

PHOBIA AND PERVERSION

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Phobia was always treated as a psychoanalytic structure. Freud named it hysteria of anxiety. However, all of a sudden the concept of phobia became mixed up with symptoms: hysterical symptoms, obsessional symptoms and even psychotic ones. And it was also conceived of as a transitory period in childhood.

The question here is: how can we take this concept in Lacanian terms? Is phobia a specific structure? We could say, for example, that phobia is a “disease of the imaginary”. Lacan never ceased to take the imaginary into consideration. Suffice it to think of his “mirror phase”. It is not because the “unconscious is structured as a language” that the imaginary has less importance. In the borromean elaboration of the Lacanian theory the imaginary ring has the same importance as the others and, with the real and the symbolic, it brings the RSI knot into existence.

Lacan’s seminar on RSI is the seminar which poses questions around “the effect of sense” as well as the one which places the imaginary as equivalent to the real and the symbolic. Phobia is without any doubt an important point in this elaboration.

In his seminar *La Relation d'Objet* (1956-57) Lacan recognises the specificity of phobia in isolating a “phobic signifier” —the horse in Hans’ case— where the function of the signifier is in opposition to the “phobic object”. So, instead of using the notion of object he places the horse as a signifier which will rule Hans’ relation to the world.

In *La Relation d'Objet*, as in Freud’s texts (particularly *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*), the distinction between phobia and hysteria, for example, remains delicate and problematic.

Lacan will come back to phobia in the seminar *Les Non-dupes Errent* where he makes a strange formulation. He says: “It is not true that the animal appears as a metaphor of the Father at the level of phobia, phobia is nothing but a return”; a return of the totemic animal, a repetitive return, a metonymic return of the phallus. But it is in his seminar *D'un autre à l'Autre* in 1969 that Lacan makes his elaboration on phobia and concludes: “We cannot here (in phobia) see a clinical entity, but in fact a **revolving plate**, something which should be clarified in its relations with the two main orders of the neuroses —hysteria and obsession—and also in the junction which phobia has with perversion.” Let us see if we can here try to elaborate this link between phobia and perversion, when phobia acts as a revolving door between neurosis and perversion.

In the seminar *La Relation d'Objet*, there are several indications about this relation between phobia and perversion. It seems it is important to pass through perversion in order to grasp that which is at stake in phobia. Lacan says that if the phobic object and the fetish have the value of signifiers they are imaginised and due to this they acquire a particular value.

Lacan in the 1950s maintained that the unconscious formations were structured as a language in children too, contrary to those psychoanalysts who put an emphasis on the rich imaginary of their phantasies.

To reread Hans for Lacan was to give a symbolic status to phantasy, particularly with

children, and not an imaginary one. One of the important points of this seminar was to demonstrate the power of the mirror stage and its capacity to put symbolic phenomena into question. And this was obtained not only through a child, but through a phobic child. To read Hans with Lacan is to realise that Freud works not with the imaginary of the body but with that of the myth—not through the drawings but through the phantasy; and also, that the phobic object reveals itself as a “signifier for everything” (*à tout faire*).

The study of Hans means that the subject as child could be in analysis—he had a symptom which could be analysed. Hans was witness to the existence of sexuality in children—sexuality meaning suffering *and jouissance*. It has nothing to do with a sexology. Sexuality in psychoanalysis is only a condition for neurosis. That a child could suffer from sexuality to the point of making a neurosis is what Hans teaches Freud.

When Hans’ mother says to him not to touch his penis, which is an ambiguous order, Hans cannot cope and turns to his father. It is at this point that he enters the neurosis, more precisely the phobic one.

It is due to the presence of the penis that he is anxious. The mother wants to make of this presence an absence. What is the real of the symptom in phobia and why is phobia a neurosis? Freud gave an answer only fifteen years later in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*. What is important is not that Hans is frightened of his father. What makes of it a neurosis is that Hans fears a horse. He places the horse together with the father to protect himself against using his penis. His father, disguised as a horse (in his dreams), becomes the guardian of the forbidden object: the mother.

Freud says that phobia is the typical neurosis of a child. For example, even the Wolf Man starts with a phobia. Why? Simply because phobia is a way of reinforcing, of sustaining the role that the symbolic father has in castration. It is because the father is the cause of the castration anxiety that the child can repress his oedipal desire. Anxiety as such is not neurotic, it is itself the condition of the speaking being. What is neurotic is to displace it in the signifier in order to cope with the symbolic father. This displacement goes with Hans on to the streets and into all aspects of his life, in objects which give body to the signifiers.

Hans asks, at the father’s expense, of a horse to provoke this anxiety and this repression. Lacan will say that what is important is that Hans has given consistency to the signifiers instead of putting in place the paternal metaphor, the Name of the Father. The paternal metaphor is the key to the door through which the sexual subject orientates himself in the symbolic. It is that which intertwines the subject—as subject of drive—in the symbolic. It seems that with this confrontation with the dead father, with this confrontation with death which could provide the paternal metaphor, phobia arises and the symbolic articulations become crystallised signifiers.

Lacan, after Freud, reaffirms the important role of the castration complex and therefore that phobic anxiety is related to castration anxiety. This means that for Lacan phobia is equivalent to the myth; a solution to a moment of passage, the passage of the imaginary relation with the mother around the phallus, to the castration game in relation to the father. But for Hans, remarks Lacan, the phobia is singularised by a feminine identification, which points to the difficulty in the transmission of castration from the father to the son, the parent of the same sex, which constitutes the ideal ego of the subject. Therefore the phobic object, with its

function of signifier, is an appeal to the Name of the Father and to the imaginary father to deal with the crisis, raised by the Oedipus. Lacan recognises phobia as having the function of being the solution to these moments of passage, in which Oedipus constitutes the model and the prototype of what is going to happen in the future. We then have phobia appearing after the irruption of a sexual real —moments of crisis in maturation (such as Oedipus, adolescence, pregnancy) but also in moments of subjective crisis which have nothing to do with maturation.

What type of *jouissance* is organised around phobia? The phobic, we could say, has no *jouissance*. Phobia appears when it is impossible to repair the image of a semblant; phobia is triggered in a space with a hole indicating the infinite. This hole or point is connected to the look: as vanishing point it acts as a look. Phobia is what distinguishes image, imaginary and look.

In the clinic, phobia teaches us that the imaginary is neither the image nor one of the dimensions of phantasy which covers the object (a). The imaginary is one part of the language structure, on the side of meaning. Hans in fact refuses to be duped by meaning. What happens is that the real of the look appears instead of the reality ruled by phantasy.

The phobic object designates the place of a lack. It comes to obliterate the fundamental anxiety of the subject. It witnesses the emergence of a real, impossible to be symbolised, and this real can only be represented by an imaginary detour (eg, the horse). It is an imaginarisation of the real but it is also symbolic since it frightens, and it is isolated in the look, for it has a function of signifier, therefore it is also a symbolisation of the real.

It is precisely anxiety that the subject in phobia tries to avoid, putting objects in its place in order to organise the real by organising space. We could define phobia as a structure which brings forth the limits of space and the body and the relation between them, that is, the look. It has to do with the dialectic of the **inside/outside**, of the interior and exterior which the look organises. Phobia appears when the space is no longer guaranteed and anxiety arises.

In phobia there is this point in the infinite, a phobic one, which is the emergence of a look in space. This point will provoke anxiety and that which the phobic finds there is a hole, something which takes the value of the look.

What happens when an object (a) emerges in a space is the dissolution of the phantasy. This means that we do not know where the subject is looked at from. There is a disappearance of the subject, a feeling of losing libido. The subject, exposed to anxiety, looks for a semblant as an ego, and in the mirror he can keep the imaginary axis of the schema.

In keeping the imaginary axis a-a' with his semblant he can keep a space, an identity.

The anxiety attack comes when there is no circulation between imaginary and symbolic. The subject was not able to pay the symbolic tribute which allows a sexual identification. It is important to point out here the relation between the scopic drive and the oral drive in phobia. The Other works as a sort of mouth; he is never in a symbolic relation to the Other.

The look is related to the oral drive in phobia at the level where this look is concerned with a hole in space. But instead of being a hole institutionalised by perspective,

there is for the phobic, in space, the non-inscription of his food, he sees the hole as an open mouth without food (remember that the phobic object is in place of a lack).

Phobia is a point of fascination to the hysteric: for her there is an idealisation of the phobic position. We could in fact say that the phobic realises that which hysterics know without ever being able to see. That is, that in the Other there is finally only a beast; it is a question of taming it. It is as if the hysteric knew that it was always like this and that it was always going to be like this. There is an idealisation of the phobic position, almost as a way of showing off that which they know already but pretend not to: that is the assumption of the paternal metaphor as in castration.

Coming back to Hans, we know that all his problems have to do with parenthood. Both parents had been in analysis with Freud, and Freud himself sent Hans a horse as a present. Where does this animal, the horse, come from? Freud says that it is a displacement, the choice of the first object which passes by.

Hans was not cured of his problems with the Oedipus complex, but he was able to take the train and carry on his life. He went on the great trip, that is, he accepted the renunciation of one of the two positions. He made himself a man on the side of women, and from there he goes through life.

But why is the animal not a metaphor of the Name of the Father? First of all the horse is not dead. Hans is actually frightened that the animal will fall over and die. But we know that for the father to occupy this place of bringing forth the paternal metaphor he should be recognised as a dead father.

It is as if, somehow, the subject pays the other a tribute, not a symbolic one but an imaginary one, by inventing the phobic animal. There is then an erotic relation to this space, to this place.

So what happens in perversion? Perversion, in Freud's time, was conceived of either under a so-called legal heading (as delinquency) or under a medical one (as illness). Freud was situated in neither of these positions. He preferred to say that the structure is perverse (which would be confirmed by his postulation of polymorphous perversion); if the structure is originally perverse, then every object is a perverse one.

The subject in this perverse structure will anchor his metonymising movements of desire on a certain object, which could only be identified through signifiers; certain marks which constitute a particular basic image. Therefore, every individual has his objects **par excellence**, which have to do with his own basic symptom. The Name of the Father is functioning, providing the subject with an S1 —each individual has a different taste, according to his own signifiers. It has to do with a renunciation and acceptance of the law, to say no and yes without not noticing the law there.

This is the originary perverse moment. To choose one object is momentarily to obliterate the gliding; it is an anchorage for the look, we could say. Another thing is perversion itself, where the object is no longer a metaphor of the Name of the Father. The Name of the Father stops functioning here and becomes the metaphor of the fetish. The Name of the Father is, therefore, pure metaphor of the object (a) and it becomes the object (a). In perversion itself, as distinct from perversion as a structure, desire is referred to that which is thought to be “the” metaphor and not “a” metaphor. In this sense the desire of the Other does not emerge. There is no paternal metaphor but the metaphor is placed over an object and not over a signifier.

In what we could call “normal” perversion, the originary one, an anchorage of the object takes place, although every subject has a fetish object which comes from his basic signifying structure (which we could say configures his symptom). In “normal” perversion the fetish is metaphor of the Name of the Father which functions through the fetish.

However, in perversion itself the object comes to be a **substitute** for the paternal metaphor. Hence the fetish object is no longer a mediator between the subject and the barred Other. We could say that:

1) Initially the individual has this “disposition to perversion”, which would be the movement of desire itself.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{NF} & \rightarrow & \Phi \\ \hline & & \\ \Phi & & a \end{array}$$

The relation of the Name of the Father to Ω is constituted as a relation of Ω to the object (a). The phallus here has the meaning of a presence of an absence. Endless metonymy of desire leading the subject to death.

2) In “normal” perversion an anchorage must be made, an anchorage in an object insofar as the fetish is a metaphor of the Name of the Father:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{NF} & \rightarrow & \Phi \\ \hline & & \\ \Phi & & (a) \end{array}$$

The phallus is in relation to object (a), but as a fetish. An anchorage in a symptom, S1, a name.

3) In perversion itself there is an exchange of places:

$$\begin{array}{cccc} \text{NF} & \rightarrow & \Phi & \rightarrow & (a) & \rightarrow & \Phi \\ \hline & & & & & & \\ \Phi & & (a) & & \Phi & & \text{NF} \end{array}$$

The Name of the Father is erased, although it does not mean that it becomes the metaphor of the object. There is a change of positions: that which in the field of the Other works as a Name of the Father would become the metaphor of that object.

We could say that in perversion the Name of the Father is metaphor of the object (a), as a fetish. In phobia the object is not a metaphor of the Name of the Father, but in what we could call “normal” perversion the fetish is metaphor of the Name of the Father. In the second one, where there is an anchorage in the symptom, there is a naming whereas in the first, originary one there is only a metonymic movement, as in a child.

The pervert presents himself as an object for the look of the other and that is to say that, in perversion the Name of the Father in the field of the Other would become substituted by the object. The object is no longer a mediator between the subject and the barred Other. The pervert, being the object for the look of the Other, indicates his anchorage in phallic *jouissance*. Therefore what I see is what I say: there is no

mediation or distance. There is no distance between the look and the voice, between what I see and what I say.

The pervert is supported in the real of phallic *jouissance*. Therefore it is only when something presents itself as an inhibitor of *jouissance* that a problem will appear for him. The problem arises in the very moment of phallic *jouissance*. The pervert does not have a symptom, it is the symptom that has him, supporting the *jouissance* of the super-ego, not only as an imperative but making of this imperative an order, a simple law.

The pervert inhabits the confluence of the real with the symbolic, there where phallic *jouissance* and the symptom are situated. The way to deal with the pervert is through inhibition: anxiety appears to the pervert via the presence of the real and also via inhibition.

Contrary to the psychotic the pervert is the one who inscribes the signifier of the lack in the Other, but he encapsulates it as an absolute object (structure of his fetishism). Therefore, we can say that the pervert sees himself as the Other of the other; that is desired by the other, as far as he considers himself as the “happy owner” of his fetish. There is an objectification of the Name of the Father.

The pervert asks the question: why am I me? The symptom, therefore, is the guarantor for the pervert; it is the crystal ball which could solve all his problems. He is not persecuted by his symptom: the pervert can be grasped through inhibition and never through the symptom. It is a case of the voyeur who is surprised in the act of seeing; this does not appear as a symptom but as an effect of the surprise which inhibits him. It is only when the police are there to stop him that he becomes inhibited; if the police are not there he could not care less.

The pervert begs from the police for the rule, instead of assuming that he already has a signifier which would bring him the limits of his real configuration (the Law). He enjoys the position of being watched, watching and only when somebody starts to inhibit him will he show anxiety.

We could say that the pervert is taken by the symptom. He “creates” a fetish which will rule his relation to the world (or at least his sexual relation in respect of the world). This fetish is exactly his symptom.

There is a brilliant case described in *Scilicet 1* called *Fetishisation of a Phobic Object*.

The phobic is taken by the Name of the Father whereas the pervert is taken by the symptom. In Hans' case we can see how he goes on and on naming his Father—a “*signifiant à tout faire*”—a signifier for everything, to “name” it all. By choosing a horse as the signifier he masks rather than expresses his experience of negating the assumption that the father is not there. Hans displaces this assumption onto an object because he is frightened of this absence—space—lack of father.

Hans was almost a perverse neurotic but he chose to be a phobic. So the pervert would say: “I see this wonderful shoe or button” and is not frightened by his outrage. Therefore, in the analysis it is for the analyst to be more perverse than the pervert is: the cut is in the imaginary. That is where analysis will operate.

We know that the object in phobia is constituted by keeping castration anxiety at a distance. The fetish is also a protection against this anxiety. The phobic object does

not represent only the Father, but the Phallus, as an “extra” signifier (*en suppléance*) to make up for the lack in the Other.

Where the symbolic Father is lacking the subject constitutes an object with the value of a universal phallus. What is a Father? For Hans the real Father appears as an imaginary one and what he has not got operating is the symbolic Father.

The positivisation of the phallus, its universalisation, which makes it into a maternal phallus, establishes here the relationship between phobia and perversion. We find in both a precarious symbolic Father and the development from the real Father to the imaginary one. There is in both a positivisation, a materialisation, of the object (a) as far as the look is concerned.

In *The Direction of the Treatment*, Lacan will distinguish the phobic object as a signifier for everything in order to supplement the lack in the Other; and the fetish as an object which appears in the cut made by the signifier. The fetish is a sort of signifier in a pure state, never really present where it is, not really absent where it is not.

However, this phobic object is not only an imaginarised signifier: it also materialises the object (a) and more specifically the look. The phobic object hypnotises the subject. It petrifies the place as an imaginary phallus. That is, both in phobia and in perversion phallus and object appear as positive and imaginary.

Lacan several times asked himself why Hans became neurotic rather than perverse. But his answer curiously enough was that destiny did not want otherwise. We can only understand that with the famous Freudian aphorism: anatomy is destiny.

Perversion can be defined not only in relation to fetishism but also by the knowledge (*savoir*) about the object (a) through which a pervert can reassure himself about his *jouissance*. In this respect there is a distinction from phobia. We can only articulate perversion with phobia when we consider the fetish.

We could think that what happens in phobia is that the ring of the real would cover the ring of the imaginary, as if the ring of the symbolic would organise this intertwining. We know that the look eludes castration: that is, we know how the imaginary is reflective of castration. In phobia we could say that between the imaginary and the real castration does not appear in the symbolic domain. It is in the symbolic domain that castration is eluded in phobia.

Lacan would say that with respect to the normal knot, RSI, it is important that the real overlaps the symbolic and it is the imaginary ring that will bring consistency to the knot (ring within rings). What we have in the phobic knot is the real overlapping the imaginary, and it is the symbolic that will bring consistency to the knot.

Lacan also says that in the normal knot the symbolic is what makes the hole, the imaginary brings consistency and the real exists. In phobia we have this particular relation between the real and the imaginary. Castration emerges in the imaginary so that the symbolic is obliterated there.

In the “normal” knot castration is masked, obliterated by the imaginary. It is in the imaginary where castration is less articulated. But in phobia, as I said, what castration brings forth appears in the imaginary.

Phobia inhabits this hole. It configures a point functioning as object look in phobia. We could say then that the look invents the object. In relation to this Lacan will say that this object is not a substitute for the Name of the Father as in perversion.

So, in phobia, the imaginary ex-sists and the real makes a hole. In the “normal” knot the imaginary is what brings forth the limit, the interdicted, and it is this limitation which is the consistency. However, in the phobic knot, if there is such a thing, it is the symbolic which brings forth the limit.

This means that, for the phobic to assume the paternal metaphor, the limit, the naming, it can only be made possible by “inventing” an object to be looked at as if it represented the thing. For the pervert, on the other hand, the thing represents the object.

The mythical animal, the horse, does not address the question of the difference of sexes: it is a phobic object, a representation of the phallus and not of the Name of the Father.

In perversion the question of the difference of sexes is not there either —there is not a myth but something which would be the thing itself.

Only distance —space— can bring forth this phallic representative which phobia implies. Here we can situate agoraphobia —we have distance and a view leading to the look, and then the invention of the object.

The pervert will place the object where it is not and the phobic creates a place for the object to fit into.

In phobia you find the impossibility of naming the thing by using a signifier which will represent everything, so that you do not need to name it. The look will represent something which was invented by the object.

In perversion on the other hand the place is marked. You know where the look that gazes at you comes from and you provide this gaze with an object to maintain it.

In perversion the object invents the look and in phobia the look invents the object.

So how was this phobic child Hans cured? He was cured at the moment when a name was introduced as a signifier —the Professor. With phobics we have to take their fear into consideration. Yes, you are frightened, I recognise that. This fear is a way of making possible the operation of castration.

It has nothing to do with an introduction of the Name of the Father for phobics but certainly the Name of the Father is a product of the analytic operation. We could say that phobics are not especially attached to sense: in fact they would laugh at it. They make no sense. The pervert on the other hand is stuck in sense.

When Lacan speaks of the Borromean knot he is implying the real. The real of the knot: what ex-sists as Other to the knot.

So the Other is real. Why do we then need the Name of the Father? That is, is the Name of the Father necessary to castration or to the symptom? Perhaps the phantasy brings one solution to that enigma.