminar (p. 68. Du Seuil). If this other jouissance were “complementary” we would stay once more in the phallic part of jouissance.

“Supplementary” jouissance means that it can never be included in the set, but that it is always one step forwards or one step backwards of its closing limit. This is the kind of feminine jouissance, the not-all jouissance.

You know the image with which Lacan begins this Seminar to put an example, a logic example, of the impossibility to reach and to say this jouissance. He speaks of the paradox of Achilles and the turtle, the paradox of Zeno that is also the paradox of the real numbers or the continuous paradox. Achilles takes a step to reach Briseida, the turtle, but the turtle has already made a very little step, and has left Achilles behind. When Achilles takes another step, the same happens, and so on...

The same can be said about the paradox of Zeno, by which taking a step that ends half way of where you want to go will never allow you to reach the end. In the “phallic” logic that works with natural numbers you will never reach the object of the supplementary jouissance that works in the compact space of the real. With the infinite of the natural numbers you will never locate the infinite of the real numbers, the infinite for example of number pi.

Therefore, Achilles the normopath will never reach the supplementary jouissance of the turtle: that's the same to say that there is no sexual relation, that there is no relation between the infinite jouissance in the phallic part and the infinite jouissance in the non-phallic part.

Achilles, the split subject of desire, will never reach this supplementary turtle of his jouissance, but this supplementary turtle will always rest as the cause of their desire. I have said "their" and that means that the turtle is not only a turtle for Achilles but that it is a turtle for itself.

That's to say: in the field of jouissance woman is the Other for man but she is also Other for herself, in the sense that she embodies (what a wonderful word for our argument) the supplementary jouissance for herself. It is at this point that Lacan speaks about the solitude of a woman with herself, a solitude with her non-phallic jouissance, that jouissance in her body that remains in silence.

What can I say after my attempt to catch the turtle, what can I say about the plurality of jouissances?

I would like to suggest that there are different kinds of plurality. There is that plurality founded in the One that wants to be All, the total One. The jouissance of the total One makes the Other to exist as an Other without lack, a consistent Other. We can write this kind of plurality and of jouissance with the formula: $1+A$ (the A stands for Other). There is the phallic jouissance (1) and there is the jouissance of the other (A).

The jouissance in the one by one side, the side that is not "all in one", that never makes a total One, leaves always a rest (a). The formula for this way of jouissance would be: $1+a$, formula that you will find in the Seminar (p. 47). It is the non complementary jouissance, it is not the jouissance that pushes the subject towards the total one but it is the supplementary jouissance that pushes him or her towards the lack of the Other.

Therefore, there is a paradox in the plurality of jouissances if we consider this field beyond the phallus. It is not the plurality that makes the Other exist (under the form of Woman as an universal, or also under the form of God, or even the other race as an integrated race), but the plurality of one by one, without the existence of the Other.

This is the plurality of the One or the plural One that Jacques-Alain Miller has discussed in the last years.

To conclude, I will say that psychoanalysis is an experience of discourse about this plurality of jouissances. And this, with an other that makes "semblant" of the supplementary object, the (a) object. It is in this experience where the subject elaborates throughout the experience of his life about this plurality of jouissances, (the sexual jouissance, the symptomatic one, the phallic one, the non phallic, the jouissance of the bla-bla-bla...), and that to isolate his or her own supplementary jouissance beyond the phallus, that's to say beyond the signifier.

This jouissance, as I said at the beginning, has its starting point in the body, in the singularity of its experience, but it can only be isolated in an experience of discourse. And it is only through an experience of discourse that the subject's position in front of jouissance can be changed, modified, one by one.

This is what Lacan had put forward in psychoanalysis practice as an "etique du bien dire", an ethics of well saying, an ethics, however, that never says where Good is.

Notes

Janet Afary, in New Left Review number 6, January-February 2000