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The Purity of Perversion

The notion at the heart of the present paper coincides with the problem raised in a peculiar warning issued by Jacques Lacan early November 1968, when speaking on the Freudian concept of perversion. The passage (supplied below) is opened with stark emphasis on the *elusive* character of the structure. Warning us against any hasty diagnosis, Lacan turns to the figure of the crusader, whose act, far from being reducible to obscenity or enjoyment in transgression, signals what is really central to the pervert: his drive to make his own *jouissance* coincides with *the big Other's*. As he says,

“perversion, true perversion, escapes the majority of you, regardless of what you may believe... It suffices to have worked with an exhibitionist to realize that we do not understand anything about what, apparently, I will not say gets him off, because he does not get off, but he gets off all the same, on the sole condition that we see ... that the *jouissance* at issue is the Other's.

There is a gap here, of course. You are not crusaders. You don't devote yourselves to making the Other [cum]. But that

interests the exhibitionist. That's the way it is: he is a defender of the faith. . . .

The crusades existed. They, too, were waged for the life of a dead God.

...

When the knights were crusading, love was able to become civilized in the places they left, while, when they were elsewhere, they encountered civilization—in other words what they were seeking, a high degree of perversion—and at the same time reduced everything to rubble. Byzantium never rose from the ashes of the crusades. We must pay attention to such games, for they can be played again, even now, in the name of other crusades.”¹

Lacan's diagnostics here very obviously transcends individual cases of perversion. What is outlined above is a structure in which the subject appears as if acting in service of some predetermined order; for (the enjoyment of) an Other, whose wholeness is achieved in the rush of identifying “perversion,” where love may “become civilized.” In other words: he's talking about fascism. Alas, from our singular, *critical* perspective, the “paucity of clinical cases of perversion”² signifies first and foremost a properly political problem.

Drawing on Alain Badiou, Gabriel Tupinambá³ proposes an immanent link between psychoanalysis and philosophy. Psychoanalytic praxis as such emerged out of a dialectic with philosophy, and from Freud's properly *critical* interrogation of matters from his own private life and dream-world. It was born from a certain dedication to subvert and question the meaning and status of his perspective as a doctor and a healer, when encountering—and listening to—the suffering other. In turn, psychoanalytic philosophy emerged almost as a necessary by-product; a left-over of thought rooted in the contemplation of recovery through speech. Freud's challenges as a psychiatrist were immediately inseparable from deeply philosophical and existential questions.

As philosophy interrogates the conditions of abstractions, psychoanalysis confronts us with what it means for such abstractions *to be lived*. Psychoanalysis, in the precise sense of a truth-procedure, belongs to the domain of love.

Love, for Badiou as for Tupinambá, is not reducible to sentiment or affect, but names a *truth-procedure* by which the world is re-organized from the perspective of *the Two*. The truth of love is the truth

of difference: a world no longer arranged around the self, but opened by the encounter with an irreducible other. Likewise, psychoanalysis, while addressing the analysand's entanglements outside the clinic, is conditioned on transference within it. Transference is not simply attachment to the analyst, but the structuring wager that speech will be heard and taken seriously, so that desire can find *another articulation*. Psychoanalysis operates through the singular love that makes emancipation possible within it.

What psychiatry had to face was how the subject of suffering is not simply ill, but *divided*. Psychoanalysis recognized that suffering, at the level of the subject, may signify a truth, and that the very moment of expression—i.e., speaking—may itself constitute recovery, i.e., *significance*. Seen from this angle, the ethics of pure difference found in psychoanalysis points back to its origins in health care more broadly. To treat suffering is never only to repair a defect or restore a norm; it is also to recognize the other as worthy of care, and to sustain the universals—"health," "recovery," "well-being"—that allow a life to be lived *regardless* of its particular expression. And is this not precisely the principle that fascism subtracts? If the healer wagers itself in the service of love—that other may emerge *as other*—then fascism decides in advance that certain lives cannot matter, that certain modes of existence cannot speak. Where psychoanalysis insists on difference, fascism insists on the closure of the One. Love, in our Badiouian sense, is not only abandoned, it is *perverted*. Pronouncements like "immigrants are parasites," or "society is degenerating" do not describe but *produce* a world where the other's existence is already "diagnosed" as the cause of social contamination.

Fascism does not necessarily announce its coming waving flags of militarist nationalism or racial supremacy, but dresses itself in the colours of feminism, child-protection rhetoric, or public health. Perversion, in naming a particular structure, helps us recognize the protean feature of emergent fascism as something capable of inhabiting the very discourses that presume to guard against it. It announces itself *through* "universals" like freedom, health and love, all while turning them against the alterity they otherwise presuppose. But because what we call "fascism" is not the triumph of perversion alone, but the effect of an alliance that binds together performances of mastery and the terror of collapse, the temptation is to dismiss such discourses as merely delusional or paranoid. To avoid this misrecognition, the article proposes a diagnostic differentiation that separates the "activism"

of perversion proper, from the anxious and defensive “withdrawal” rightfully signified in terms of neurosis or psychosis.

On a certain level, the notion of critical analysis always presupposes a layer of diagnosis. Analysis, as the breaking-up or untying of something, is to confront its material as fractured. If we take ‘diagnosis’ in its original meaning, *diagignōskein*, it means “to discern-apart-from”: to take a particular, partial perspective, wagered on the merits of what this particular focus allows us to see. Against the presumption of attaining a total or “neutral” view of its object, every act of analysis entails a diagnostic incision that produces its subject through a partial view of its matter. If diagnosis is sometimes seen as closing its subject, the right decisions and apparatus open it. Diagnosis is a tool; a supporting, *structuring* feature in a dialectic through which a proper notion may be precipitated. Ultimately, the article seeks to further develop the notion of perversion as a structure that “mask the conflictual articulation at the level of logic itself.”⁴ In what follows, I will first situate these dynamics in the context of right-wing populism.

POPULISM

In populism, ‘the People’ are elevated to the dignity of the big Other. Yet we hardly have to remark how the right-wing populist’s concept of ‘the people’ has little to do with the actual sum of any population. When Trump, at his inauguration, uttered “we’re going to have so much fun,” who was he speaking to? He was, of course, speaking to the American people, but only in this sense of a strictly phantasmatic mass. ‘The People’ are the ones who are going to have fun; those who are going to have fun are ‘the People.’ It is not a countable population, but something sustained by a *fantasy*, and by *enjoyment*. This is why Trump can receive support from even black, Mexican or even openly transgender supporters, seemingly without contradiction. From the perspective of populism, the subject’s place in the collective does not derive from their empirical belonging, but from their function within its fantasy. Furthermore, in the age of the internet, the phantasmatic unity of ‘the People’ is increasingly sustained and inflated by technological prosthetics: anonymous accounts, memes, bots, algorithmically amplified voices, and ‘patriotic’ engagement farmers, operating from the Middle East or Africa. Paradoxically, the populist’s fantasy is most powerful where there are no people: in the disembodied chorus that returns the subject’s fantasy to himself as if from an actual outside community.

The unity produced in this “Master-discourse” may not improve anyone’s material conditions, but it does something else, as it reorganizes the very coordinates through which oppression and day-to-day suffering is read and addressed. This is a structure in which people are, at least, offered the brief “empowerment” embedded in the certainty of the collective and its fantasy. In this sense, the populist leader is not simply the representative of those who identify with MAGA but the necessary point of embodiment that sutures the fantasy together. People are invited to partake in this enjoyment, and it is this (promise of) enjoyment that glues them together. Therefore the internal consistency can be maintained only through exclusion. And this is, of course, where our notions of populism and fascism meet. Those who aren’t welcome—the *undesirables* who are ‘spoiling the fun’—aren’t just expendable from this ‘set’ in the name of the dream’s continuity; their exclusion *marks the dream’s driving force to begin with*. The populist leader therefore emerges as the one who names and expels the obstacle that prevents the People (the Nation, etc.) from being whole. As Žižek put it already in 1998:

“The whole Fascist ideology is structured as a struggle against the element which holds the place of the immanent impossibility of the very Fascist project: the ‘Jew’ is nothing but a fetishistic embodiment of a certain fundamental blockage. Far from being the positive cause of social negativity, the ‘Jew’ is a point at which social negativity as such assumes positive existence. The ‘criticism of ideology’ must therefore invert the linking of causality as perceived by the totalitarian gaze [and] detect, in a given ideological edifice, the element which represents within it its own impossibility.”⁵

In this sense, the populist leader acts as the guarantor of the big Other’s consistency, as if he is there in its stead, as its “humble” instrument. He acts as the voice of the collective’s fantasy, maintaining that the Real (the trauma) of “castration”—the *source* of social corruption—has a *location, an identity*, and that *we all know what (the source of) this corruption looks like*. When addressing his people, the populist is positioned so that the gap in the Other (i.e. the People) is covered by his presence. As such, the populist (and *de facto* elite) *appears*, at least partially, as “one of us.” The ‘set’ of the People includes the populist

leaders themselves, but only in the way that a dream “includes” the dreamer.

We will return to the subject of perversion and its *labour* as precisely a form of dream-work. For now, our task lies in distinguishing between this leading agent and its non-perverse other. As I will show, the rise of fascism is underwritten by an alliance between ‘crusaders’ and conspiracists—one that, when properly investigated, proves more parasitic than symbiotic. The task at hand is to isolate what remains an essentially necessary feature of civilization (*and its discontents*) from another, properly repressive drive that originates in something else, namely perversion, with its additional libidinal investment, that drives an organization and weaponization of such discontent.

ALLIANCE

To perform this distinction, and define this so-called alliance, Alenka Zupančič’s insights into conspiracy discourse become indispensable. In *Disavowal*, Zupančič reframes conspiracist paranoia, treating it not simply as a failure to engage with reality but, in a certain way, almost the opposite. That reality itself, in our digitized day and age, demands a certain response that may appear paranoiac. As she puts it:

“One might [...] ask whether the recent proliferation of conspiracy theories, the rapid spread of conspiracy thinking, is not something of a neurosis of our times – with all the dignity that Freud gave the word when, from the very outset, he recognized its social dimension. The resistance to being objects of the Other’s satisfaction takes many different forms, including some of the most picturesque and grotesque conspiracy theories.”⁶

At first, this alliance between conspiracists and perverse crusaders (i.e., the agents of exclusion) appears almost impossibly intricate. From its inception, conspiracy theory has been deeply entangled in bigotry, especially antisemitism. But as time has shown, whether the target is Jews, LGBT+ people, feminists, Muslims, or satanists, a conspiracy theory is always at hand or ripe for synthesis, casting an image of the social demographic as a monstrous, existential threat, endangering “our children,” “our women,” and the very foundations of “our way of life.” This also serves to signify the proximity between bigoted conspiracy theories and ostensibly “scientific” discourses, such as anti-vaccine ideology. Despite mimicking the surface grammar

of “critical thinking,” these narratives reproduce the same paranoid structure, the same illusion of ideological resistance, and underlying premises of some (organic, spiritual, racial, sexual) Wholeness. The question remains: where is the meaningful difference? In what does the “alliance” consist?

First, fascism proper advances not only on restless suspicion, but with a conviction that a certain lost enjoyment can and must be restored. It thrives on the uneasy alliance that seduces the anxious, naturalizes suspicion while weaponizing it into crusade. While paranoia signifies and sustains the atmosphere of urgency and danger, perversion signifies the vanguard of a fantasy of purification. We could say that the alliance is forged around diverging relations to what Zupančič called the “Other *as Deceiver*,” a concept developed when she discussed conspiracy theory:

On the one hand, [conspiracy theorists] are convinced that a big Other very much exists (they believe in the existence of an agency which is in itself consistent, operates purposefully, pulls all the strings, and coordinates everything). Yet they also believe that this agency is fundamentally and deliberately evil and deceiving.”⁷

In this context, deception and mystery are not problems to be uncovered or resolved, but something to be entertained by the conspiracist as ends in themselves. Zupančič proposes “the ‘conspiracy cogito’ as follows: I’m being deceived all the time, but I’m the subject of this deception, therefore I am.”⁸ Alas, when they are “connecting the dots,” they’re not doing so for the sake of uncovering the truth, but for the sake of stimulating the belief that they’re (worthy of) *being deceived*. It is the repeated circling of this negativity that becomes a supporting pillar of their identity. As such, “connecting the dots” is essentially a defensive effort to stave off the terrifying prospect of (psychic or worldly) breakdown by externalizing and systematizing it. The conspiracy itself becomes a kind of protective fiction. The gaze of the Other is still essentially petrifying; the Other is still *unbarred*, but since it is no longer solely the subject themselves who’s under scrutiny—or whose thoughts are being read, etc.—life becomes bearable, and perhaps even supplied with a like-minded community. The logic seems to go, “it’s not just me—it’s all of us who are under threat, and at least I know that.

The social neurosis of conspiracism may, in this sense, be thought of as a symptom of a world in distress. And since the actual roots of this distress are systemic and practically inconceivable, we are vulnerable to narratives that may be improper, but which nonetheless take root because they speak to us. The conspiracist is “right” in the elementary sense that something is indeed *not* right, and moreover, conspiracy theories, as a rule, contain some grain of truth; some valid concern about the interests of big corporations and so on. But ultimately and fundamentally, they misname the problem. As Zupančič argues:

“even if our partner is actually cheating on us, there is still something pathological about our jealousy . . . [Likewise,] even though some conspiracies really exist, or if they carry in themselves some element of symptomatic truth, there is still something pathological that pertains to conspiracy theories ...”⁹

Incidentally, Žižek made a similar reference already in his inaugural work, in relation to the point about fascism already discussed, concerning how anti-Semitism is pathological *even if* what people say about Jews were empirically correct.¹⁰ As such, both of our subjects (conspiracy theory and fascism) have been tackled with the same point, further testifying to the intimacy of this “marriage.” We could very well proceed from here with an investigation into perverse versus neurotic forms of jealousy (or, rather, reactions to it), but it suffices to reiterate Zupančič’s point that conspiracist paranoia may testify to the subject’s *resistance* to being reduced to an object of the Other’s enjoyment, while perversion, by contrast, wagers itself in the position of the *instrument* of the Other’s *enjoyment*. This is not without its own ambivalences, however. Even perverts are not immune to castration anxiety, the question is rather how it manifests. From this particular perspective, the alliance is indeed fixed around a certain paranoia. And I’ll argue that this is precisely what Zupančič pinpointed in her text on *Paranoiac Power* when she recognized how the trauma of castration is attributed a peculiar *contagious* quality:

Being weak (“emasculated”) is seen as contagious; it immediately corrupts the nature of the strong and powerful. This is why, for example, a simple mention in schools and kindergartens of the existence of gay and trans people is deemed capable of immediately corrupting the eternal and innate *Nature* of

children, turning them all into gay or trans people—that is, into “emasculated people.” Similarly, immigrants are persecuted precisely when they are already most vulnerable, *because* of their precarious status, and not simply as representatives of some other, alternative potency.¹¹

We touch here upon the quintessential interfaces of our two subjectivities. But while the neurotic or psychotic paranoiac is focused on maintaining and sharing the belief that we are all being deceived by a malevolent *Deceiver*, the populist’s *perverse* labour is fixed around converting this “scandal” into action while granting consistency to the “*bigger*” or “*Real*” Other, which would be Whole if not for the disavowed, malevolent Other that currently traumatizes it. This is why, when the conspiracist is compelled to weave images of how “woke” teachers and doctors perform sex changes on children, the pervert *doesn’t really care if this is true or not*. To revoke Mannoni’s classic formula of disavowal, the pervert may know *very well* that it isn’t true, yet he will nonetheless gladly act *as if* he believes it, reproduce the sentiment of the theory, and—most importantly—*actively* fight to, say, make transgender healthcare illegal. Zupančič captures this “activist” dimension when she argues that

this is the point where it becomes perverse: the paranoiac idea that signifiers are hiding in the real meets here the perverse logic of *forcing reality to itself produce what it is lacking*.¹²

Let us unpack this.

The pervert stakes their subjectivity on the conviction that a fundamental trauma can be stabilized at the level of the big Other. What might otherwise appear as cracks in their own psychic economy is displaced instead onto a fetish-object, which comes to present or embody a disturbance *of the world itself*. In this way, what cannot be spoken or borne is pre-emptively externalized, often through socially recognized (or even “constitutive”) ruptures. Things like sex, money, race and health emerges as sites of fixation because these are ruptures that, by necessity, will acquire a certain ambivalent privilege in the symbolic order. As such, the pervert’s apparent composure does not signal an absence of fracture, but *a structural displacement of it*. To quote Lacan: “Perversion is the returning, . . . or restoring of *a* to the field of *A*.”¹³ The fracture, i.e., *castration*, is entirely intact, but it is relocated into

the field of the Other, where it may emerge or be seen in the form of some “objective” impurity that can be cleansed. We are approaching here the exhibitionist core of right-wing populism:

People ask themselves whether the exhibitionist truly intends to provoke shame, fright, or [some sort of] echo ... But that is not what is essential to the scopophilic drive... What is essential is above all to make the gaze appear in the field of the Other.¹⁴

Why is this essential? Because it is *the gaze that grants consistency to the object*. To *create* spectacle, and *make* the gaze appear, is to reproduce the reality (the Law) in which the fetish-object emerges and *become enjoyable*. It has to appear other people’s eyes, because it has to lack myself. As Tupinambá put it, “If I conceive it for myself ... then it loses its ontological consistency, for it stops lacking my consciousness, a lack that is part of its being.”¹⁵ This is the reason they actually *act* upon these transphobicⁱ or racist convictions, rather than merely enjoy the repetition of, e.g., complaining about them: the object of enjoyment is ‘*abject*.’ If there’s a structural formula for hate-mongering and its “obscene enjoyment,” this is it. The pervert’s “activism” lies in the labour of sustaining this projection in which a rupture attains consistency (or identity) as what we’ll call ‘fetish-*abject*’: something the enjoyment of which is premised on its expulsion (ridicule, destruction, etc.) and the conviction that the underlying “trauma” dissolves with it. That if it wasn’t for *it*, America would be Great Again, so to speak. The figure of the crusader designates this willingness to take it upon oneself to embody the Law and literally *perform the work of its superego*. As so precisely formulated by Zupančič in *What IS Sex*:

The drive does not want (us) to enjoy. The superego wants (us) to enjoy. The superego (and its culture) reduces the drive to the issue of satisfaction (enjoyment), making us hostages to its vicissitudes, and actively blocking access to the negativity that drives it. In other words—and this is crucial—satisfaction

ⁱ I am not using «transphobic» in any psychologized sense. I encourage the reader to think of how phobia is used in, say, chemistry. The notions of transphobic and racist are to be read as signifiers on the same level: as notions of what is effectively repelled.

(for the sake of satisfaction) is not the goal of the drive, but its *means*.”¹⁶

Instead of the unconscious qualification of lack as the *object cause of desire*, the “lost object” takes form in the world as an abject impurity, and it is the labour of maintaining this status in the eye of the Other—the conviction that “it’s not just me, I am doing God’s work”—that takes hold, sometimes as a fixation.

In what follows, we shall focus on a concrete example of such exhibitionist labour. It serves, first, to tie our current propositions together, while also rendering legible the particular ambivalence of transphobia as one core mediating factor, channelling far-right sentiment—i.e., hatred—into more “liberal” fantasies. As implied in Zupančič’s formula, this involves “actively blocking access to the negativity that drives it.” This, as we shall see, is rendered particularly clear in certain populist actors, for whom enjoyment is both forcefully demonstrated and completely disavowed. The case highlights the peculiar centrality of enjoyment by showing how different “gazes” may divide the exhibitionist along the two sides of the superego (the “traditional” and the “obscene”) and how, precisely, the negativity—otherwise recognized as hatred—is “actively blocked.”

HATRED

Few public figures today embody the paradoxes of exhibitionism as vividly as J. K. Rowling. In her self-presentation, the gestures of ethical seriousness and the theatrics of enjoyment exist in perfect, if uneasy, tandem. In the podcast *The Witch Trials of J.K. Rowling* she was interviewed on her decision to “speak out on the trans issue,” rather than remain silent. When the interviewer proposed the philosophical question “How do you know if you’re a *Hermione* or an *Umbridge*?” (i.e., *good or bad*?) Rowling gave this peculiar answer:

“Well, if you’re having a lot of fun doing it and getting a huge sense of self satisfaction out of it, then I do believe you maybe want to stop and think. Am I getting a huge ego rush out of this? That would be a good question to ask yourself, you know, is this giving me pleasure? Because I can say from my heart, none of this has given me pleasure. It has given me anxiety.”¹⁷

This denial of pleasure, which is a recurring theme, is offered as moral proof. It is as if anxiety certifies sincerity as such. It is a performance of ethical purity that seems to echo the Kantian ideal of acting “for the moral law alone.” Yet what makes Rowling so revealing is that this denial is inseparable from an ongoing public display of enjoyment *par excellence*. On X (formerly Twitter), she routinely displays sarcasm, relish, and mockery in defending her cause; she jokes with her allies, taunts opponents, and stages her moral certainty along a kind of jubilant defiance. Her performance on the podcast cannot but appear as a blatant lie. The stain of enjoyment is all over her. But her activism has to appear as the Cause of the big Other. For her, anxiety becomes the mark of obedience, of serving the Law.

But to “serve the Law” reflexively implies occupying the place of its enunciation. There is no big Other: believing yourself to “merely serve” will, by necessity, put you at the place of the bearer of its truth. The structure here can be rendered topologically as the twist of a Möbius strip. At first, Rowling positions herself as the dutiful subject who merely follows the Law: “I do not enjoy, I just speak for what is right,” but following this logic, she effectively becomes the Law’s very embodiment: “I act, mock, and punish in its name.”



J.K. Rowling ✓

@jk_rowling

I love it when a plan comes together.

#SupremeCourt #WomensRights



1:10 AM · April 17, 2025

32.2K Retweets **467K** Likes

To sustain the belief that they speak for the big Other, the exhibitionist must alternately embody and obey its place. At one moment they appear as its humble instrument, compelled by duty; at another, they enjoy the impunity of its unbarred potency. These two positions belong to a single surface: the superego.

We see here how and why Rowling and the current American government are but mirror expressions of the same perverse structural oscillation. On one hand, there are invocations of virtue—"protecting our children," "defending the homeland," "upholding the rule of law." On the other, there is what Mathias Sindberg called "the right-wing's

performative evil,”¹⁸ a display of enjoyment in cruelty: memes about deportation, taunts directed at the vulnerable, ironic celebrations of (state) violence. What Sindberg misses here is how this sadism emerges as a logical extension of the zealous sanctimony of the very same administration.

The function of right-wing populism is, then, to create the necessary “spectacular” semblance of collective identification, and elevate social ruptures to the level of Public concern. Here, subjects like Rowling, who stage their enjoyment as reluctant duty become a proxy through which others can disavow their own pleasures, anxieties, and aggressions in ways that resembles moral clarity. And just as capital produces surplus through the appearance of restraint (saving, investing), perverse activism produces libidinal surplus through sanctified self-positioning. What it provides is not just justification but a necessary displacement, as it allows enjoyment to circulate through the superego’s “obverse” logic of duty; a workload not conferred by just anybody, but by “Reality” or the “Natural Law” itself.

The thoroughly ambivalent economy of optics, and of “managing” the gaze, is key to understanding exhibitionism. What Rowling’s peculiar insistence (“I can say from my heart, none of this has given me pleasure”) reveals is that what’s essential to the exhibitionist is neither God nor doctrine but *optics*, and the enjoyment of what only the gaze allows the production of. Crusaders can rape and pillage same as the “unbelieving savage,” because they are otherwise—in some way—*seen* as the exceptional instrument of divine will. What must be repressed is how this will was essentially constructed retroactively *through their own self-presentation*. Rowling’s differing attitudes renders clear how “different gazes” appeals to different sides of the superego. When broadcast to the wider public, she appears as an anxious heroine, weighted down by her unyielding conscience; when she’s “at home,” on her social-media profile, another side of her emerges. Both express the same “scoptophilia,” albeit enjoyed through differing social laws. This is where the mentioned “ego rush” comes from; why it cannot be acknowledged, and why she perceives it *everywhere else*.

We can call this *projective perversion*. When the pervert themselves may oscillate into unbarred impunity, their peers are presumed to operate according to the same libidinal economy. This is why they decode all benevolence as “virtue signalling”: because they cannot conceive of an act not driven by the pursuit of enjoyment, admiration, or ego-satisfaction. In other words, what is disavowed in themselves—their

own investment in the gaze and in recognition—returns in the field of the Other. The *jouissance* that has become the locus of their own lives is thus projected outward, as the hidden motive behind every altruistic gesture or claim of solidarity. And this “malevolent” Other, imagined as secretly enjoying, must therefore be corrected and made “civilized.”¹⁹ The “crusade,” then, revolves around ceaselessly managing the lack in the Other through repeated stagings of (moral) certainty against the backdrop of an absent symbolic guarantee. And when cracks inevitably appear in that edifice, we are reminded that the pervert’s scene is always marked by their entanglement with the impossible object, *objet petit a*. In one such moment, Rowling tweeted:

In light of recent open letters from academia and the arts criticising the UK’s Supreme Court ruling on sex-based rights, it’s possibly worth remembering that nobody sane believes, or has ever believed, that humans can change sex, or that binary sex isn’t a material fact. These letters do nothing but remind us of what we know only too well: that pretending to believe these things has become an elitist badge of virtue.²⁰

Rowling is here reacting to the thousands of academics who had spoken out in defence of UK’s trans population, and in condemnation of the infamous ruling. What is remarkable is, first, the staging of certainty. It is not just that *she disagrees* with their claims, but that “nobody sane believes,” thereby framing the debate itself as already “false.” Her framing casts these expressions of solidarity not as political acts motivated by ethical conviction, but as performances undertaken for prestige – “badges of virtue” – and a mask for narcissistic gratification. What followed in the (quite long) tweet was not arguments, nor any attempt to “debunk” what was said (in any of the open letters) but a theatrical recollection of the horrors of so-called trans ideology: the “sterilisation of vulnerable and troubled children,” the “narcissistic men who threaten and sometimes enact violence,” and then the rhetorical question, “Do they feel any qualms at all while chanting the foundational lie of their religion: Trans Women are Women, Trans Men are Men?”²¹

At such moments, we could say, the ‘crusader’s’ field of the Other becomes a battlefield, and the only way to “win” is to make the necessary gaze appear: one through which their—why not say it?—*hatred may reign*. The perceived threat from the academics demanded a

compensatory escalation: a recollection of the most hateful tropes, to restore the faltering spectacle. The moment of doubt reflexively flips into the aggressive performance of mastery.

In this sense, the (largely European) notion of *hate crime* certainly points to something Real. Emerging in the aftermath of the Second World War and the unprecedented confrontation with Nazi genocide, the category was devised to name and criminalize a form of violence motivated not by what someone did, but by what someone *is*, or rather, what they are *objectified* as. If our conspiracist subject wagers his enemy as essentially invisible (as a Deceiver hiding in the real), the pervert, in stark contrast, produces a very much *visible* enemy. The fetish-object is essentially invented in propaganda, in which the demographic is saturated with its hateful ideological supplement. What we call *hate-mongering* secures the (“perverse”, “abhorrent”, “dangerous”) reality of the fetish-object by channeling itself into formats like memes, rallies, and linguistic artifacts and clichés that transmit the ideology in which it appears. Thereby, they also flatten the complexity of the social world, converting ethical or scientific questions into platitudes, that immediately reduces complex social and ethical realities to repeatable units (e.g., “biological reality”). Rowling’s insistence that her critics are, as she argued, “chanting the foundational lie of their religion: Trans Women are Women, Trans Men are Men” is therefore projection *par excellence*. The adversary is reduced to a slogan, a repeatable, performative unit, whose repetition sustains her own enjoyment and moral authority.

What this means, is that reality as presented by the fascist (through spectacles, slogans and hate-mongering) should be treated as their “dream,” i.e., as a rebus, of which the real significance is established only when the images fall away²² in the course of *analytical* re-presentation. In the following, we will dive further into this topic of “symbolic degeneration,” by employing the traditional psychoanalytic vocabulary of the interpretation of dreams.

CONTENT

If we maintain that we wake up from a dream into reality so that we can *keep on dreaming*, the pervert is no exception. On the contrary, if we understand the notions of ‘condensation’ and ‘displacement’ as the elementary tectonic shifts of what we otherwise call disavowal, the logical extension of the “dream-work” as an active mediator into social reality becomes tremendously clear in perversion.

This forces us to recognize how the dream, essentially, is fundamentally deceptive. It is not just that the recollection of the dream distorts it, or that the spoken account cannot live up to the “real,” but that the dream—whether meticulously conjured up from the correct restful position on the couch or withdrawn into oblivion before it was ever recalled—was never “immediate” in the first place. As a seemingly frustrated Jacques Lacan puts it:

“What would he have had to add so that we would stop expecting dreams to deliver up the words of the soul? Have the sentences of a rebus ever had the slightest meaning, and does its interest—that is, the interest we take in its deciphering—not derive from the fact that the signification manifest in its images falls away, having no other scope than that of conveying the signifier that is disguised in it?”²³

The variety of techniques invented throughout history to relieve some insight or guidance from the dream phenomena are testaments not to any immediate truth, but to the dream’s *significance*. In psychoanalysis, to speak about a dream is to allow its logic to emerge within a space, where it may reconfigure the subject’s relation to speech and thought itself.

As also argued by Zupančič in the introduction to *What IS Sex?* this is precisely why Lacan proposed that bad psychoanalysts may be recognized by their use of the notion of intellectualization: “the word they use to depreciate all research on technique and theory that furthers the Freudian experience in its authentic dimension.”²⁴ The unconscious *thinks*. The leap from the manifest dream to the so-called latent “dream-thought,” is inextricably linked to the proper *intellectual* process by which the “extra-subjective subject-matter,” of stuff like dreams, dialectically reconfigures into something that recounts in its production a *new signifier*. Such a signifier works most concretely at the level of the unconscious *as a thought*, precipitated in and through the subject’s singular interrogation into the “discourse of the Other.” Hence its notation as a signifier of the Other’s castration, S(~~A~~).

Like with critique of ideology, the interpretation of dreams was always about *unlocking* something. In perversion, we very well say that we have an inverse operation. Instead of an inquiry into what may disguise some path to *desire*, what we’ve discussed here in terms of spectacles, propaganda or slogans are precisely forms into which a

disavowed (hateful) *enjoyment* is “encrypted.” What circulates as “content,” whether online or psychologically, is, to be sure, largely measured by its enjoyment. And as our investigation into the case of J. K. Rowling shows, this encryption is highly necessary. Even the perverse subject, who’ll secure us all that they “know very well,” has to remain ignorant of a certain level of their own involvement in the production of what they enjoy: that there is no big Other, and that they invented their crusade.

As such, the very structures that disguise enjoyment for the perverse subject are the ones that psychoanalysis exposes as formations of dream-work. The Freudian insight here was, essentially, the recognition of the dream’s properly *enigmatic* status. The dream appears as a ‘spectacle’ to the sleeping mind, enigmatic *even to the unconscious itself*. Listening to it, and to its “message,” requiring not decoding so much as reverse-engineering: an operation aimed at understanding the fundamental logics of its encryption. And as it happens, this always entails putting it “out there” in the field in which such logic was founded; in the field of “love,” and the perspective of the Two. Love, in this sense, is the name for the subject’s encounter with the Other as *co-participant* in truth.

Perversion, by contrast, abolishes this minimal scene of the Two. Speech here does not aim to reach the Other, but *to overwrite it* and install itself in the position of the Other speaking without interruption; without symbolic castration. From the perverse perspective there can be no enigma, no “*Che vuoi?*” The structure manifests in a world of platitudes and pseudo-questions because *thought itself* literally undergoes a certain corruption, or, as Lacan suggested, a “*masking*” of the “conflictual articulation at the level of logic itself.”²⁵ Zupančič dramatized this logic as following: “I exercise my cognitive abilities, and abundantly so, in order not to think. I’m smarter than to think. I know better than to think.”²⁶ It may attain the appearance of thinking, even philosophical inquiry, but only in the service of giving up the Real of knowledge to the Other, which is to say, *to obscurity*. And is this not precisely how we should understand right-wing’s fundamentally unidirectional apprehension of “Free Speech”? What it defends is not speech as a site of *response*, but speech literally purified of alterity and, namely, *responsibility*. It presupposes a language stripped of reciprocity, where one speaks first and foremost to sustain the illusion that one’s word or proposition is self-sufficient. What presents itself as a defence of “discourse” becomes instead its abolition. “Free Speech,” as this

particular populist cliché, functions as a fetish that forbids speech from being mediated by the enigma of (the barred Other's) *desire*. If anything, this was precisely what the late Charlie Kirk's spectacles were about: disavowing the unilateral nature of populist discourse behind a veil of "honest debate." The Right's pseudo-dialogue functions almost as a ritualized scene in which the partner's insufficiency—typically a liberal, feminist, or trans interlocutor—reaffirms the Speaker's access to the big Other's "treasure trove." Yet what is nonetheless revealed is how this disavowal requires a peculiar "detour" of knowledge, or, rather, lack hereof. This partner may be enjoyed (i.e., ridiculed), but there's also a necessary function here, especially regarding one particularly problematic—if yet insistent—rupture: sexual difference.

TRANSPHOBIA

Take the often repeated *gotcha*-question: "What is a woman?"

Framed as an inquiry into "gender ideology," the questionⁱⁱ demands a proposition that must be immediate, final, and immune to contradiction. The purpose of the gesture lies, first, in staging the partner's hesitation, but there's also another function; one that regards the problem of the Woman's non-existence, and the "lack of the binary signifier." A partner is needed to answer here precisely *because* the Woman—as Lacan posited—*does not exist*. By staging and enjoying the partner's missing answer, the "missing signifier" stays missing, while the very fantasy that there is a Woman and a sexual Relation, can live on. Posing the question to the partner becomes itself a way of solidifying the Woman in the very heart of the patriarchy. The question does not seek to think women or womanhood, but to preclude the necessity of thought altogether, by restoring Her —and the sexual non-relation as such — to an immediacy proper to the big Other.

As such, what returns in debates about transgender is at once an anxious reaction to a fracture in the sexual, and the repetition of a particular archaic fantasy. In a succinct formulation, Alenka Zupančič isolates this fantasy's political core:

"Policing 'trans' and policing 'women' are essentially part of the same agenda. 'Trans' functions as the surplus object in which

ii The question is often used in debates as a shameless deflection when women's issues in other contexts are brought up. «So you want to talk about abortion? What is a woman?»

the lack of a signifier for the ‘other sex’ appears as something positive, something visible and external. The underlying idea is that if you remove this surplus object, women will be ‘whole’ again—they will function as the proper signifying counterpart to men, and this restored complementarity will resolve the sexual as well as social (non-)relation.”²⁷

When ideas about female identity now circulate among the same actors who’ve routinely mocked “identity politics,” it is no real contradiction. The political Right has always centered around identitarian images; not so much as identities among others, but as monolithic, naturalized ideals. Identity politics, when employed in the service of naturalizing social, racial or sexual hierarchies, is often so central that it becomes almost invisible.

Here, the figure of the trans person becomes a fetish-object through which the fantasy of a whole, unified Woman is reinforced. A strategy that may appear to be a recent invention, but the now-familiar idea that trans women are agents of patriarchal colonization can be traced back at least to 1979 and Janice G. Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*.²⁸ As we’ve just established, one need not think the Woman, for “Her” to effectively work in discourse. When thought like Raymond’s, once confined to a marginal strain of second-wave feminism, is now absorbed into mainstream reactionary politics, it is because it erects the Woman *by negation*: by being *anti-trans*.

What is more puzzling how Raymond’s thought appeared within the institutional *heart* of *Lacanian psychoanalysis*. Cited as a “feminist study,” *Transsexual Empire* functions as the platform from which Catherine Millot’s *Horsexe* takes its departure. It even reproduces the infamous assertion that “All transsexuals rape women’s bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact”²⁹—to “reinforce their ineradicable virility,”³⁰ as Millot puts it.

At this point, it seems safe to conclude that the theme of transgender functions as a *convergent*: a point where disavowed tensions within discourses crystallize. As such, it should not come as a surprise if the paradigmatic example of transphobic literature in psychoanalysis simultaneously appears as a text-book case of what Gabriel Tupinambá called *Lacanian ideology*.

We’ve already explored how the libidinal structure of perversion differs from the “conspiracist” paranoid’s. Speaking of transgender,

the type of obsession found in the latter is neatly exemplified in the “transvestigation” phenomenon, as the conspiratorial hunt for hidden transness in others, often celebrities. What’s essential here is, again, the sensation of being deceived. Perverse transphobia, on the other hand, is often fixated on maintaining that *no such ambiguity ever existed in the first place*. Here, the enjoyment lies not in being deceived but in the rush of performing certainty that “trans people don’t truly exist,” or that “trans is a delusion.”

Psychoanalytic philosophy, as I’ve tried to show here, is uniquely equipped to sustain and mediate the contradictions of which fascism demands disavowal. But to do so, it must, of course, resist the temptation to become one more apparatus of such disavowal. *Horsexe* plants itself neither cleanly within the perverse or paranoiac register, but alludes to both.

In the final, concluding remarks of her ‘*Essay on transsexuality*,’ Millot recalls an encounter with a young trans-masculine person who visited her in the hope of receiving a referral for gender-affirming care. But rather than clarifying the limits of her position as a traditional psychoanalyst, Millot delivers a verdict: “Surgery would merely exchange one lie for another,”³¹ she says.

Most symptomatically, the scene takes place neither quite inside the clinic, nor fully outside it, but literally at the threshold. By positioning herself at the gates, she maintains an indistinction between the outside and inside of the domain of psychoanalysis, which is only reinforced on the spoken level, at which her refusal is presented with detached neutrality, as simply “one lie for another,” thus clearly disavowing how one of these lies has been devaluated throughout all the preceding pages. The book then ends with this rather theatrical demonstration, as Millot fixes the reader’s gaze on her act of refusal. In the guise of exercising the psychoanalytic “heroism of the lack,” Millot offers closure to an edifice at the exact place at which it should be open. What is foreclosed here is, incidentally, precisely what later Lacanians—most notably the Ljubljana school—would re-open: the possibility that the ‘ethical act’ may very well occur outside the clinic and take forms unimaginable to the analyst.

The act of sexual transitioning could be seen as an expression of desire in the most radical sense. But because of this this feature—the disregard for the given (‘relation’)—it appears transgressive, which precisely is why it so often provokes what Zupančič, in her *Ethics of the Real*, called the “fundamental ideological gesture:”

“This is why we propose to maintain the concept of the act developed by Kant, and to link it to the thematic of ‘overstepping of boundaries,’ of ‘transgression’, to the question of evil. It is a matter of acknowledging the fact that any (ethical) act, precisely in so far as it is an *act*, is necessarily ‘evil’. ... The fundamental ideological gesture consists in providing an image for this structural ‘evil’. The gap opened by an act (i.e. the unfamiliar, ‘out-of-place’ effect of an act) is immediately linked in this ideological gesture to an image. As a rule this is an image of suffering, which is then displayed to the public alongside this question: *Is this what you want?* And this question already implies the answer: *It would be impossible, inhuman, for you to want this!*”³²

In insisting on the “heroism of the lack” outside its domain (within the confinements of clinical psychoanalysis proper), Millot exemplifies something noticed by Tupinambá: that *clinical* theory serves most primarily to support the analyst’s “*identity*” as someone supposed to sustain the tensions that characterizes their particular work.³³ This is, reflexively, what drives psychoanalysis to distance itself from its exterior, and often define itself in opposition to other forms of healthcare. This may be both productive and necessary, but may also, as demonstrated by the case of *Horsexe*, be *pure ideology*. This point is only rendered more vivid in the following example:

The transsexual, who is formed through assignation by the other—a doctor or psychologist—finds an obdurate [SIC] and even fallacious response to the enigma of his desire when he encounters his Other in Science. The desire of the Other is no longer veiled, the verdict is pronounced: let him be operated on.³⁴

Millot’s words crystallize the moment at which psychoanalysis, in defending its own purity, confuses its ethical limit with an ontological one. The figure of “Science” is cast as an unbarred Other, “cutting” into the real. Her anti-trans attitude is staged as fidelity to lack, when in fact it masks an investment in preserving a particular image of psychoanalysis, and her as its faithful crusader. Trans people became the fetish-object, the impurity, that allowed this fantasy to be demonstrated.

This disjunction, where psychoanalysis meets politics and ideology, is something we should address as *a structural gap*; an opening at

which we maintain psychoanalysis as ever evolving. Even if the unconscious is “ahistorical,” *psychoanalysis*, in its concrete manifestations, is simply not. In the preface of Tupinambá’s book, Slavoj Žižek makes a striking formulation that cuts directly to this problem: a madman is not only “a king who thinks he is a king: a madman is also an analyst who thinks he is an analyst.” The analyst, Žižek reminds us, is essentially a *function*. To believe that one simply *is* an analyst, outside or beyond the contingency of the function, is to fall into the very form of ideology that psychoanalysis is meant to interrupt: “The moment we substantialize the analyst... all the deadlocks of how to deal with a Master reappear.”³⁵

If perversion is defined by its resistance to transference, what my analysis proposes is, in the end, something that everyone who knows anything about predatory behaviour already knows: that “perversion” may likely begin at the exact place at which “love”-relations are supposed to be handled. As Lacan stressed, these are indeed games to which we must pay attention. Whether in the assumption of authority over the limits of sex, or in the long process of grooming subjects into places within it, *perversion* lies not first in the act of transgression, and definitely not in any “transgressive identity,” but in the labour of creating the scene, from where transgressions goes unnoticed.

1 Lacan 2023: 220
2 Lee 2022: 10
3 Tupinambá 2021: Ch. 4
4 Lacan 2023: 254
5 Žižek 2009: 142
6 Zupančič 2024: Ch. 3
7 *Ibid.*
8 *Ibid.*
9 *Ibid.*

- 10 Žižek 2009: 49
 11 Zupančič 2025
 12 Ibid.
 13 Lacan 2023: 253
 14 Ibid.: 254
 15 Tupinambá 2021: 129
 16 Zupančič 2017: 104
 17 Phelps-Roper 2023
 18 Sindberg 2025
 19 Lacan 2023: 220
 20 Rowling 2025
 21 Ibid.
 22 Lacan 2005: 394
 23 Ibid.
 24 Ibid.: 435
 25 Ibid.: 293
 26 Zupančič 2024: Ch. 2
 27 Zupančič 2025
 28 Raymond 1994
 29 Raymond 1994: 104
 30 Millot 1990: 14
 31 Ibid.: 143
 32 Zupančič 2000: 95
 33 Tupinambá 2021: 78
 34 Millot 1990: 140
 35 Tupinambá 2021: xii

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