

Toward hysteria as an ethics of desire

(shortened version)

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Only love allows jouissance to condescend to desire.

– Jacques Lacan, *Seminar X*

Death of the subject

This paper so seeks an explicit distinction between desire and jouissance in the context of an ethics of desire. We can begin generally: desire, Bruce Fink writes, "is subservient to the law! What the law prohibits, desire seeks."¹ On the other hand, "The drive couldn't care less about prohibition; it knows nothing of prohibition and certainly doesn't dream of transgressing it. The drive follows its own bend and always obtains satisfaction. Desire weighs itself down with considerations like 'They want me to do it, so I won't!'"² Desire can be framed as concerning itself with the symbolic space, finding its source in the Other, whereas jouissance, "on the side of the Thing," has no knowledge or care for the Other; it is simply involved with obtaining satisfaction from the drives.³ Similarly, Lacan differentiates "the category of pleasure" from "that of *jouissance*" in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, writing that "*jouissance* implies precisely the acceptance of death"—this "death" he describes, perhaps being the death of the subject.⁴

Desire, which necessitates distance between drives and subjectivity in the space of the unconscious, ensures the protection of subjectivity for both the desiring subject and their Other. Jouissance, however, in all of its blind materiality, incurs a destructive element to the subject, risking grounds for what I will name 'terror.' I will primarily discuss this 'terror' as being inflicted onto one's object of desire in the pursuit of phallic jouissance, however, this 'terror' can very

¹ Fink, Bruce. "From Desire to Jouissance." In *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, 207.

² *Ibid.*, 208.

³ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁴ Lacan, Jacques. "Love of one's neighbor." In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Dennis Porter, 186–201. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992, 189.

much so be inflicted onto oneself, which is why I describe this as an ethics of desire as both for oneself and their Other.⁵ Desire is fundamental to the subject, whereas *jouissance*, distinct from desire, on the side of bodily enjoyment, is where ethical violations have grounds to exist. Lacan takes note of "the frightening aggression that *jouissance* contains," describing it as "the frightening core of the *destrudo*."⁶ The more force there is applied to symbolic *intervention*, expediting one's desire into phallic *jouissance*, the higher risk there is for violence to be inflicted, in which the subject pursuing said phallic *jouissance* is politically responsible and unjustified by psychoanalysis. For the practical sake of orienting ourselves toward 'unethical' and 'ethical' traumas, I will define two poles of trauma's role for the subject as *terror* and *masochism*.

Terror

In "Psychosis," Bruce Fink describes what he calls "the invasion of *jouissance*," which is what the psychotic subject suffers from upon the failure of the imaginary and a collapse of "the hierarchy of the drives."⁷ Fink writes: "The body, which has been for the most part rid of *jouissance*, is suddenly inundated with it, invaded by it. It comes back with a vengeance, we might say, for the psychotic may well experience it as an attack, an invasion, or forcible entry."⁸ What Bruce Fink describes as an '*uncontrollable invasion of jouissance*,' I'd like to describe something of a similar nature, except for all non-psychotic subjects, which I'll call *terror*. The instability of a subject, without sufficient limits to *jouissance*, risks coercion into a sexual object

⁵ This often happens when compelled to align their "love object" and "sexual object" into one, streamlined activity, or, as Fink writes, "normal heterosexual genital," as was often pressured by American psychoanalysts under the impression of a 'healthy' sexuality, which was criticized by Lacan. (Fink, "Neurosis," 128.)

⁶ Lacan, Jacques. "The *jouissance* of transgression." In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Dennis Porter, 177–185. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992, 194.

⁷ Fink, Bruce. "Psychosis." In *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, 97.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

while *still having the consciousness of a subject*, which can be aptly described as *terror*. In "The *jouissance* of transgression," Lacan writes, "When one approaches that central emptiness, which up to now has been the form in which access to *jouissance* has presented itself to us, my neighbor's body breaks into pieces."⁹ In "Love of one's neighbor," Lacan describes *jouissance* to "be a form of evil:" "my neighbor's *jouissance*, his harmful, malignant *jouissance*, is that which poses a problem for my love," and depicts unsublimated *jouissance* as "an assault on the goods, the life, or the honor of someone else."¹⁰

It may be unclear at this point why one's pursuit of phallic *jouissance* inflicts trauma onto their Other. After all, *jouissance* can't exactly be 'transferred' from one subject to another simply by its acquisition on one end. Bruce Fink offers insight on an instance of the obsessive being forced to confront the Other's desire, unable to refuse it as a neutral entity, unable to assign it to their usual convoluted route of sexuality-into-pleasure, writing that neurotics who have had "an unexpected encounter with the Other's desire, an encounter with the lack in the Other that generates anxiety (perhaps for years thereafter)," such as "the obsessive's sudden realization that one of his parents has become involved in a passionate love affair shortly after the death of the other parent," renders the neurotic shaken and unable to continue to "successfully nullify or neutralize the Other and his dependence on the Other."¹¹ Fink continues, "such an encounter makes the obsessive more like the hysteric, the hysteric always being attentive to the Other's wants. The obsessive has become 'hystericized,' to use Lacan's term—has opened up to the Other."¹²

⁹ Lacan, "The *jouissance* of transgression," 202.

¹⁰ Lacan, "Love of one's neighbor," 187-189.

¹¹ Fink, Bruce. "Neurosis." In *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, 131.

¹² *Ibid.*

Fascinatingly, the obsessive becomes 'hystericized' (at least temporarily) the moment it is, quite traumatically, forced to directly confront desire in the Other, their preferred mediated relation between sexuality and pleasure being *denied* upon confronting their Other's pursuit of phallic jouissance. It is not that jouissance has been 'transferred' onto the subject by their Other; rather, a sudden denial of the obsessive's mediated subjectivity, as if one's immune system suddenly stopped working in a room full of contagious flu patients, floods the obsessive's libidinal economy with jouissance, and can be aptly described as a terrifying 'invasion of jouissance,' to use Fink's words. In other words, the pursuit of the Other's phallic jouissance, has come at the expense of the obsessive's subjectivity. This example which Fink provides, this hystericization of the obsessive, reveals the protective quality of a hysterical economy upon encountering 'terror.'

Masochism

Now, trauma undoubtedly plays a fundamental role in the psychoanalytic subject. Having undergone psychic alienation as split subjects, we are irremediably situated in the symbolic whilst taunted by the real—this is *necessarily* traumatizing—but not to be automatically conflated with *terror*. To be contrasted with *terror*, is the role that trauma may play in a more 'ethical' sexuality; indeed, phallic jouissance (conditionally) belongs to an ethical sexuality as well. Slavoj Žižek elaborates on the paradoxical logic of masochism in "The Masochist Social Link," wherein the masochistic subject transforms itself into "a desubjectivized multitude of partial objects," what Žižek describes as "the perverse organ without a body."¹³ With the organ isolated as a locale for jouissance, the drive, which Žižek describes as "this subjectless *moi*...the

¹³ Žižek, Slavoj. "The Ambiguity of the Masochist Social Link." In *Perversion and the Social Relation*, edited by Molly Anne Rothenberg, Dennis A. Foster, and Slavoj Žižek, 112–125. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003, 115.

insistence of an undead 'organ without a body,' standing, like Lacan's *lamella*," takes precedence over desire, and we find that the psychoanalytic subject slips out of sight.¹⁴ An attempt to reverse the loss of this 'undead' organ without a body, to shed oneself of subjection, found "embodied in a network of 'material' bodily practices," is the masochist's activity.¹⁵ Žižek continues, "this perverse vision of the body as a multitude of sites of partial drives, however, is condemned to failure: it disavows castration."¹⁶ Although a perverse sexuality appears to disavow castration, it only *appears* to do so—what it truly refuses is a *jouissance without limits*. By transgressing the law under a 'decoy' of refusing castration, the pervert attempts to *bring it into being*.

Unexpectedly, the perverse sexuality can hence be described as protective by design: the pervert, too, needs to sustain itself as a subject of desire. Thus, regardless of one's libidinal economy, unsublimated *jouissance* will *always* fail, so long as the subject is missing.

Toward hysteria as an ethics of desire

The sexual subversion of our times owes as much to [the hysteric] as science.

— Colette Soler, "Hysteria in Scientific Discourse"

Before I continue, it is important to note that hysteria and femininity are not one and the same, but hysteria belongs to a Lacanian feminine structure, and so when I discuss the feminine subject, I am invoking the hysteric as well.

¹⁴ Ibid., 113.

¹⁵ Ibid., 118; Žižek specifies scenarios in which one might be compelled to shed itself of 'excess subjection,' for example those subjected to power mechanisms, in which Žižek provides the example of *Fight Club*, where physical violence is used as a tool to 'liberate' oneself from the "coldness" of capitalist subjectivity. This may be useful as 'temporary treatment' under specific contexts involving ongoing unethical subjection, but should not be approached as a 'standalone sexuality.'

¹⁶ Ibid., 116.

Beyond the organ

An important characteristic of the hysteric is an identification with the signifier, and of stopping *at* the level of the signifier. Geneviève Morel recounts Lacan's definition of hysteria as "final identification with the signifier of desire."¹⁷ The emphasis of identifying with the signifier is important here, because *stopping* at the level of the signifier, in contrast to the phallic act of *progressing* into a narrative, is a distinction which distinguishes the hysteric from the phallus, despite her unconscious belief that she wishes to be the phallus. In "Tongues of Angels," Suzanne Barnard contrasts the feminine structure and the masculine structure's situation in the symbolic: "within the universe of masculine structure—a universe in which the phallic exception is instituted *from the outside*—for feminine structure there exists the possibility for a provisional 'master' signifier that is not instituted from without but from *within*'...produced through a contingency, via *tuche* as encounter...."¹⁸ The title of Barnard's essay, *Tongues of Angels*, is a reference to this non-language language, or "llanguage:" "the language of the being that ex-sists in the Other *jouissance*...can be heard in the 'body' of language—the letter of the body...."¹⁹

Strangely enough, wherever phallic *jouissance* functions as 'opaque' and 'corporeal' enjoyment, the feminine subject retracts into language; yet, wherever the phallic function wields symbolic intervention to source its enjoyment, the feminine structure of *jouissance* (Other *jouissance*, as I will elaborate on later), employs a "nonsignifying corporeal mediation" to face her Other, one which "goes beyond speech," like the "flesh of the placenta and the opaque textural surface of the spider web."²⁰ The two structures seem to partake in either materiality or language at opposite sectors, and seemingly for opposite purposes. For the feminine structure,

¹⁷ Morel, Geneviève. "Feminine Conditions of *Jouissance*." In *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, edited by Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink, 77–92. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, 88.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 184.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

enjoyment is on the side of language, and subjectivity (or facing the Other) is on the side of materiality. Whereas for the phallic structure, enjoyment is on the side of materiality, and subjectivity (or facing the Other) is on the side of language. Barnard continues, "The feminine subject inhabits the symbolic...not as a simple absence but as a mode of presence that emerges from 'beyond the veil' of phallic presence. In other words, the feminine subject is (wholly) alienated in the symbolic in such a way as to have a different relation to its limit." The feminine subject neither affirms nor negates the phallic function, despite the symbolic realm being under phallic dominion—somehow she is also present. In this way, the feminine subject's relation to the symbolic can be understood as not the inverse of, but a *subversion* of a masculine structure, where, as Barnard puts it, "the real finds a signifier."²¹

Unlike the woman's position, which is that of a symptom, the hysteric wants to 'be the phallus,' which is "means precisely not wanting to be the symptom," Soler suggests, which has much to do with her refusal to be the cause of her Other's jouissance.²² In "Neurosis," Fink writes, "The hysteric's position as a desiring subject is dependent upon the Other's desire...the hysteric also identifies with her male partner, and desires *as if she were him*."²³ In this sense, the hysteric "plays the part of the man," as she concerns herself with and brings out his lack and desire, but, "at the same time she usurps his place or plays his role for him."²⁴ This method can perhaps be described as an erratic way of allocating (*not* causing) some strange form of satisfaction for both parties.

Fink continues, "The hysteric finds a way, just when it seems her husband is most satisfied, to provoke a desire in him for something else, or even someone else," "orchestrating [a

²¹ Ibid., 179.

²² Soler, "Hysteria in Scientific Discourse," 51.

²³ Fink, "Neurosis," 124-125.

²⁴ Ibid., 125-1226.

triangular *circuit of desire*]” to become *the cause of his desire*, however, “at the same time she attempts to avoid being the person with whom he satisfies his desire. She keeps his desire unsatisfied in order to avoid being the object of his *jouissance*.”²⁵ This is precisely the defining characteristic of a hysteric sexuality: wanting to be the cause of her Other's desire, but *refusing to be the cause of her Other's jouissance*.²⁶ In this way, the *terror* and ‘invasion of *jouissance*’ earlier aforementioned become securely sheathed. The triangular (or larger!) configuration is essential for the hysteric, who sustains desire in her and her Other, with protection from the violent quality of *jouissance* for both parties.²⁷ The result is not a conventional reception of phallic *jouissance*, but some *other* kind of satisfaction. As Soler writes, the hysteric seeks not some ‘higher caliber’ of phallic *jouissance*, but rather, “someone who can say what *jouissance* it is that a woman has beyond that of the organ.”²⁸ So, let us investigate what a *jouissance* beyond ‘that of the organ’ may look like.

Barnard writes, “The feminine subject's ‘other’ relation to the Other correlates with a *jouissance* ‘beyond’ the phallus, a *jouissance* that belongs to that part of the Other that is not covered by the fantasy of the ‘One’—that is, the fantasy sustained by the positing of the phallic exception. As such, this form of *jouissance* is inscribed not in the repetitive circuit of the drive but in what Lacan calls the *en-corps*, an ‘enjoying substance’ which insists in the body beyond its sexual being (Seminar XX, 26/23).²⁹ Since the feminine subject exists in the symbolic without sourcing from the ‘phallic exception’ for her structure of desire, her relation to the Other brings about “another ‘unlimited’ form of *jouissance*.”³⁰ In “Knowledge and *Jouissance*,” Fink posits

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁹ Barnard, Suzanne. “Tongues of Angels: Feminine Structure and Other *Jouissance*.” In *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan’s Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, edited by Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink, 171–86. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, 172.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

that although not all of the feminine subject's jouissance is a phallic jouissance, nonphallic jouissance cannot exist, that is, all jouissances which *positively exist* are phallic—and so, nonphallic jouissances, or "the Other jouissance," may only "ex-sist," because, "to exist it would have to be spoken."³¹ Now, hopefully readers aren't under the impression that "Other jouissance" is simply 'jouissance for women'—phallic jouissances as well as Other jouissances certainly aren't tied to a symptom. "Women do not have to renounce phallic jouissance to have Other jouissance," Fink adds, "they can have the Other jouissance without giving up their phallic jouissance. They can have *both* this homosexual jouissance—related to object *a*, and not to their partners as such—and the Other jouissance as well."³²

Soler's essay, "What Does The Unconscious Know About Women?" reflects on the absence of Other jouissance in analysis: "analysis has led to an emphasis on phallic jouissance, for its practice is only concerned with jouissance that is filtered through the signifier."³³ Soler continues, Other jouissance is "foreclosed from the symbolic, a jouissance that can be qualified as 'outside the unconscious.' The unconscious knows nothing of this jouissance... Unlike phallic jouissance, it is not caused by an object correlated with castration and in this sense cannot be measured... This is why Lacan says in 'L'Étourdit' that it is 'beyond the subject [*le sujet en est dépassé*]. In contrast, phallic jouissance is not beyond the subject."³⁴ I might add, the feminine subject's Other jouissance is perhaps not completely 'beyond the subject,' but, rather, similar to Barnard's description of the 'letter of the body,' the feminine subject's encountering of her Other

³¹ Fink, Bruce. "Knowledge and Jouissance." In *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, edited by Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink, 21-46. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, 39.

³² Fink, "Knowledge And Jouissance," 40-41.

³³ Soler, Colette. "What Does the Unconscious Know About Women?" In *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, edited by Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink, 99-108. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, 107.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

takes up a strangely 'opaque' and 'textured' form—a non-subjectlike form which adopts the function of the subject. In other words, we might say that the feminine subject *ex-sists*.

Perverse decoys

As established in the previous section, the hysteric insists on experiencing *jouissance* vicariously, functioning in a *non-phallic* mode of *jouissance*; a layer of mediation, to protect both herself and her Other from the risk of 'terror.' Fascinatingly, I find that the obsessive, pervert, and hysteric fail to reliably behave according to their libidinal economy. This failure is not necessarily a failure of psychoanalysis, but rather a dialectical failure inevitable to any form of working logic. Indeed, psychoanalytic discourse tends to associate the hysteric more closely with the neurotic, yet, I find so often, between hysteria and perversion, a profound blurring: *the nature of being concerned with the Other's desire is strikingly similar to the pervert's concern with the Other's demand, both marked by the activity of refusal*. I will essentially argue that both hysteria and perversion, remarkably, exhibit identical, mirrored behavior upon encountering *jouissance*. In this section, I will illustrate how both the hysteric and the pervert protect themselves from *jouissance* by propping up a *perverse decoy*. Indeed, my argument thus implies that the perverse sexuality is not truly perverse.

In "Perversion," Fink posits, "If neurosis can be understood as a set of strategies by which people protest against a 'definitive' sacrifice of *jouissance*—castration—imposed upon them by their parents...and come to desire in relation to the law, *perversion involves the attempt to prop up the law so that limits can be set to jouissance*."³⁵ At first glance, this might seem fundamentally contrary to the perverse sexuality; neurotics and some analysts often fall into this

³⁵ Fink, "Perversion," 165.

"trap," thinking that the pervert "must be getting an awful lot more satisfaction in life."³⁶

However, Fink suggests, "The pervert's conscious fantasies may involve a kind of unending jouissance...but we must not confuse conscious fantasies with concrete activity, and *the latter is designed to place limits on jouissance*."³⁷ Fink continues, "What appears from the outside to be a no-holds-barred pursuit of satisfaction by the pervert himself is, in fact, a defense of sorts: the attempt to bring into being a law that restrains the pervert's jouissance, that bridles or checks him on the road to jouissance."³⁸

A distinction between pleasure and jouissance needs to be made here. The pervert indeed refuses to sacrifice his pleasure, *but, the pervert does not refuse to sacrifice his jouissance*. Rather, he refuses a jouissance without *limits*, and insists on invoking the law to apply such limits. In other words, the pervert refuses the law *precisely to make it come into being*. At this point, distinctions between hysteria and perversion become increasingly unclear, as both libidinal economies seem structured around "propping up" 'decoys' in the interest of circumventing an unregulated amount of jouissance, whereas the obsessive, on the other hand, has no issue with keeping the law in place (for the most part). In other words, the transgressive behavior of the pervert can accurately be defined as the refusal to experience an unmediated jouissance, which is *strikingly similar* to the hysteric's refusal, as we will now examine.

In "Hysteria in Scientific Discourse," Soler writes, "the hysteric's refusal or impossibility to accept herself as an object," causes herself to become "[extricated from] the *a*-sexual jouissance of the relationship between the sexes."³⁹ Unlike the pervert, however, the hysteric doesn't just refuse jouissance without castration; she refuses phallic jouissance altogether. As

³⁶ Ibid., 180.

³⁷ Ibid., 180.

³⁸ Ibid., 192.

³⁹ Ibid., 52.

mentioned earlier by Soler, "For a hysteric, in any case, being interested in the other's symptom means not consenting to being the symptom, and it does not mean having a symptom identical to a man's symptom."⁴⁰ The hysteric appears to exhibit traits of perversion in this way, through her interest in and insistence on being the cause of her Other's desire. The pervert *refuses* to be subject to their Other, imposing themselves instead as sexual object, often transgressively, in hopes of calling the law into existence. Similarly, the hysteric *refuses* to be the symptom, and instead, insists on *vicariously identifying* with the Other's symptom. Just as how the "paternal function," that Fink describes, is inadequate for the pervert, I posit that the *phallic signifier* is inadequate for the hysteric.⁴¹ However, they move in opposite directions from here; the pervert disavows castration to strengthen the paternal function, whereas the hysteric *identifies* with the phallus in order to elude it. Still, both the hysteric and pervert mirror each other in a symmetrical manner even in this departure.

Fink writes: "The pervert would rather serve as the cause of the analyst's anxiety and desire than let the analyst become the cause of his own musings. It is thus quite difficult to do genuinely analytic work with perverts."⁴² The hysteric, as we have established, also wishes to be the cause of the Other's desire, but *not* the object of desire nor the cause of their jouissance. And so, the pervert and hysteric move in perfectly opposite directions to achieve the same defensive purpose: away from jouissance. The pervert's decoy is done by positioning himself as '*that*,' as sexual object (so he needn't be involuntarily forced into the *actual* position of that horrid, 'undead organ without a body'). In this way, the pervert is not a pervert through-and-through, but rather (unconsciously) utilizes a *perverse decoy* to sustain its desire, one which is not unique to the pervert or any libidinal economy for that matter.

⁴⁰ Soler, "Hysteria in Scientific Discourse," 52.

⁴¹ Fink, "Perversion," 181.

⁴² Fink, "Perversion," 176.

The hysteric's perverse decoy is slightly more complicated and does not apply to all hysterics. Although triangulation is conventionally viewed in psychoanalysis as essential to the hysteric's circuit of desire, I argue that it is possible for the hysteric to operate in a *couple* (that is, just herself and her Other) by effectively splitting herself into two subjects: the first, a perverse decoy as bait, and the second, the hysterical subject. The hysterical subject will then direct her Other's desire toward the outward perverse decoy (instead of allocating this desire to an actual person, such as the slender friend of the butcher's wife), so that the hysteric may then identify *with her Other's* desire for said decoy.⁴³ This is the way in which her perverse decoy functions to circulate desire. Furthermore, this is how a hysteric may sustain a circulation of desire in a closed couple, contrary to some opinions that the hysteric is a malfunctional dynamic which is unable to work on the 'inverse' with other libidinal economies. By creating a perverse "decoy" of herself whilst identifying with the Other's desire for said decoy, both the hysteric and her Other may engage in a mutual projection of desire. Moreover, Soler suggests that "Another practical result is that the hysteric becomes the active agent of the Other's castration."⁴⁴ Amazingly, this is what the pervert (and all subjects, for that matter) needs but cannot speak of—and it is unnecessary to do so, as the hysteric will always stop at the signifier of desire. The 'perverse decoy,' then, is not only a blurring between the hysteric and the pervert, but reveals a sustainability in the hysteric sexuality that was previously viewed as pathological and malfunctional in the context of 'normal sexuality.' Similar to the perverse sexuality, the 'propping up' of this decoy is not a conscious, duplicitious act, but rather is precisely the erratic and convoluted nature of a hysteric sexuality.

⁴³ Soler writes: "Consider the butcher's wife: at the imaginary, visible level, she competes with her female friend in playing the part of the woman, but this masquerade results from the fact that, at the symbolic level, she identifies with her husband insofar as he is lacking something." (Soler, "Hysteria in Scientific Discourse," 53).

⁴⁴ Soler, "Hysteria in Scientific Discourse," 53.

Giving what you do not have

In "The *Unvermögender* Other," Joan Copjec writes:

"Let us cite the Lacanian formula once again: love is giving what one does not have... Whether one gives a child whose cry expresses a demand for love a blanket, or food, or even a scolding, matters little. The particularity of the object is here annulled, almost any will satisfy—as long as it comes from the one to whom the demand is addressed."⁴⁵

Let us not overlook in this quote the relationship between where love is situated and the annulment of 'the particularity of the object.' Is it not that the hysteric offers her Other precisely anything *but* an object? That, the hysteric, who identifies with the signifier, who does not progress into phallic dominion, can only *ex-sist* for her Other? Is hysteria not, as Soler writes, an "identification with desire's lack as opposed to desire's object?"⁴⁶ Indeed, "[the hysteric's] desire is sustained by the Other's symptom, to the extent that one could almost say that she makes herself a cause thereof, but a cause of ... knowledge, not because she is motivated by a desire to know, but because she would like to inspire a desire to know in the Other."⁴⁷ Could we not perhaps say, then, that the hysteric gives to her Other, *what she does not have*? As Fink writes, the Other jouissance can't be spoken of, for, "If it were spoken, it would have to be articulated in signifiers, and if it were articulated in signifiers, it would be subject to the bar between signifier and signified."⁴⁸ In other words, it would *exist*. But, the Other jouissance *ex-sists*. Surely, something must exist in order for it to be 'had,' let alone given—yet, the hysteric gives what she does not have. I am saying that the hysteric's desire resembles closest to that of love as theorized by Lacan, moreso than any other libidinal economy. As offered by Barnard, "It is in the traces of jouissance inscribed in this en-corps that we can, perhaps, discern something of the *poesis*—the

⁴⁵ Copjec, "The Unvermögender Other," 148.

⁴⁶ Soler, "Hysteria in Scientific Discourse," 52.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Fink, "Knowledge and Jouissance," 39.

something coming from nothing—that Lacan links to the contingency of being, and, ultimately, to the path of love."⁴⁹

Conclusion: 'An undermining of interpolation'

In a world of irremediably desiring subjects, perhaps a more ethical orientation toward one another can be learned from the position of the hysteric. To see value in stopping at the level of the signifier rather than insisting on 'progressing' toward phallic containment harbors profound potential for gentler desires in a gentler world. But let us take a rest from interrogating the hysteric's sexuality. Beyond its strange and erratic way of effectively configuring desire into an unlimited kind of nonphallic *jouissance*, the hysteric indeed embodies an even more *elementary* form of subversion. To use Slavoj Žižek's words:

*Hysteria, in its most elementary form, is a critique of ideology: hysteria, in its most elementary form, is an undermining of interpolation; hysteria is feminine.*⁵⁰

Upon confronting her Other, the hysteric does not respond with repression or transgression; instead she artlessly asks, *why am I what you say I am?* Instead of narrativizing or attempting to obtain mastery over her Other, she comes to identify with the very non-substance that makes up her Other; their lack. Hysteria functions in the absence of a logic of finite positivity; at the same time, it does not negate...neither affirmation nor negation, hysteria, modestly and impossibly, acts as *the body of subversion itself*.

⁴⁹ Barnard, "Tongues of Angels," 172.

⁵⁰ Žižek, "The difference between hysteria & perversion," 3:23.

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