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SEXUAL AMBIGUITIES

Sexuation and Psychosis

Geneviève Morel

Translated by Lindsay Watson

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"... all human individuals, as a result of their bisexual disposition and of cross-inheritance, combine in themselves both masculine and feminine characteristics, so that pure masculinity and femininity remain theoretical constructions of uncertain content".

Sigmund Freud

Some psychological consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes (1925)

"... There is nothing vaguer than the question of belonging to one side or the other [...] Still, I have to find a point of departure, which is a [...] mere supposition, the supposition that there is a male or female subject. It is a supposition which experience shows us to be quite obviously untenable"

Jacques Lacan

Les non-dupes errent (15 January 1974)



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INTRODUCTION

"I don't know how to be a woman, because nobody ever showed me" (woman aged 30).

"I've always had a vague sadness about not being a woman. But then, it's what allows me to see that there is such a thing as making a choice to be a man" (Mr T, aged 50).

"It's not just that I wear the trousers—I am the man, because everything at home depends on me. Without me, the whole thing wouldn't exist at all. All I need in order to be a man is a willy" (Mrs H, aged 50).

"Later on, I'll turn into a boy, so I won't ever have babies" (Lea, aged 5, following the birth of her brother).

"I was impotent for ten years. It helped me to communicate with women, because I was really close to them" (Mr B, aged 35).

"I want to leave women behind" (young homosexual woman).

"Being a man meant being nothing. For me, to be something meant becoming a woman Before, I was a man or a woman, and I could cross the border between the sexes. When I became a father, I could no longer reverse the process of turning from a man into a woman, or a woman into a man" (Mr H, aged 40).

A psychoanalyst hears ideas such as these from the couch, but also outside the consulting room. For example, an actress claimed that her favourite role was that of Virginia Woolf's "Orlando": she had enjoyed changing sex on the set. Another actress, who had played a feminine G.I., explained her feelings during the filming of a scene which had put her body to the test: on the one hand there were men, and on the other, there were women, and then there was her, belonging to neither category. A transsexual writer, who had written numerous biographies of famous men, said during an interview that she wanted to "reconcile the opposites". "He" had been a husband and father before undergoing an operation to "transform" him into a woman. "So", she said, "men and women feel at home with me; I belong to both groups".

These statements are all very different from each other. Some of them bear on sexual identity. There may be uncertainty—"Am I a man or a woman?"—which can slide into perplexity. There may be an attempt at defining something that slips away into infinity—"What is a woman?"—which risks becoming complete disarray in the absence of an instruction manual saying how to be one. It may be a case of inability—"I can't be a man"—which can cause impotence, but may also entail the benefit of an identification with the other sex, even though there is no possible rapport, let alone any possible sexual relation. It may be a question of refusal: "I don't want to be a woman", with gradations from denegation to the most radical rejection: "I am a man in a woman's body". Finally, one may encounter the desire, voiced with or without humour, to belong to a special, exceptional category: "I am impossible to classify sexually".

Some people aim at a knowledge of the unimaginable that the other sex experiences, like Tiresias¹ who, by being a man and then a woman, and then a man again, was able to say who enjoyed the sexual act more intensely. This can range from play to the theatrical role² to the most severe sexual disturbances.

Others aspire to what Zeus accomplished, according to Aristophanes in *The Symposium*:³ cutting human beings in two. Does not "reconciling the two", putting the two back together to make one, contain an echo of this? It is not without irony, yet it could possibly happen, with the aid of a scalpel. Indeed, some individuals, confusing being and appearance, insist on metamorphosis in the flesh. Modern surgical techniques mean that the offer is there⁴ and,

if we are to believe the statistics, it is being taken up in increasing numbers.

It is this variety that I want to explore in *Sexual Ambiguity*. In language, "ambiguity" is the double meaning that gives rise to uncertainty, and on which the enigma depends. It is the equivocation which, according to Freud,⁵ always endows the symptom with two opposing significations. It gives rise to indecision, and sows the seeds of doubt. It is tempting to slip in and out of both, being neither one nor the other, neither man nor woman. Or to believe that one is both at once, a combination of man and woman. We can find these positions in the two great Freudian neuroses, hysteria and obsessional neurosis.

Others may wish to cross to the other side, by "throwing a switch", as some transsexuals put it, or even continuously, believing they have been there since birth. Some will feel at the mercy of powers beyond their control, subjugated to a will that they experience as external and foreign to them, in spite of their intimate and determined resistance, which nonetheless weakens over time. This was the case with President Schreber,⁶ whose delusion transformed him into God's wife. Sexual ambiguity can be imaginary, as in the case of the heightened femininity of the tomboy, or in the unisex game of androgynous fashion. It can be symbolic, when it becomes the metaphor of the hysterical symptom.⁷ It can be real, when it forms the substance of a conviction which impacts on the body itself, notably by surgical means, or which torments the mind with an invasive delusion.

In the face of the complex nature of sexual ambiguity, is it appropriate to appeal to gender, that grammatical notion of the opposition between masculine and feminine in language? Is there really such a thing as a definable entity called "gender identity", which would refer to "the very being of a person"⁸ and which in some way would be their psychical sex? "You play a role, you are your identity", says Robert Stoller, author of a number of studies of transsexualism. What exactly is the "being" entailed in gender identity? Is it sufficient to believe oneself to be a man or a woman in order to function effectively as such, in relation to a partner of the opposite sex, or of the same sex? Is it reasonable to think of the enforced feminization in the Schreber case, as the covering-over of a male "core of gender identity" by a delusion which is supposed to be a defence against

his “unalterable knowledge” of being a male?⁹ What could possibly be the motive for such a successful defence? Despite the interesting clinical research that gender theories have produced, they are conceptually inadequate, and miss what we can deduce from the practice of psychoanalysis. I have tried to explain why this is, and to put forward an alternative.

Sexual ambiguity is too widespread, and it affects too many people, for us to be able to postulate a “core of gender identity”, or even to affirm that it is covered over by these ambiguities, which would then be secondary. I have chosen to posit sexual ambiguity as being fundamental. In doing this, I could have allied myself with the famous Freudian idea of bisexuality. But this theory, for which Fliess claimed paternity, is based on the anatomical model; and Freud was not fooled by that. From 1905¹⁰ onwards, he said he did not know what constituted this “bisexual predisposition”, “beyond anatomical conformity”, and points the reader in the direction of the development of the sexual drive. In 1929¹¹ he confirmed: “The theory of bisexuality is still surrounded by many obscurities and we cannot but feel it as a serious impediment in psychoanalysis that it has not yet found any link with the theory of the drives [‘instincts’ in Strachey’s translation]”.¹² While gender theory (the theory of gender identity) nowadays focuses our attention on identifications, Freud suggested we study the drives and their vicissitudes, rather than bisexuality.

If human beings have so much difficulty in finding an orientation with regard to sexuation, if it is so hard for them to line themselves up on the side of man or woman, should we not be thinking in terms of there being a real void at the beginning,¹³ rather than a core of identity?

This void is postulated by Freud when he affirms that there is no feminine drive, but just one single libido, which is masculine in nature,¹⁴ or when he situates the phallus and the castration complex at the centre of the sexual life of both boys and girls.

The first part of this book maps out the psychoanalytic field of sexuality. We will see how language forms a barrier to any sexual rapport, and confronts human beings with a specific reality, that of jouissance. From this position we can rethink questions of death, reproduction, and the body, as they take on completely different values from those that they have in biology. Underpinning this

exploration are a contemporary “psychopathology” and a clinic at the limits of psychoanalysis and medicine.

The second part is concerned with sexual difference. Does believing oneself to be a man or a woman, even unconsciously, equate to being one or the other? Are identifications sufficient to determine sexuation? The clinic offers answers to these questions in cases where there is a denial of the real. The study of contemporary theories (gender theory and anthropological theory derived from structuralism) shows where all sexual classifications break down: they fail to deal with alterity, by reducing it to a system of signifying oppositions. Freud had already observed this when he discovered that theories of infantile sexuality were unable to capture the essence of femininity; but did he not overestimate the importance of anatomical difference, and the value of the phallus for the child of either sex? A study of misogyny and a relativization of the importance of the discovery of anatomical difference will show how problematic this is. In order to introduce the necessary concepts, I have emphasized examples rather than definitions, since the former are more reliable—without, however, neglecting the latter, and tracing them back to their sources. The discussion of these points leads to the introduction of different functions of *jouissance*, notably the phallic function and the function of the symptom. Following Lacan, I propose a formalization for neurosis and for psychosis which is simple and clinically useful. Then I construct a theory of sexuation which comprises three logical moments articulated around the phallic function, which takes account of anatomy and the symbolic and social environment, while retaining the function of choice on the part of the subject. The choice of being a man or a woman is thus rooted in the subject’s modes of *jouissance*. This theory is, in my opinion, more coherent and closer to clinical experience than the opposition between nature and nurture, which Freud had denounced as early as 1905, and which we find barely disguised in the contemporary debate between the adherents of social construction and those of pure biology. The theory is put to the test in relation to cases of people who have been assigned to one sex, only to be assigned later on to another by their entourage.

The third part, entitled “Sexuation and psychosis”, puts this theory to the test of analytic practice in the field of the psychoses. It contains what inspired me to undertake this research: six analytic treatments which produced a plethora of questions and a

few answers. What happens if a subject does not have access to the phallic function in order to find an orientation within the field of sexuality? What can the subject rely on if the Name-of-the-Father and the phallic function are foreclosed?

Transsexuals want to belong to the other sex, and do not shy away from bodily alterations which in some cases are irreversible. But is it not the phallic function that they are refusing, as Lacan suggested in his debate with Stoller? Analysis of cases from both sexes shows the importance of certain early identifications that are anchored in the mother's desire. However, in analysis, a transsexual subject may find solutions to the problem of sexuation other than the mutilation of surgery (e.g., transvestism, or a "classifying" identification). Having observed that it is love for a woman that is the determining factor here, we are then led to study the Lacanian concept of the "push-to-the-woman" ("*pousse-à-la-femme*"), which at times is a source of sexual ambiguity, and is often mortifying. The multiple facets of this concept are put into perspective within the transferential dynamic of the analytic treatment of the psychotic subject. From this we can deduce the singular solution which each individual invents to the problem of sexuation, as well as new perspectives on the treatment of sexual ambiguity through the medium of speech.

Notes

1. Ovid. *Metamorphoses*, pp. 60–61. cf. also Loraux N. *Les expériences de Tirésias, Le féminin et l'homme grec*, 1989.
2. Regnault, F. "Pourquoi les hommes jouent-ils une femme sur le théâtre?", *Les énigmes du masculine*, "Les parchemins du midi", May 1975, pp. 19–41.
3. Plato, *The Symposium*, p. 60.
4. Chiland, C. *Transsexualism: Illusion and Reality*, 2004.
5. Freud, S. "The paths to the formation of symptoms", Lecture XXIII of *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, 1916, p. 360.
6. Schreber, D.P. *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness*, 2000.
7. For example, in Freud's case of Dora, her identification with male impotence through her infantile enuresis. cf. Freud, S. "Fragment of an analysis of a case of hysteria" (Dora), 1905, p. 74.
8. Stoller, R.J. *Presentations of Gender*, 1985, pp. 11 and 17–18.
9. Stoller, R.J. *Sex and Gender*, Vol. I. *The Development of Masculinity and Femininity*, 1968, p. 47.

10. Freud, S. "Three essays on the theory of sexuality", 1905, p. 9.
11. Freud, S. "Civilization and its discontents", 1930a, p. 64.
12. The German term is *Trieblehre*, which should be translated as the theory of the drives, not of the instincts. cf. Freud, S. "Civilization and its discontents", 1930a.
13. This term is to be understood in a mythical or logical sense, rather than in a chronological one.
14. Freud, S. "Three essays on the theory of sexuality", 1905, p. 85. Also see "Female sexuality", 1931, p. 240.



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PART I

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE REAL



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CHAPTER ONE

Sex in science and in psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis affirms the existence of a different real from that of science, a real that is specific to it. While Freud, in one of his 1932 lectures,¹ posited that psychoanalysis “is a part of science and can adhere to the scientific *Weltanschauung*”, Lacan would later invite us to consider that there is an irreducible gap between the real of science and the real or “reals” (since it is preferable to speak of them in the plural) of psychoanalysis.

Let me briefly describe this opposition. Science discovers a knowledge in the real, from which it deduces its laws, which are universal. These laws allow the scientist to predict what will happen in the real, assuming adequate experiments have been carried out. So Newton wrote the Law of Gravity, and the real obeys this law, at least up to a point. Thanks to this law, on the other hand, we have been able to create new objects, such as satellites. The results of “thought experiments”, described by Einstein, which were not technically possible at the time, have now confirmed the most astonishing conjectures of the theory of relativity and of quantum mechanics.²

How is the real defined in science? Obviously this is the subject of debates which are beyond the scope of this study. While there is

clearly a real in which scientific laws operate, let us just say that it is the same real in which some of them come up against their own limits. At certain times, precise observations of stars have contradicted the Law of Gravity. The law operates in the real, but can also come up against obstacles in it, which then give rise to crises in the realm of science, the resolution of which coincides either with the advancement of the theory, or a change in it. So we could define the real of science as that which resists the present state of knowledge, that which forces us to search for new laws. So the real would be that which is impossible to know. It would then be necessary to differentiate between what would emerge from that which was still impossible to know (future discoveries within the framework of an existing theory), and what would emerge from something definitively impossible to know using any given theory. Thus, from the point of view of classical mechanics, one would expect to be able simultaneously to determine the position and the speed of a particle. However, various experiments show that this is not the case.³ Yet this impossibility is in relation to classical mechanics, which does not allow for a correct conception of elementary particles. The problem is resolved within quantum mechanics, in which particles do not simultaneously possess the two attributes, position and speed. "The exception tests the rule",⁴ as the physicist Richard Feynman put it. An experiment which invalidates a rule and brings to light something that is impossible to know spurs the scientist on to invent a new theory which can integrate it. The difference between these two sub-categories (what is as yet impossible to know and what is definitively impossible) is, however, not easy to establish, and results in scientific controversies.

There is no sexual relation

For psychoanalysis, the situation is different; we could even say it is the opposite. There are no universal laws, deduced from experience, which would allow us to predict with any measure of certainty what will happen to the subject placed in one or another combination of circumstances. On the contrary, a knowledge accumulated within the psychoanalytic tradition describes the clinical structures and their differential traits, models of the unfolding of an analysis, or infantile sexuality, etc. There is knowledge of a more singular type,

that of the clinical case, but it does not take precedence over the experience of psychoanalytic treatment. That is why Freud advised the practitioner to forget everything he knew before listening to a new patient. Lacan's aphorism,⁵ "There is no sexual relation", should be understood in this way: there is no psychoanalytic equivalent of Newton's law. One cannot write the psychoanalytic law of attraction between human beings. Of course, men and women have sexual "relations", but psychoanalysis cannot write the universal law of this relationship, nor can it provide us with any rules, because they do not exist. Instead, each individual invents a sort of DIY which functions more or less well. Certainly there is a vast psychoanalytic knowledge derived from the contingent failure or success—through love,⁶ for example—of the relation to the sexual partner, but it is not a substitute for what would be the universal writing of a law which would give some kind of "user's guide" for the relation to the sexual partner. Ethology describes rules of this sort for the coupling of animals, whose instincts are not denatured by language. If that were the case for human beings, we can bet that psychoanalysis would become useless. In psychoanalysis, the real is above all the absence of the writing of the sexual relation, and the consequences for each individual of the lack of it. The impossible-to-know does not have the same meaning as it has in science, where it is a question of finding laws that function universally.

The gap between the real in science and the real in psychoanalysis is especially palpable where sex is concerned. Biology strives for a precise description of the male and female sex cells and their genetic structure. It establishes the conditions for fertilization. The real in biology, if we define it schematically as the impossible-to-know, is what continuously pushes towards a refinement of a genetic coding: in order to discover new genes, to reduce the number of cases of sexual ambiguity through the examination of the genotype, etc. Through a study of the sexual signals of copulation and the establishment of genetic codes, ethology and biology subordinate sex to reproduction, and each in its own domain achieves a sort of written sexual relation. But this remains useless for the unconscious.

In the field of psychoanalysis, we observe that the unconscious has a structural difficulty in responding to the excitations and bodily sensations which overwhelm the subject from infancy onwards. We also know that sex emerges in children in the form of pressing

questions, which are conscious at first, and to which they will have to find answers. This is at the heart of infantile neurosis. How are babies made? How did I come into the world? What is the difference between girls and boys? Where sex is concerned, the impasses that the speaking being encounters stem from the fact that sex can only pose its question in the unconscious through the medium of language, and not through the union of sexual gametes. Thus in a very simple way we can oppose the writing of the sexual relation in the field of science (biology and ethology) and its non-writing in the field of psychoanalysis as two distinct versions of the real. Psychoanalysis surely needs to take science into account, but the obverse is not, at least so far, the case.⁷

Who is the father of whom?

We encounter the gap between the two versions of the real as a limit in psychoanalytic practice. But it can also act as a stimulus to the psychoanalyst, who is confronted with scientific discoveries which he cannot ignore: for a number of years now, it has been possible, in a scientifically certain way, to establish who is the father of whom. So the old Latin adage *pater semper incertus* (paternity is always uncertain), cited by Freud, has been thoroughly demolished by science. The Montand case at the end of 1997 demonstrated this to be true: the genotype of a dead man can be made to “speak”, and even to oblige the latter legally to “recognize” his posthumous paternity. In place of the ancient notion of recognition by the father, which was a sort of adoption, and thus involved the father’s speech, we now find a procedure in which speech is no longer required—which is clearly all the more apparent if the man in question is dead. We can see how far this is from Freud, for whom the dead father was promoted to the position of father of the law. Indeed, thanks to Lacan, psychoanalysts since Freud have relativized, even criticized, this Freudian conception of the father, in favour of a more utilitarian notion (what is the use of a father?). The Montand case was nonetheless a sign of the devalorization of the Freudian “dead father”.

However, it is the task of psychoanalysis first of all to affirm the non-equivalence of a biologico-legal “recognition” and the recognition-adoption which requires the speech of the father. The difference can be measured according to its effects on posterity.

And then it falls to psychoanalysis to remind us that no amount of biological certainty will stop a child from unconsciously doubting the identity of its father, nor will it stop the invention of a family romance, or even the construction of a delusion of filiation.

We find the same opposition between certainty and doubt, this time certainty of perception and doubt in the unconscious, where sexual difference is concerned. A child can perfectly well see that women do not have a penis, and yet continues to assume that the mother possesses a phallus. Or you might believe that "all men are mortal", and yet unconsciously believe that you are nonetheless immortal, etc. Certainty in the field of science, of experience or perception cannot always be opposed to the unconscious, for which the truth rests on another sort of proof: one that touches on the most intimate of the subject's reasons.

Returning to the problem of the father, would a psychoanalyst give the same response to an individual who was a partner in a sterile couple, according to whether the technique of insemination that would offer a solution to their problem was available or not? Would he respond, as was once reported to me, "It makes absolutely no difference whether you have a child by your husband or by an anonymous donor, since the father is not the same as the progenitor, and it's not the progenitor who counts, but the symbolic father".⁸ The analysand might well laugh in the analyst's face if the latter has so little regard for modern science. Scientific discoveries impinge on the analytic subject in a very real way. There could be nothing more than a dialogue of the deaf between an analyst who said, "What counts is the symbolic father", and an analysand who replied with her desire for a child underpinned by science: "Spermatozoa can now be injected straight into an ovule without any father at all"; or perhaps before long, "They can make an identical clone of me".

In some countries, experiments can legally be carried out on embryos under 14 days old. This is in order to study parthenogenesis, which is the development of ovules which have not been fertilized by spermatozoa into ova. There is also some interest in sexing, that is to say, the choice of sex of an embryo, even the possibility of changing the sex, to be able to select male or female. The pretext for this research is therapeutic. There are certain sex-linked genetic diseases which could be prevented by choosing the sex of the child. But if this procedure is possible with a therapeutic aim, it

is also possible without it. Should psychoanalysts protest? Should they, like the church, say that such research is immoral? Should they, on the contrary, blindly applaud scientific progress, when the spectre appears of a new kind of segregation masked by therapeutic aims? Certainly there is nothing to stop a psychoanalyst joining an ethics committee, nor campaigning for or against a law regulating adoption.⁹ But surely it would be more interesting, more “fertile”, for psychoanalysts to develop responses which are specific to their own field, and then to transmit their knowledge outside their field, to scientists, to practitioners of medicine, to lawyers, to mental health workers, to everyone Lacan wrote¹⁰ in 1967 that the psychoanalyst must not “drift from humanism to terror”, that it is not for the analyst to maintain an ideological, humanistic, or prophetic discourse. Humanism would consist in this case in denouncing science without conscience, or scientific terrorism. Psychoanalysis should rather respond to science with its own concepts, such as the essential one—that of the subject. In other words, it needs to develop a response which involves the clinic of subjectivity, which is neither that of generality nor that of analogy. Psychoanalysis has as its starting point the truth that determines this subject, who is no longer merely an animal that reproduces.

It is from the starting point of what it knows about the subject as a speaking being that psychoanalysis can have something to say about human cloning. The desire to be cloned is a convergence of narcissism and the death drive, defined respectively as love of the self and rejection of the other (the clone is the same, the self), and a desire for, or rather, a fantasy of, immortality (reproduction of the self *ad infinitum*, beyond one’s own death, at the price of the possible destruction of the species). This is Thanatos against Eros, to take up Freud’s terms again.

The sexuality of lizards

But where sex is concerned, the gap between the real in science and the real in psychoanalysis can also be measured in relation to certain hesitations in the discourse of science. In science, the definition of sex is linked to that of reproduction and the idea of a sexual relation programmed by instinct, a kind of inner, automatic knowledge, but it remains dependent on a certain imaginary register described by ethology. Instinctual knowledge, as Konrad Lorenz’s experiments

showed, can in fact be blocked at certain periods in the animal's development, which are known as critical periods. Lorenz proved that if he spent time with young greylag geese during a critical period, they would mistake him for their mother. Once his image was inscribed as that of their mother, it would change their subsequent sexual behaviour: when he appeared, it would trigger a sexual display in the geese which was normally reserved for their own species, during reproductive periods.¹¹ This experiment showed that the animal's instinctual knowledge remains linked to the environment and to the imaginary, in this case to an image appropriately called the "imprint". (It is not the same imaginary register as that of the speaking being, which is structured and marked by the symbolic and language.)

Let us look at another example here, the controversy over the sex life of whiptail lizards,¹² which are so-called because their tails make a whip-like movement in certain circumstances. Lizards reproduce by parthenogenesis, which is an exception among reptiles: the female lays eggs without ever having been fertilized by a male, so there is no masculine heredity at all. A scientist, David Crews, observed a bizarre piece of behaviour: one lizard mounted another and "mimed" copulation, during which the sexual organs came into contact. While the scientists agreed on the facts of the case, there was a dispute as to what meaning could be attached to them. Indeed, this behaviour, which they all agreed was sexual, was an aberration with regard to the reproduction of lizards, and has no function as a trigger to parthenogenetic reproduction in any of the females involved. A scientific quarrel ensued as to whether these aberrant acts might have been provoked by the fact that the lizards were kept in captivity; some said this behaviour would not have occurred if they had been in the wild. Unfortunately, the others replied, lizards climbing on top of each other in the wild is not something that can be observed, because they run away! So the problem could not be solved, and remains unsolved. What is interesting here, however, is that the spirit of scientific enquiry should have been thrown off course by behaviour which it considered to be sexual, but which had no connection with reproduction, and therefore, from a scientific perspective, no connection with sex.

Why, then, call it sexual? From the point of view of science, there is no reason to call one lizard mounting another sexual if it does not make any contribution to the reproductive function. On the

other hand, to human observers, this act of mounting is a coupling which automatically suggests the field of sexuality. It suggests a satisfaction disconnected from reproduction, a satisfaction which in this case would not contribute at all to the propagation on the species, but would be open to the dimension Freud called "the sexual aberrations".¹³ So behaviour in animals which clearly evokes human behaviour immediately provokes a scientific dispute. This wavering in the spirit of scientific enquiry manifests itself at the limit of the discourse of science, at the point where it touches a real which is heterogeneous to it, that of the field of the *jouissance* of bodies, which in the speaking being is disconnected from reproductive aims.

The field of jouissance

Let us define what we mean by "field of *jouissance*".¹⁴ "*Jouir*" is an old French word, which you will find more frequently in Racine and Corneille than in contemporary language, although it does occur in law and in certain very "intimate" expressions. Freud uses the term "satisfaction" (*Befriedigung*) in relation to the libido or the drives, in its usual sense and in the context of the symptom, where it is experienced as suffering due to repression: "The kind of satisfaction which the symptom brings has much that is strange about it".¹⁵

"*Jouir*" means to extract profit or pleasure from something. But the ambiguity of the term is revealed by Littré: "'*Jouir*', which implies satisfaction, is not used with reference to bad things. [...] However, when the bad thing in question, be it misery, pain, suffering, can, with a certain poetic licence, be considered as something in which the soul finds satisfaction, then '*jouir*' can be used to good effect". Thus, according to Littré, it is acceptable to use the expression "enjoy one's suffering".

It was for this semantic richness that Lacan chose the term "*jouissance*" to designate those phenomena described by Freud as "beyond the pleasure principle", because they imply a destruction of the homeostasis required by the pleasure principle: not too much, not too little. So "*jouissance*" can designate the excess of pleasure, a satisfaction that the subject finds too intense, as well as the suffering which can result from a prolonged state of internal excitation which can upset the equilibrium required by the pleasure principle. Freud¹⁶ gave various examples: the infant's game commemorating

the painful separation from the mother; the nightmare of traumatic neurosis; the compulsion to repeat that drives the neurotic to reproduce painful events; the negative therapeutic reaction, etc. He gave the name "death drive" ("death instinct" in Strachey's English translation) to the psychical tendency responsible for these phenomena, which is stronger than the homoeostatic pleasure principle. If every drive aims at satisfaction, it is because it is underpinned by the death drive: there is no *Eros* without *Thanatos*. Lacan, following Melanie Klein, took the death drive seriously. He wanted to define its metapsychology, by introducing the "field of jouissance".¹⁷ The polymorphous nature of jouissance, which is palpable in the anomalies Freud lists in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920g), is due to the twists and turns of the drive, which "cheats" repression in order to achieve its aim: satisfaction. This is why it is often so bizarre, foreign, and unrecognizable. For instance, the "Rat Man", an obsessional neurotic analysed by Freud, was prey to a jouissance "he himself was unaware of" when he told his analyst one of his fantasies.¹⁸ This also indicates the variety of forms of sexual jouissance from one subject to another, and the "polymorphous perversion" of the infant, for whom the modes of jouissance are not reduced just to genitality. The first genital sensations in the infant are overwhelming to the point of being neither identifiable nor localizable. The genital organ, which escapes all control, may even seem not to belong to the body. It is at this point that language is called in to interpret these first experiences, resulting in those curious elaborations of knowledge known as "infantile sexual theories".¹⁹

Stoller (1968)²⁰ has given us the valuable and precise observations of a clinical psychiatrist on the subject of transsexualism. But his theory of gender remains basically dependent on a biological conception of sex. It is a paradoxical attitude, since, in the cases of the transsexuals he studies, it is a question of phenomena which arise from the field of jouissance, and are not subordinate to reproduction. To think of sex as subordinate to reproduction is to believe that there is a "natural" sexual relation between two classes, males and females, which can be recognized according to their attributes. The notion of gender then serves as the basis for a third class, in which identity would be defined by psychical attributes conceived of just as rigidly as anatomical criteria (the conviction that one is a woman in a man's body, for example). A subject, recognized at his request as

belonging to this third class—in which gender does not correspond to anatomical sex—is then completely justified in insisting on a surgical operation. The problem is that the clinician relying on this theory, which is based ultimately on the biological model, is led to sanction the subject's delusion even to the point of the mutilation that may arise from it. This is why it is vital to be rigorous in delimiting how we intervene where the sexuality of a speaking being is concerned. Human sexuality is not simply rooted in biology; it is subverted by the relation of the subject to language.

This relation already implies a cut between the animal, outside of language, and the human being, whom Lacan called the “*parlêtre*”, which means the “speaking being”, whose only being is vested in speech, and whose organism becomes a body only through the effects of language. This cut runs alongside another which separates the two reals of sex which we have tried to distinguish, the real of science and the real of the field of *jouissance*, which can be accessed via the analytic discourse.

The biological real

The real of science, in our case biology, is that of the science elaborated since Darwin and Weismann, who were both references for Freud. François Jacob points out the real that is at stake: “For modern biology, each living being is formed according to the execution of a programme inscribed in its chromosomes [...]”.²¹

Each child conceived by any given couple is the result of a “genetic lottery”. By means of countless combinations of a finite number of genes, chance produces the genetic diversity of living beings: “The reason why you need two to reproduce is so that you can do something different”.²² We know neither the algorithm of this programme nor its internal logic, but scientists postulate that it includes the genetic information of a living organism, the inscription of plans for its future development, etc. The theory of evolution implies the constraint of sexed reproduction, which brings into play this “lottery” through the diversity of possible combinations of genes. Science can thus describe a “sexual relation” defined by this combination of male and female sex cells, and through the combinatority of genes which accompanies it. We know that some very important developments in knowledge about these genes, and particularly

genes concerned with sex, have been made relatively recently, such as the discovery in 1994 of the gene DSS which is responsible, among other things, for certain sexual abnormalities. The real of biology, circumscribed in this way, can be subject to experiments which, as F. Jacob reminds us, are linked not to the idea of truth—there is no absolute, total truth, even in science—but to the theory which allows these experiments to be constructed.²³

This refined writing of genetic combinations in modern biology still, however, always leads to making the classification of species, here that of men and women. This classification obeys a logic of attributes: men are the ones who have a penis, women are the ones who do not. On one side, we find the masculine ones, who have a positive trait, and on the other, the feminine ones, with a negative trait. Certainly, thanks to progress in biology and genetics, these anatomical criteria have been stated more precisely, and that has meant that two more precise classes have been delineated, but there is nonetheless a grey area between them. This grey area concerns those who are of an ambiguous sex. Biology has not completely succeeded in eliminating this area, even though it is constantly being reduced as science progresses. This logic of classification remains that of Aristotle. Aristotle constructed a nested structure of genus and species containing individuals. For example, the individual human belongs to a species, that of man, and the genus of this species is that of animal.²⁴ He thus establishes a tree of genus and species. Two genres are different from each other, and one is not subordinate to the other, as long as they can be distinguished by a specific difference. For example, a biped, terrestrial animal is opposed to a winged, aquatic animal within the genus “animal”.²⁵ We shall see that while this logic of class and attributes is suitable for a mode of identification that is based on differential traits, it is not adequate to account for the sexuation of a subject.

The real as impossible

The real as it is implicated in the analytic discourse has as its framework the analytic set-up invented by Freud, which is basically one of speech. Language is the principal framework of the psychoanalytic method, which involves free association; in other words, saying everything that comes into one's head. The analytic set-up also

requires the analyst's interpretation. Subjects in analysis, known as analysands, have the impression that they are the ones who do everything in the treatment. But all the same, the analyst operates, acts, is an agent. Certainly he speaks less, but he needs to know when is the right moment to intervene, and when it is better to be silent. So his desire is crucial in the process and is part of the set-up. In this way, the real is at stake, its production and its deduction are intrinsically linked to what Lacan called the desire of the analyst.²⁶ This real does not pertain to the field of science, in which the real does not depend on the desire of the experimenter.

To say that the real involved in the psychoanalytic discourse in not the real of science does not mean that it cannot be defined. Besides, Lacan defined the real as "impossible" for science, as much as for psychoanalysis. But, as we have already seen, the impossible at stake is not the same in both fields. In the case of science, it is a question of the limits which experiment and the practice of science can oppose to what is written in universal laws. Where psychoanalysis is concerned, it is above all a question of the absence of a universal law which would match man with woman: nothing is written with regard to the sexual relation. This impossibility has consequences with regard to their *jouissance*. Before we explore this idea, let us examine two points of reference in the Lacanian definition of the real as impossible: logic, and the primordial relation of the infant to the breast.

Modern logic involves the writing of formulae in sequence. Such writing comes up against impassés which, when we try to remove them, ultimately confront us with the impossible. For Lacan, this impossible is paradigmatic of a real that can be grasped through proof. In this way, more than any other kind of science, logic is a "science of the real":²⁷ for Lacan (1970a), Gödel's theorem of incompleteness, to which he sometimes alludes,²⁸ is the prime example of the approach to the real through logic.

How can the practice of psychoanalysis, based as it is on free association, that is to say, on saying everything that comes into one's head, lead to a real that can be defined in a similarly exacting way? It could only be an analogy, because speech is not a logical form of writing. The idea is that in an analysis, there is a certain decanting of speech, which we can schematize in a construction in three stages. During the first stage, there is the analytic set-up, and the