

# On Ambivalence

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The term “ambivalence” was coined a little over hundred years ago by Eugen Bleuler, the then director of Burghölzli, who despite sympathizing with psychoanalysis refrained from becoming a genuine part of the emerging Freudian collective body. In the end, his insistence on maintaining his individuality produced an ironic twist: while Freud (and Jung, for that matter) became popular authors, Bleuler was left with the impossible trophy of being the author of popular signifiers, the author of terms that seem to have appeared out of nowhere: in addition to ambivalence, he ought to be credited for inventing “autism” and “schizophrenia.”

It is well known that Freud was not very enthusiastic about the latter terms and kept insisting on paraphrenia and narcissism, respectively. As for ambivalence, he accepted it immediately and without hesitation. When introduced in Freud’s essays, ambivalence is accompanied with a whole series of laudatory remarks: the term is *glücklich, gut, passend, trefflich*, “happily chosen” (Freud 2001 [1905], p. 199), “excellent” (Freud 2001 [1912], p. 106), “appropriate” (Freud 2001 [1909], p. 239n), “very apt” (Freud 2001 [1915], p. 131). Although he rarely fails to point out that he is not the author of the term, he never bothers to present the reader with the particular clinical framework within which the term has been invented. The praise of the author is here transformed into the praise of the term itself, the quotation does not add anything to Bleuler’s authority; it is rather an excuse to repeatedly point to the authority and breakthrough nature of the

very conceptual background that made the invention possible. Ambivalence entered Freud's theory at a certain point in time, but it seems as if it had been there from the very start, Bleuler's only credit thus being primarily one of craftsmanship. The expression is *trefflich*, it struck the field into which it was included; it is very apt, but for Freud it is by no means an intervention of a new theoretical content to which psychoanalysis would have to adapt. Ambivalence, in short, is *passend*; it perfectly fits the frame of psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, this excessive agreement contains a trap. The looseness of the term, which later blurred its theoretical origin, is perhaps not a fluke, rather the problem is already inscribed into the gesture of Freud's acceptance. This is also the way we can understand Lacan's remark regarding ambivalence in *Seminar XX*.

In no way does Lacan share Freud's explicit affirmation of the term, quite the contrary. Yet he remains very explicit, adding the following to Freud's series of laudations: the term is *bastardized*:

What I will willingly write to you today as "*hainamoration*" is the depth (*relief*) psychoanalysis was able to introduce in order to situate the zone of its experience. It was evidence of good will on its part. If only it had been able to call it by some other name than the bastardized one of "ambivalence," perhaps it would have succeeded better in shaking up the historical setting in which it inserted itself. But perhaps that was modesty on its part. (Lacan 1999, pp. 90–1)

While Freud accepted Bleuler's term without hesitation, not taking much heed of the original context, there seems to be an inverted situation here. Lacan not only acknowledges the Freudian context but is himself immersed in it—this, after all, is what makes Lacan Lacan—directing his critique precisely at the term which Freud immediately accepted as a part of his own theory. However, one should notice how Lacan actually sees more in ambivalence than Freud himself: what Freud, despite all the praise, still considers to be a particular element of the system, becomes

the possibly ultimate signifier of psychoanalysis. “Ambivalence” was indeed *trefflich*, it did hit the mark, the only problem being that the hit should have come from within.

There is, however, another difference between the two approaches. Freud, on the one hand, implicitly favours the couple of love and hate while, at the same time, definitely detecting a problem in it; however, he shifts the core of this problem to other manifestations of ambivalence, this shift being precisely that which effectively drives other levels of the discussion on ambivalence: in the case of other binary oppositions, the logic of the love/hate couple becomes increasingly more complicated. On the other hand, Lacan’s neologism focuses entirely on the love/hate relation; he seems to claim that the entire question of ambivalence can be pinned to this couple. But we must not overlook the fact that love and hate are no longer mere primary examples of ambivalence—Lacan pushes their exemplary status to the point where the referent of such an example itself disappears. It is precisely the montage-writing of the singular (*l’hainamoration*) that brings forth the emergence of the core of psychoanalytic experience. If Freud examined the excess of the love/hate couple in other fields, Lacan renounces other fields, thereby transforming the problematic excess of this opposition into a non-relation; everything is encompassed in this pair of love and hate, but only at the cost of it ceasing to be a pair at all. What, in Freud’s own work, provides the basis for this return to Freud?

The first indirect hint at an answer to this question is perhaps provided precisely by the multiplication of the pairs of opposites that Freud relates to the problem of ambivalence. In the time-period of almost thirty years between the introduction of the concept and Freud’s death, ambivalence left its mark in practically every field of Freud’s inquiry. The first and last mention of ambivalence concerns the problem of transference, with the simultaneity of positive and negative transference leading Freud to directly affirm the following: the “transference is ambivalent” (Freud 2001 [1940],

p. 175).<sup>1</sup> For Freud, ambivalence of transference is a consequence of another classic locus of ambivalence, namely the relation towards the father, which extends to the relation to God, thus implying the broader question of religious ambivalence (*cf.* Freud 2001 [1923]; Freud 2001 [1939]; Freud 2001 [1913]). Moreover, it concerns the already mentioned pairs of love and hate, the active and the passive, as well as—in *extremis*—the eternal struggle between Eros and the destructive drive. Viewed from this perspective, ambivalence would seem to always be at work within a given pair of opposites, with every pair displaying a tendency of appearing to oscillate between the two extremes, with the unity of this opposition remaining (exclusively) a matter of prehistory.<sup>2</sup>

The first question that strikes us when faced with such a manifold list is, of course, which of the pairs of opposites represents the original form of ambivalence, which of them serves as the prototype for the multitude of ambivalences. And one could say that, despite a few slips, such as the linear derivation of the ambivalence of transference from the originally ambivalent attitude towards the father, this question does not receive a definitive answer. The theoretical advantage of the privileged love/hate relation lies therefore in the fact that, in principle, it can be inscribed into any pair. This is true of course under the condition that the emphasis is not transferred to the triumph of emotions, that the

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<sup>1</sup> See also Freud 2001 [1912], p. 107, where he limits the ambivalence of transference to curable forms of psychoneuroses: “Where the capacity for transference has become essentially limited to a negative one, as is the case with paranoics, there ceases to be any possibility of influence or cure.”

<sup>2</sup> Examples of this include the taboo and certain *Urworte*, such as the famous Latin word *altus* and the increasingly (in)famous *sacer*, which were also mentioned by Bleuler in a reference to Freud’s recently published text on the *Gegensinn der Urworte* (Freud 2001 [1910]). A perhaps more interesting theory of the ambivalence of words is the one Freud develops for the concept *unheimlich*: “Thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*.” (Freud 2001 [1919], p. 226)

problem of ambivalence is not reduced to the question of the ambivalence of feeling. To put this differently, under the condition that ambivalence does not slip to the level of the predicate, the level of “being ambivalent,” but retains its structural dimension.

The second perspective that I would like to introduce at this point is not radically opposed to the first one, i.e. to the multiplication of pairs, but rather stands for its inner turn, its split into two. The very insistence that the main reach of ambivalence is the oscillation between the pairs of opposites introduces a certain doubt as to whether the essence of ambivalence is within the oscillation between two “actualized” affections or is instead a question of the *conditions* of this oscillation. The problem is that, in Freud, the second thematization does not appear separately from the first one; there is no text containing the theory of ambivalence independently of its phenomenal forms: ambivalence exists only in the material that appears in the form of a multitude of ambivalences.

And this is precisely the reason why it might seem that the focus on other phenomena of ambivalence may pose a danger of an impermissible extension of the original ambivalence of love and hate to other pairs of opposites. However, this impression fails to consider the fact that Freud’s accumulation of analogies effectively aims at introducing a formal aspect of the concept of ambivalence, that it is an extension that entails a narrowing down, a sharpening of the problem, i.e. its actual conceptualization. Although it may seem that Freud extends the circle of ambivalence because it had proven to be *trefflich* in relation to love and hate, it can be shown that the real reason for this extension is the fact that there is a problem in the love/hate relation that exceeds the common notion of them being two interconnected, yet autonomous affections.

However, as we cannot take a shortcut around Freud, we will proceed step by step, starting precisely with the love/hate opposition. The best illustration of the complexity of the latter—which is perhaps not surprising in view of the above—is provided by a

case dated just before Bleuler's invention of ambivalence, a case to which Freud added a note only *post festum*, pointing out the agreement between his own theory and the new term, i.e. the case of Rat Man.

The obsessional neurosis proves to be the most suitable field for the explicit emergence of the problem, insofar as in obsessional neurosis ambivalence appears in its explicit, or rather, explicated, "unravelling" form, i.e., it consists of a conflict between two impulses towards a single person, the conflict of love and hate. For Freud, this conflict is more challenging (both in theory and in praxis) than the other conflict that also marks the Rat Man, namely the opposition between two objects, his fiancée and his dead father. According to Freud, the latter corresponds "to the normal vacillation between male and female which characterizes every one's choice of a love-object [...] first brought to the child's notice by the time-honoured question: 'Who do you love most, Daddy or Mummy?'" This conflict can vary in intensity and can also lead to one or the other fixation of the subject's sexual aim, "but normally [it] soon loses the character of a hard-and-fast contradiction, of an inexorable 'either-or'. Room is found for satisfying the unequal demands of both sides, although even in a normal person the higher estimation of one sex is always thrown into relief by a depreciation of the other." (Freud 2001 [1909], p. 238)

Here, the choice of one element occurs smoothly and, in principle, reduces the intensity of the opposite element, i.e., the condition of the vacillation is a drop in intensity on the one side.<sup>3</sup> In the conflict of love and hate, we witness an inverse logic. It is impossible to choose one at the expense of the other since the choice of one actually intensifies the other:

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<sup>3</sup> The decrease in intensity having external reasons, as is suggested by the following observation from Freud's analysis of Schreber: "Generally speaking, every human being oscillates all through his life between heterosexual and homosexual feelings, and any frustration or disappointment in the one direction is apt to drive him over into the other." (Freud 2001 [1911], p. 46)

We should have expected that the passionate love would long ago have conquered the hatred or been devoured by it. And in fact such a protracted survival of two opposites is only possible under quite peculiar psychological conditions and with the co-operation of the state of affairs in the unconscious. The love has not succeeded in extinguishing the hatred but only in driving it down into the unconscious; and in the unconscious the hatred, safe from the danger of being destroyed by the operations of consciousness, is able to persist and even to grow. In such circumstances the conscious love attains as a rule, by way of reaction, an especially high degree of intensity, so as to be strong enough for the perpetual task of keeping its opponent under repression. The necessary condition for the occurrence of such a strange state of affairs in a person's erotic life appears to be that at a very early age, somewhere in the prehistoric period of his infancy, the two opposites should have been split apart and one of them, usually the hatred, have been repressed. (Freud 2001 [1909], p. 239)<sup>4</sup>

The formula is thus inverse: choosing love always means choosing hate as well, and the entire spectacle of love only serves to conceal the failure of keeping both impulses apart. What is essential here, however, is that love and hate are caught in a specific causal loop. Not only is love a mere reaction-formation that fights in vain against the inert unconscious "truth," without access to the dynamics of the latter; it is rather love—and not hate—that is the central agent of the *unconscious mechanism* of repression. The process of defence is infinite, insofar as the reaction-formation is nothing but a repetition of the initial repression itself.

What we have before us here is a nice illustration of the quandary of defence, which Freud captured a few years later under the concept of vicissitude of the drive, *Tribschicksal*: at first

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<sup>4</sup> At one point, Bleuler uses the following accounting metaphor: "The split psyche of the patients [...] is keeping accounts on the active and the passive, but is unable to summarize both evaluation rows into a consistent record." (Bleuler [1910]).

sight, it would seem that this term designates the functioning of the drives in a closed space of the unconscious, i.e. the way that drives circulate in their inert nature. For Freud, the “vicissitudes” are at the same time the “modes of defence against the instincts” (Freud 2001 [1915], p. 127); they encompass both the defended instance and the instance against which the former defends itself. In the last instance, it is this paradox that prompts us to focus on the economic aspect, i.e. on the problem of the quantity of a certain investment. And we could say that it is precisely in the places where this aspect comes to the forefront that Freud confronts the paradox of the unconscious in its pure form: there is a peculiar psychical quantity that traverses all dualisms.

Perhaps the original problem of the quotation posed above is that Freud is too quick in mapping the existing substantial opposition of love and hate that doesn’t allow isolating the one from the other onto the original, prehistoric separation of the two elements. For, by way of explanation, he immediately adds that we

know too little of the nature of love to be able to arrive at any definite conclusion here; and, in particular, the relation between the negative factors in love and the sadistic components of the libido remains completely obscure. What follows is therefore to be regarded as no more than a provisional explanation. We may suppose, then, that in the cases of unconscious hatred with which we are concerned the sadistic components of love have, from constitutional causes, been exceptionally strongly developed, and have consequently undergone a premature and all too thorough suppression, and that the neurotic phenomena we have observed arise on the one hand from conscious feelings of affection which have become exaggerated as a reaction, and on the other hand from sadism persisting in the unconscious in the form of hatred. (Freud 2001 [1909], p. 240)

What now appears as a dualism of conscious love and unconscious hate is not simply a consequence of the repression of hate, but rather of the repression of the sadistic component of love itself at a time when love had not yet been determined as

a tender opposite of aggression, i.e. when love was not yet love in the strict sense of “genital love.” It is precisely this repression of the sadistic component of love that forms not only the hostile pole but the dynamics of the relation as such.

There is no doubt that, in obsessional neurosis, there is an inexorable *conceptual* separation of the two impulses. However, on the existential level, the situation is precisely the opposite one: love and hate never seem to appear separately. This problem is most clearly observable in the example of the paradigmatic mode of symptom-formation in obsessional neurosis, i.e. in the so-called “two-stage” compulsive acts (*zweizeitige Zwangshandlungen*). A nice example of this is once again provided by the Rat Man’s well-known episode about the carriage, the road and the stone. On the day his beloved departed, Freud reports, the Rat Man

knocked his foot against a stone lying in the road, and was obliged to put it out of the way by the side of the road, because the idea struck him that her carriage would be driving along the same road in a few hours’ time and might come to grief against this stone. But a few minutes later it occurred to him that this was absurd, and he was obliged to go back and replace the stone in its original position in the middle of the road. (Freud 2001 [1909], p. 190)

Freud interprets this act as a plastic illustration of Rat Man’s struggle between love and hate: if, in view of this, the removal of the stone is a “deed of love,” then returning it to its original position betrays a hostile impulse, the wish “that her carriage might come to grief against it and she herself be hurt.”

We shall not be forming a correct judgement of this second part of the compulsive act if we take it at its face value as having merely been a critical repudiation of a pathological action. The fact that it was accompanied by a sense of compulsion betrays it as having itself been a part of the pathological action, though a part which was determined by a motive contrary to that which produced the first part. (Freud 2001 [1909], pp. 191–2)

It is evident that the third element traversing the pair is the element of compulsion, which accompanies and connects the first two. The unconscious of compulsion is by all means a different kind of unconscious than the unconscious of the hostile impulse—and if Freud focuses on Rat Man’s inability to realize that the critical repudiation of a pathological act (this time, the pathology of loving care) is not simply neutral but already contains a hostile impulse, then the introduction of compulsion once again brings into focus the two-stage act as a whole. Since it was preceded by a preliminary stage—i.e., the instant when he knocked his foot against a stone—it is as such *nothing but a reaction*, an attempt to decipher the sign brought to him by his foot, so to say, to respond to the non-neutrality of the sign, to its ambivalent nature, to the objective appearance of ambivalence.

In the analysis of Rat Man, the materiality of ambivalence appears at yet another well-known point when, during analysis, the Rat Man reproduces the triggering moment of his great obsessive idea, after which he was named. Freud presents the difficulties that Rat Man has in recapping a story told by the captain he dreaded about “a specially horrible punishment used in the East” from two aspects.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, the overcoming of resistances triggers the unintelligibility of expression and a painful progression from one detail of the narrative to the next. On the other hand, the resistances are granted their own plastic representation:

At all the more important moments while he was telling his story his face took on a very strange, composite expression. I could only interpret it as one of horror at pleasure of his own of which he himself was unaware. (Freud 2001 [1909], pp. 166–7)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In the story, a pot was placed upside down on a criminal’s buttocks and then some rats were put in it, boring their way into the criminal’s anus.

<sup>6</sup> A similar case of object-ambivalence is reported in the first few paragraphs of Bleuler’s text: “A [...] mother has poisoned her child; but in retrospect she is in despair over her deed. However, what strikes one’s attention is that despite

While the first aspect focuses on the vacillation between *telling and not telling*, i.e. on the struggle of symbolization when it strikes its Real core, the second aspect, the aspect of affection, makes this core appear in the most definite yet internally split form of the subject's own pleasure of which he himself was unaware. It is precisely this composite expression, demonstrating the subject's ignorance of his own pleasure, that receives its correlate in the triggered obsessive idea—the idea that this punishment is *impersonally* imposed on a person dear to him. The fact that both his beloved lady and his dead father can assume the place of the affected person is evidence that, in the obsessive idea, both Rat Man's prevailing conflicts, the ambivalence of love and hate and the opposition between two loved persons, are condensed in a specific way.

The example of the two-stage symptom showed that the core of ambivalence amounting to an indifferent act receives its extension in compulsion. At the first level, compulsion is ascribed to each act separately, while, at the second level, it—precisely as their common element, as the element traversing them—*demands* that the pair of opposites appear as a pair. In other words, compulsion in this case appeared as a correlate of the split into two impulses, as the persistence of this split.

In the second case, ambivalence is expressed through contradictory pleasure, a subject's pleasure of which he is unaware, thereby no longer appearing as a function of doubt but as one of certainty. Thus, the compulsion that first assumed the character of the certainty of vacillation itself, now receives its own

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all the whistling and weeping *the mouth clearly laughs* [*der Mund ganz deutlich lacht*]. The patient is unaware of this [Letzteres ist der Kranken unbewußt]. [...] The mother who killed her child and now—despite her despair—*laughs with the mouth* [*mit dem Munde lacht*]. She did not kill the child by accident but following a long struggle. Hence, she must have had a reason to kill the child. She does not love her husband, and she loathes this man's child. That is why she killed the child and is now laughing about it; but the child is also hers and therefore she loves it and cries over its death." (Bleuler [1910]; my emphasis)

“representation,” its great obsessive idea. The great obsessive idea is not merely one among Rat Man’s obsessive ideas that he manages to defend himself against with his usual formulas (with “a ‘but’ accompanied by a gesture of repudiation, and the phrase ‘whatever are you thinking of?’” [Freud 2001 [1909], p. 167]); rather, it is an obsessive *representation* into which the correlate of compulsion is inscribed. It is a staging of the Real core, a staging of the creation of the Symbolic, in this sense coming close to what Freud would later capture by the concept of “construction in the analysis.” More precisely, if at first Rat Man manages to defend himself against this obsessive idea in the usual way, once an opportunity arises for the establishment of the series *Ratte*—*Spielratte*—*Raten*—*heiraten* this defence fails.

What, then, is the actual core of this great obsessive idea? What precisely is there in this obsessive idea that functions as a correlate to the composite expression? It is evident that it is not simply the primary idea of the rat punishment. As long as it appears as a compulsive thought, where compulsion is an external predicate of thought, it can be eliminated by formulas, which are likewise a compulsive repetition of the same content. The situation becomes complicated when compulsion is internalized, whereby the dualism of compulsive form and content loses its ground. The very content of the idea starts functioning as form, compulsively producing a signifying series whose core is no longer the signified “rat” or some external element (e.g., “debt”) but the independent signifying fragment “*r-a-t*,” which is the actual driving force in the formation of the series—but, we have to add, only and precisely insofar as it is itself already a record of the materialization of the signifier *Ratte*. This element functions as a correlate of pleasure represented by the composite expression of knowledge not knowing itself. In this element, the innermost part of the signifier, its ability to produce associative relations in the form of a series, comes into contact with a seemingly extra-signifying object, namely pleasure, which cannot be captured with words

and thus resists symbolization. The obstacle to symbolization is produced precisely as the materialization of the signifier.

In Freud, the inner contradiction of ambivalence is shown in its most expressive and speculative form at the point where he relates ambivalence to the question of the drives. In the already mentioned metapsychological essay *Triebe und Triebchicksale*, we come across a moment of productive unclarity. It seems that Freud's oscillating between the broader and narrower meanings of ambivalence (i.e., ambivalence of feeling) appears within a single text under the framework of a single question. When Freud lists "reversal into its opposite" as one of the possible vicissitudes of the drives that he observes, we at first have before us a situation suggesting an established use of the concept of ambivalence. At the first level, the reversal into the opposite is split into two different processes: first, a change from activity to passivity, and second, a reversal of its content. Later in the text, Freud examines the process of the reversal of content in the case of love changing into hate—which is "the single instance of the transformation" (Freud 2001 [1915], p. 127). For Freud, their frequent coexistence, their simultaneous focus on the same object, provides the most important examples of the ambivalence of feeling, *Gefühlsambivalenz* (*ibid.*, p. 133).

If this were all, ambivalence would serve only as a description of a special case of reversal, more precisely, it would designate the consequences of one of the cases of reversal, the coexistence of opposite feelings that a subject has for the same object. In this case, Freud would be speaking in terms of predicate ambivalence, of "being ambivalent." Although such a simplified understanding is no doubt abundantly exemplified by Freud's uses of the term, the concept proves to be much more complicated in the context of the vicissitudes of the drives.

At the first level, it seems that in the text there is only a parallel use of the concept of ambivalence, i.e. only the explication of its meaning. This claim is supported by the fact that the second part

of the “reversal into its opposite” —the change from activity to passivity—also becomes related to ambivalence: “The fact that, at this later period of development of an instinctual impulse, its (passive) opposite may be observed alongside of it deserves to be marked by the very apt term introduced by Bleuler – ‘ambivalence.’” (Freud 2001 [1915], p.131) The motif for extending the use of the concept seems clear: what makes up the essence of ambivalence is not determined substantially in terms of love and hate, but is a matter of a formal coexistence. So, when Freud notes that “the earlier active direction of the drive persists to some degree side by side with its later passive direction, even when the process of its transformation has been very extensive” (*ibid.*, p. 130), there is no reason not to describe the relation of active and passive using the same term.

The first consequence of this extension is that, despite the explicit separation of the two types of reversal into opposites, the two share a common point that concerns precisely the failure of the reversal: the second member of the pair does not eliminate the first one, the substitute does not annul the original. In this sense, ambivalence is no longer a specific characteristic of a special case of the reversal into opposite, but precisely the point in which both processes that are declaratively “different in their nature” (*ibid.*, p. 127) lose their fundamental distinguishing feature.

But at this point things are complicated even further. As mentioned, Freud lists all four vicissitudes undergone by the drives, but focuses on “the reversal into its opposite” and “turning round upon the subject’s own self,” while leaving the remaining two, “repression” and “sublimation,” for another time.<sup>7</sup> The logic of pairs followed by Freud here works out on the declarative level, insofar as the distinguishing criterion between the reversal into its opposite and the turning round upon the subject’s own self lies in the fact

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<sup>7</sup> Freud addresses repression in an eponymous essay written in the same year. Sublimation was supposedly the topic of one of his lost metapsychological essays.

that each of them fundamentally concerns one of the dimensions of the drive. The first is determined by the change of the aim with the object remaining unchanged, while the second is characterized by the change of object with the aim remaining unchanged. Examples of the first process are provided by the following pairs of opposites: sadism–masochism and scopophilia–exhibitionism. The matter is clear: sadism relates to the active aim of “torturing,” while masochism relates to the passive aim of “being tortured”; scopophilia, *Schaulust*, is related to “looking at,” while exhibitionism is characterized by “being looked at.” But the problem is that the operation of turning round of a drive upon the subject’s own self, which supposedly entails the change of object while retaining the drive’s aim, is represented by the same pairs of opposites:

The turning round of an instinct upon the subject’s own self is made plausible by the reflection that masochism is actually sadism turned round upon the subject’s own ego, and that exhibitionism includes looking at his own body. Analytic observation, indeed, leaves us in no doubt that the masochist shares in the enjoyment of the assault upon himself, and that the exhibitionist shares in the enjoyment of his exposure. The essence of the process is thus the change of the object, while the aim remains unchanged. (Freud 2001 [1915], p. 127)

Not only have the two sub-processes of the reversal into its opposite been merged at the formal level; at the higher hierarchical level, the declarative disjunction between object and aim also merged the moment both examples were introduced. In consequence, Freud immediately ascertains that “we cannot fail to notice, however, that in these examples the turning round upon the subject’s self and the transformation from activity to passivity converge or coincide” (Freud 2001 [1915], p. 127). And when he announces that he will present the *process* by considering the example of the sadism–masochism pair of opposites, it is not clear which of the above processes he is actually referring to—the presentation of the process can actually be conducted only in view of the example.

If, with the introduction of the example, the two separate processes merged into one, it is precisely this unified perspective that once again has to dissolve into two. Instead of two processes, we follow a double perspective, two interconnected explanations of one and the same process. The first, basically linear explanation is given as follows:

- a) sadism is an exercise of violence against another person as the object;
- b) the object is replaced by the subject's self and this is the point where the active aim changes into a passive one;
- c) an extraneous person is sought as the object which, due to the alteration in the aim, assumes the role of the subject, the bearer of activity.

But already within this linear explanation there occurs step *b*, which—*stricto sensu*—does not exist in sadism and masochism and would be unnecessary and invisible in the eyes of this transformation. But still, its theoretical construction is necessary, and according to Freud the first argument for its introduction is already provided by the fact that this is the point where obsessional neurosis stops: sadism is not transformed into masochism, the sadistic drive turns round upon the subject's own self without complementing this passivity with another person as the bearer of activity: "The desire to torture has turned into self-torture and self-punishment, not into masochism." (Freud 2001 [1915], p. 128) If, at first sight, the transformation of sadism into masochism seems to be a transformation of pure activity into pure passivity, it is nonetheless not realizable without this additional stage that marks the moment of the turn itself.

Freud is hesitant here. In the case of obsessional neurosis, this is the point where there is no pure passivity insofar as it is defined as "the passivity of another person"; what we have before us is a turning round upon the subject's own self, however, the aim,

i.e., that which defines the duality of active and passive drives,<sup>8</sup> is not yet passive. This is also the reason why, from the viewpoint of grammar of the drives, Freud ascertains: “The active voice is changed, not into the passive, but into the reflexive, middle voice.” (Freud 2001 [1915], p. 128) In obsessional neurosis, “to punish oneself” appears instead of “to be punished.”

However, describing the step *b*, Freud asserts the opposite: “With the turning round upon the self the change from an active to a passive aim of the drive is also effected.” (Freud 2001 [1915], p. 127) In the case of the transformation from sadism to masochism, the stage where both processes of obsessional neurosis (reversal into its opposite and turning round upon the subject’s self) still appear in their minimal difference is precisely the moment of their coincidence. Insofar as the third stage also takes place, the point of transformation is at the same time the point of the already completed transformation; but if the process stops here, then the reversal of an active aim into a passive one effectively does not take place. Put differently, if point *b* is taken as a point of transition, we can already speak of the passive—in a sense, even of a pure passive without any extraneous factor. But the moment this point is actualized, brought into “existence” in obsessional neurosis, the pure passive ceases being a passive at all: *For Freud, the actualised pure passive is the middle voice.*

In order to resolve this contradiction, Freud has to introduce another explanation, which again requires a shift to the second of the two examples, i.e. to the *Schaulust*—exhibitionism relation. First, Freud repeats the above scheme:

- a) looking [*Schauen*] as an activity directed towards an extraneous object;
- b) the giving up of the object, the turning of the scopophilic drive [*Schautrieb*] towards a part of the subject’s own

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<sup>8</sup> “Every instinct is a piece of activity; if we speak loosely of passive instincts, we can only mean instincts whose aim is passive.” (Freud 2001 [1915], p. 122)



Freud, who is here at the height of speculation, writes the auto-erotic stage  $\alpha$  in two ways, equating both possibilities: “oneself looking at a sexual organ” and “sexual organ being looked at by oneself,” whereby a factually unified situation is split into two voices. And insofar as the preliminary stage is neither  $a$  nor  $c$ , insofar as it is formulated as “either-or,” both of the exclusive “either-or” positions can be derived from it. In this sense, Freud explains the reasoning underlying its introduction: “This preliminary stage is interesting because it is the source of both the situations represented in the resulting pair of opposites, the one or the other according to which element in the original situation is changed.” (Freud 2001 [1915], p. 130) If one’s own sexual organ is replaced by an extraneous object, the result is an active position of “oneself looking at an extraneous object” marked as  $\beta$ . On the contrary, the replacement of oneself produces a passive position of “one’s own object being looked at by an extraneous person” marked as  $\gamma$ .

How do the schemes “ $abc$ ” and “ $\alpha\beta\gamma$ ” relate to one another? Is the introduction of the preliminary stage  $\alpha$  merely an addition to the first scheme, as it would seem at first sight, or is the result a completely new scheme? Neither of the two. On the one hand, it is certain that the preliminary stage  $\alpha$  is not only a preceding stage to the “ $abc$ ” scheme, however, on the other hand, it is also true that the schemes do not overlap linearly:  $\alpha\beta\gamma$  is not a transcription of  $abc$ . The second scheme is a repetition of the first one, but a repetition characterized by a specific shift.

In general terms, we can say that stage  $\beta$  coincides with stage  $a$  and that stage  $\gamma$  coincides with stage  $c$ , while each of them is derived *directly* from one of the variants of the preliminary stage  $\alpha$ . Although the schemes do not overlap linearly, they nonetheless overlap, which implies a necessity of interconnecting the remaining elements:  $b = \alpha$ .

How can we justify this *equation*? It cannot escape us that already at the descriptive level  $b$  and  $\alpha$  both refer to analogous

situations. If stage  $b$  involves “the turning round of the scopophilic drive upon a part of one’s own body,” then the preliminary stage  $\alpha$  (being an auto-erotic stage) is also characterized by the object existing on one’s own body, meaning that a certain self-reference is at work in both situations.

A parallel can be detected also at the formal level. Both stages are marked by a paradoxical indeterminateness, neither of them being fully ontologically constituted; however, they nevertheless differ and it is precisely this difference that causes the shift in this repetition. We already indicated that there is no linear overlapping of the two schemes. At this point we can add that, paradoxically, such overlapping would only be possible if the preliminary stage would be understood as a fully constituted preceding stage, but this is not what Freud had in mind. On the contrary, we are faced with two modes of a comprehensive treatment; each of the schemes covers a totality, but it is precisely the radical overlapping of both totalities that first enables a correct understanding of the inner contradiction of each of them.

In other words, each scheme may be misleading if taken by itself: the first one implies the originality of pure activity with passivity being understood as an aberration, while the other posits the initial split that directly develops into two holistic opposites. Their juxtaposition, however, is condensed precisely where they seemingly do not agree, namely in the equation  $b = \alpha$ .

What we actually have before us here are two written accounts of the interference in linearity. In the  $abc$  scheme,  $b$  is the point of transition, which, according to Freud, is neither active nor passive, but rather a point of transition functioning as a “vanishing mediator” between the two positions of the drive. In the other scheme, activity and passivity are separated, they each develop directly, there is no possibility of transition between them, but only insofar as they coincide in the origin, which is a split of one into two, of one substantial situation into two voices. The radical overlapping of both schemes translates into the following formula:  $(b = \alpha) = (\text{neither–nor} = \text{either–or})$ .

But this is not the end of the story. Freud's texts suggest also the materialization of the latter formula. Freud notes the second example of the pairs of opposites in several ways. Firstly, when he sticks strictly to the level of the verb, he writes the pair as *(be)schauen–beschaut werden*, “to look at”–“to be looked at.” Secondly, when he speaks “in the language of perversion,” he translates the opposition into the pair voyeur–exhibitionist. Between the two extremes, there are intermediate formations, such as the pair *Schauen* and *sich Zeigen*, “to look at” and “to show oneself,” and *aktive Schaulust* and *Zeigelust*, “active scopophilia” and “desire for exhibition.”

We are again faced with a dilemma between form and content running along the demarcation line between the perspectives of “perversion” and drive. From the viewpoint of “perversion,” the passive “looking at” is always already exhibition. Thus, an ordered pair of the new active subject, the extraneous person, and the remainder of activity in the old subject is established which translates “looking” into its opposite, i.e. exhibition, or the active *Schaulust* into *Zeigelust*. But, for Freud, this ordered pair is nevertheless marked by the opposition of ambivalence:

With regard to both the instincts which we have just taken as examples, it should be remarked that their transformation by a reversal from activity to passivity and by a turning round upon the subject never in fact involves the whole quota of the instinctual impulse. The earlier active direction of the instinct persists to some degree side by side with its later passive direction, even when the process of its transformation has been very extensive. The only correct statement to make about the scopophilic instinct would be that all the stages of its development, its auto-erotic, preliminary stage as well as its final active or passive form, co-exist alongside one another; and the truth of this becomes obvious if we base our opinion, not on the actions to which the instinct leads, but on the mechanism of its satisfaction. (Freud 2001 [1915], p. 130)

Freud does not simply claim that after the transformation into the passive *Zeiglust* there remains some part of the *active Schaulust*, which surfaces from time to time, disturbing the completeness of the transformation, thus creating a whole person driven by a series of various impulses. In addition to the active and passive forms, Freud includes in the final co-existence the auto-erotic preliminary stage, the balanced “either–or” condition of this imbalance, whereby the latter “coordinative imbalance” or the alteration of activity and passivity is transformed into an “unwhole” imbalance, unable to form the entirety of an ordered pair. Returning to the equation  $b = \alpha$ , we can see how the stage of transition is “a pure passivity”; it is a transformation of the aim of the drive without the *addition* of activity: neither the old activity of the new subject nor the new exhibitivive activity of the old subject.

The advantage of the verbal transformation “to look at–to be looked at” is thus precisely that it shows what is preserved in this transformation. The answer seems to be obvious: what is preserved is the content, the “looking.” But, again, this hasty conclusion is misleading, as far as the answer is implicitly understood in terms of the persistence of the active verb. This is why we have to add two additional points. Firstly, the verbal transformation acquires its true meaning only under the condition that we read it together with the thesis on the persistence of the preliminary stage  $\alpha$ , which postulates the split of one substantial situation into two formal modes of the same, thus demonstrating the impossibility of preserving the content of the situation as a referent of two perspectives—the content of the auto-erotic preliminary situation exists only through this doubling.

Secondly, we have to appropriately interpret the last sentence in the above quotation where Freud draws the line between actions engendered by the drives, *Triebhandlungen*, i.e., the actualizations of the forms of drives, and the mechanism of satisfaction. Recall that, within the *abc* scheme, we set out point *b* as the point

of transition where—according to Freud—it does not yet come to a passive position although the active aim is actually already transformed into a passive one, which is why we termed it the point of pure passivity. If we add that, for Freud, the “aim of the drive is always satisfaction,” we see that it is precisely in stage *b* that pure aim, pure satisfaction, is at work. Or better yet, stage *b* is the moment where the mechanism of satisfaction is displayed in its pure form: in the transition the aim or mode of satisfaction is changed, however, this change is not bound to a concrete *Triebhandlung*, but is precisely a pure impersonal drive. Moreover, if we consider stage *b* as equated with the preliminary stage  $\alpha$ , we see that the moment of the pure passive is at the same time the moment of the pure active, a point where the opposition between the active and the passive is reduced to the duality of perspectives.

The name of this co-incidence is nothing other than *Schaulust*—insofar as we do not limit it to its active phenomenal form, to the *aktive Schaulust*. *Schaulust* is no longer the desire to look, the pleasure that accompanies the act of looking, but is in a strict sense the “pleasure of looking” and as such no longer bound to the active or the passive form. *Schaulust* instead stands for a point at which the looking and being looked at come together, an intersection of their non-relation and at the same time an element which prevents each form from being reducible to itself.

We said that stage *b* is the moment of the pure passive without *additional* activity in the form of the remainder of the old active *Schaulust* or of the new activity of another subject. How can we relate this to Freud’s thesis that every drive is “a piece of activity,” *ein Stück Aktivität*?

Perhaps we should return here to Lacan, who in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* forms his own variant of the paradox we attempted to capture with the equation  $b = \alpha$ . Lacan is well aware of the fact that, at the level of the drive, *pulsion*, the opposition of activity and passivity is “purely grammatical” (Lacan 1998, p. 200), insofar as “the enigmatic character of Freud’s

presentation derives precisely from the fact that he wishes to give us a radical structure—in which the subject is not yet placed” (*ibid.*, pp. 181–2).

It is support, artifice, which Freud uses in order to enable us to understand the outward-return movement of the drive. But I have repeated four or five times that we cannot reduce it simply to a reciprocity. Today I have shown in the most articulated way possible that each of the three stages, *a*, *b*, *c*, with which Freud articulates each drive, must be replaced by the formula of *making oneself seen, heard* and the rest of the list I have given. (Lacan 1998, p. 200)

What enables Lacan to condense the development from “*beschauen*, to look at an alien object, an object in the strict sense” to “*beschaut werden*, being looked at by an alien person» (*ibid.*, p. 194) into the formula *se faire voir*? It is precisely the realization of the passive activity of the object itself, which Freud proposes in the preliminary stage  $\alpha$ . In the person looking, there is present the “being looked at” object:

It is not seeing oneself in the mirror, it is *Selbst ein Sexualglied beschauen* – *he looks at himself*, I would say, *in his sexual member*. But, be careful! It’s not right, either. Because this statement is identified with its opposite – which is curious enough, and I am surprised that nobody has noticed the humorous side of it. This gives – *Sexualglied von eigener Person beschaut werden*. In a way, just as the number two delights at being odd, the sex, or widdler, delights at being looked at. Who has ever really grasped the truly subject making character of such a sentiment? (Lacan 1998, pp. 194–5)

The active and the passive are not balanced insofar as they are joined in the origin. And since Freud’s preliminary stage is at the same time the point of the *return* of the impossibility of balance, we are faced with the very core of the basic paradox of repression where the moment of the paradox of repression unravels in the primal repression and the return of the repressed as its formal

repetition. Therefore, one should not be surprised to find the following sentence in the essay on *Repression*: “The ambivalence which has enabled repression through reaction-formation to take place is also the point at which the repressed succeeds in returning.” (Freud 2001 [1915b], p. 157)

Lacan’s contribution lies not only in the fact that *se faire voir* condenses both of Freud’s schemes, but, in the last instance, also in the way he connects the levels of pulsation and love. For Lacan, *se faire voir* fundamentally implies activity which is inherent to passivity and thus converges two fields that are separate in Freud’s work; the reciprocity of a subject’s loving and being loved is accompanied by pure activity “*durch seine eigene Triebe*” (cf. Lacan 1998, p. 191).

By pointing out Freud’s two schemes, we primarily want to suggest that a version of Lacan’s *se faire voir* is already at work in Freud, but is obscured both by his resistance to understand love as a partial drive, instead of conceiving it as an expression of *ganze Sexualstrebung*, and by the introduction of the three polarities dominating psychological life: the biological (active–passive), the economic (pleasure–unpleasure) and the real (subject–object or Ego–the outside world). By introducing these polarities, Freud failed to recognize that each of them is marked by an interference. The interference in biology can be seen in its grammar, ultimately in the equation  $b = a$ . The interference in economy can be seen in the problem of the excess of affect over the feeling of this affect, the pleasure of the organ. The error in the real can be seen in the original paradox of drive-formation:

We thus arrive at the essential nature of instincts in the first place by considering their main characteristics – their origin in sources of stimulation within the organism and their appearance as a constant force – and from this we deduce one of their further features, namely, that no actions of flight avail against them. (Freud 2001 [1915], p. 119)

But the problem is that the latter is not a plain deduction. In the preceding paragraph, Freud invites us to imagine the following situation: a helpless, living organism unoriented in the world receiving stimuli in its nervous substance is forced to make its first distinction. The stimuli against which it is able to defend itself with a flight, i.e. with muscular activity, will be ascribed to the external world, while the failure of a flight will become evidence of the existence of drive needs: “The perceptual substance of the living organism will thus have found in the efficacy of its muscular activity a basis for distinguishing between an ‘outside’ and an ‘inside’.” (Freud 2001 [1915b], p. 119)

That which seems a mere deduction is, in fact, a condition of possibility of the two other characteristics. The moment when an “outside” and an “inside” cannot be distinguished coincides with the failure of defence. This initial paradox is what drives the quantitative factor, the constant force. The drive does not have three “characteristics” but is a constant force of the impossibility of the pair of opposites.

To conclude, we can say that even Freud himself did not notice the humor of his inversion — which is no coincidence. The impossible equation between the subject looking at his sexual organ and the sexual organ being happy about it being looked at is not an expression of his humor but rather a sign of his grammatical madness concerning the identification of the object, not at the site of the sexual organ, but in the split of one situation into two voices. A sign of certainty that Freud was not mad enough to recognize.

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