

## SOME REMARKS ABOUT SEXUALITY

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### 1. Freud and the de-biologization of singular plural sexuality

We could talk about human sexuality, but we also could talk about human sexualities in plural. I think plural sounds more psychoanalytic, if we take into consideration the singularity of a subject. The singularity of a subject is the singularity of sexuality. There is no such thing as universal human sexuality. There are always already plural singular sexualities. Sexuality is a common name for different sexualities. It is a question of particular and universal. Such a dialectic might be seen more clearly in terms of the unconsciousness. According to Freud's logic in the very first paragraphs of the *Mass Psychology and Analysis of the "I"* the subject's unconsciousness is as collective, as it is individual. The binary opposition of collective and individual is deconstructed in psychoanalysis, it is not valid. There is no need to remind us that unconsciousness and sexuality are inextricably connected; and the only universal sexuality would be the absent sexuality: 'the only way to be universally sexual is to appear asexual' (Žižek 2020: 252)<sup>1</sup>.

It is important that Freud writes 'Three essays' not on (*über*) sexual theory but to (*zur*) it. Freud does not so much write essays (in the plural) based on an already existing theory, but rather essays on a possible, or rather *impossible* future *general theory of sexuality*. To write *on* something would mean to write about something already existing; to write *to* something is to leave the object open to the future studies. The object of reference - *sexuality* - is the same, but the relation to it is totally different. In the preface to the third edition of the book, he emphasizes that it contains only psychoanalytic principles, and therefore it is 'out of the question that they could ever be extended into a complete "theory of sexuality"' (Freud 1905d SE VII: 130). So, psychoanalytic principles do not line up into a general theory of sexuality. So, psychoanalysis allows us to talk only about multitude of singular theories of sexuality.

Let us pay attention to the title of the book, to the word 'theory'. This word in the title already indicates an intellectual approach. Theory implies intellectualization, and this is where the reason for Freud's rejection lies: not in sexuality, but in its intellectualization. If Freud was obsessed with questions of sexuality, the first thing we encounter is the endless difficulties caused by trying to determinate what we mean when we pronounce the words 'sex' and 'sexuality'.

At the end of 19th century two approaches to human sexuality emerged - sexology and psychoanalysis. In 1914, in the preface to the third edition of 'Three Essays' Freud separates these two approaches:

I must, however, emphasize that the present work is characterized not only by being completely based upon psychoanalytic research, but also by being deliberately independent of the findings of biology. I have carefully avoided introducing any preconceptions, whether derived from general sexual biology or from that of particular animal species, into this study - a study which is concerned with the sexual

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<sup>1</sup> And also, what concerns the universality of sexuality: 'Universal is not the encompassing container of the particular content... the Universal as such is the site of an unbearable antagonism' (Žižek 2020: 256).

functions of human beings and which is made possible through the technique of psycho-analysis.

Freud 1905d SE VII: 131

More than that he argues the different discourses, scientific and psychoanalytic, lead to different conclusions:

It was legitimate for me to indicate points of contact and agreement which came to light during my investigation, but there was no need for me to be diverted from my course if the psycho-analytic method led in a number of important respects to opinions and findings which differed largely from those based on biological considerations.

Freud 1905d SE VII: 131

There is a gap, an abyss between psychoanalysis and sexology. Freud revolutionizes the understanding of human sexuality. The fundamental notion of human sexuality is drive, *Trieb*, the boundary notion, differentiating psyche and soma. Drives are not biologically inherited, they arise in relations with the mOther, and with multitude of others. Thus, the concept of drive brings us not so much to sexuality, as to psychosexuality.

Human subject is the subject of psychosexuality, and the phases that Freud writes about in 'Three Essays' do not imply progressive development with an irreversible transition from one stage to another, but the integration of one phase into another. Moreover, each subsequent phase re-registers the previous one. This reverse temporality of transcription, unfolding the arrow of time from the future to the past, Freud called *Nachträglichkeit*, differed action.

The paradox of embedding phases and differed action is that we are not yet talking about the subject, that is about the *parlêtre*, if to use a Lacanian neologism, but the phases 'when they are being lived, are already organized into subjectivity (Lacan 1977: 52). The differed action mechanism makes it possible to clarify subjectification before subjectification, birth into a symbolic cradle before birth itself. Let us not forget that according to psychoanalysis humans are not born as subjects, they are in the process of becoming-subjects, that is of becoming speaking beings. According to Freud and Lacan, neither phase of infantile sexuality, nor mirror-narcissistic phase are phases when we could speak about subjects in a proper sense of the word. A subject as speaking subject, a *parlêtre*, as Lacan calls it, is a product of the next phase that is of the Oedipus complex.

Every time when Freud speaks about sexuality, he means psychosexuality. The concept of psychosexuality marks an excess of being. This excess of the psycho seems to make up for that lack of the natural, organic, which constitutes the 'nature' of man, and the name of another excess is *jouissance*, always already, in Lacanian terms, *plus de jouir*. We can say that lack of sexual relations is the result of a 'psycho'-excess influencing, deflecting and splitting sexuality. We could speak about the excess of being at least in two different modes. First, enjoyment itself is an excess, a surplus *jouissance*, something which is – in regime of compulsive repetition – unbalances the psychic apparatus. In "Beyond the pleasure principle" Freud comes up with a new idea, according to which repetition compulsion [*Wiederholungszwang*] produces traumatic excess. This excess as surplus *jouissance* is the byproduct of the signifying structure of the psychic apparatus; and human deviation starts with the excess of enjoyment disturbing the apparatus. Second, if the subject – according to the Lacanian algorithm – is a signifier representing itself to other signifiers, then the subject itself partly finds itself under the bar of the linguistic sign. The

subject emerges by means of dialectical alienation from itself, by losing part of its being. The lost part makes itself known by the pressure from the real as non-symbolizable excess. Psycho in psychosexuality implies debiologization of sexuality. The debiologization of sexuality in its turn implies the debiologization of the human subject. The point is not only that sexuality, at least in part (and this is enough) – is found outside the hypothetical natural field, but it removes the subject from this field. In the words of Slavoj Žižek, ‘sexuality is the very terrain where humans detach themselves from nature’ (Žižek 2020: 20). The very concepts of ‘nature’ and ‘biology’ belong to the symbolic matrix. Nature is always already found in culture, and sexuality, devoid of biological foundations, is radically different from that described by ethology.

## 2. Schizo-sexuality

Freud talks about infantile sexuality, which in itself is revolutionary. This sexuality of prehistoric time, *prähistorische Vorzeit*, covered by the time of the future, covered with infantile amnesia. Infantile sexuality belongs to the absolute past and its oblivion, but its effects, the traces of its shadow presence are always already here. Freud names the infantile sexuality polymorphic-perverse one. Infantile sexuality is a particular constellation of partial objects. It is universal in a sense that it depends on relations with the Other and the others, in a sense that the same objects/orifices might be involved in it – voice, nipple, mouth, gaze, fingers, etc. But the constellation of the objects/orifices and their intensities are singular.

Commenting Freud, Žižek writes: ‘First, infantile sexuality consists is a weird entity which is neither biological, nor a part of symbolic/cultural norms. However, this excess is not sublated by adult “normal sexuality – this later always distorted, displaced’ (Žižek 2020: 128).

Polymorphism implies, to use the word of Felix Guattari (who borrows it from James Joyce) *chaosmosis*, chaosmosis of partial objects forming articulations and assemblages between them. This phase precedes the drawing of boundaries between oneself and others, objects are dis-organized into chaosmosis of fingers, smiles, breasts, nipples, gazes, knees, mouths, ears, anuses, voices...

The drives are always already partial, and in psychoanalysis we are never talking about a monolithic, centered sexuality; it always remains already fragmented, manifesting itself though partial drives, and they are partial, as Lacan claims in XI seminar, in relation to the task of sexuality as the reproduction of the species. There are no objects except partial ones; there are no attractions except partial ones.

Infantile sexuality, as Freud writes in ‘Summary’, is uncentered [*nicht zentriert*] and objectless [*objectlos*]. The relationships between partial objects paint the map of infantile sexuality, of polymorphic-perverse sexuality, of diverse and deviant sexuality. Taking into account the fact that in psychoanalysis we are not talking about stages of development, but about phases of formation, sexuality is always already uncentered, objectless and deviant. Deviation of sexuality is principle. There is nothing but deviation. Freud uses in German at least four different words to mark sexuality as something that is in constant deviation: *Abweichung*, *Abirrung*, *Verirrung*, *Verleugnung*. Thus, we are faced here with the negativity of sexuality and its closeness to the atomistic concept of *clinamen*.

Clinamen is the name Lucretius gave to the erratic swerve of atoms. Atoms, void and clinamen are three basic elements of atomistic theory. The trajectory of the atoms is in deviation. Deviation from what? From its direct descent through the void: atoms move

straight down by their own weight and deflect. Atoms are always already in detour [*Umweg*], as Freud would say. Lacan uses the word *clinamen* in his XI seminar, when he speaks about atomistic theory, the meaning of choice and origin of the world. If you ask yourself what exactly human sexuality deviates from, then the simplest answer would be from nature with its organic needs and instincts. In the framework of psychosexuality, the Freudian notion of the drive [*Trieb*] with its trajectory would be the principal reason for deviation.

Infantile sexuality with its diversions raises the question of perversion, the perversity of sexuality itself, and perversity takes on a special meaning in Freud's discourse. The perversity is an essential part of sexual life, and such 'universality of this finding is in itself enough to show how inappropriate it is to use the word perversion as a term of reproach' (Freud 1905d SE VII: 160). In other words, within the framework of psychoanalytic discourse, the word perversion cannot have negative connotations.

### 3. Sex and being

Sexuality turns out to be not just a fundamental psychoanalytic question, but, moreover a question of psychoanalytic philosophy and even ontology. Sex is a question of being, and this being is not so much existence as, to use the word of Jean-Luc Nancy, *sexistence*. Sex in such a sexistential understanding becomes not some kind of ultimate 'object' to which we come every time when analyzing the human psyche, but a contradiction of human existence itself. Sexual relationships are silent about being. Missed relationships are a pass, as if allowing one to look into the abyss of existence. And if sexual relations are missed, then no relationship is possible. Missed or non-existent sexual relationships are relationships of relationships. In this sense sexuality is as fundamental for Being, as disturbing contradiction of existence.

One of the most complex questions is this: What is Freud talking about when he talks about sex and sexuality? Didn't Freud tired of being misunderstood, declare in 1920 that he was not heard, understood, or perceived when he spoke about human sexuality? To get out of this impasse of misunderstanding, Freud is ready to say that his sexuality implies the Eros of 'divine Plato'. However, this reference to divine Plato does not seem to reassure those who talk about Freud.

The subject of sex is incomprehensible and exciting, it is precisely this that has eclipsed the question of the unconscious, and it is precisely this that continues to disturb and disturb even today, at a time when there are plenty of other reasons for anxiety and concern. Incomprehensibility of sexuality is explained by the fact that we cannot fully and completely articulate it, give it space in the symbolic. The somatic component of drives and sexuality always already elude symbolization. Something is inevitably missing in the domain of words.

In the missing beginning, in the absence of a primary signifier, the place of which, as Alenka Zupančič writes, is taken by *jouissance*, thought and sexuality meet. And sexuality is not beyond the signifying order; their appearance is interconnected:

Sexuality is not some being that exists *beyond* the symbolic; it "exists" solely as the contradiction of *the symbolic space that appears because of the constitutively missing signifier, and of what appears at its place (enjoyment)*.

Zupančič 2017: 42

### 4. Sex, history and three stories

Sexuality belongs to culture. It belongs to history. In my lifetime it changes rather radically at least two times. Before I talk about it in more detail, I want to remind that Lacan recalls Victorian sexuality in 1967 and notes that it has since undergone radical changes, in particular, it has become ‘something much more public’ (Lacan 2008: 17). The paradox that Lacan notes is that while sexuality moves to the pages of newspapers and magazines, it evaporates from psychoanalysis. It is also interesting that sexuality, at least in 1967, permeates reality, it ‘means all sorts of things, the papers, clothes, the way we behave, the way boys and girls do it one fine day, in the open air, in the marketplace’ (Lacan 2008: 18). Sexuality might saturate reality in different ways, in different forms. Its realization in the singular form of subjectivity of course depends on the cultural framework.

Sexuality permeates reality, especially the reality of the market, and boys and girls have sex even today, already in digital times, but sexual relations still remain missing. It is to this omission that psychoanalysis approaches. It is here, in sexual life, in impossible sexual relationship, that Lacan discovers psychoanalytic truth. Sexual relations always fail, and according to Lacan, there is sex only in something that does not work. The principal formula of Lacanian psychoanalysis is *there is no sexual relationship*, and one of the first interpretation of this phrase means that each subject, in order to enter into a relationship, must launch its phantasm, its ‘psycho’ component of psychosexuality, its private sex formula. There are no relations, or in other words, there are *non-relations* because each subject resides in its own monad-phantasm.

#### (1) *Sex or no sex in the Soviet Union*

The fact that sexuality is tightly, but antagonistically connected with the symbolic matrix, with the ideological setting of this very matrix, was clear to me from my youth. Sexual relationships, of course, existed in the Soviet Union; I heard talk about them at least from the first grade of school, but they did not officially exist. The word ‘sex’ was considered obscene, it was not discussed in public space, it was reserved for more intimate conversations. This word was not spoken in public space.

If in the 1920s sexual issues and gender policy were aimed at emancipating the subject, then in the 1930s a right turn began, i.e., under the slogans of the fight against Western influence, Comrade Stalin rushed precisely towards totalitarian state capitalism with a conservative ideology of relations between the sexes. Through the efforts of this comrade, abortion was again banned, the heterosexual family again became the support of the state, sodomy was again recriminalized, trials against homosexuals began again, divorce proceedings became more complicated again; kisses began to be cut out of movies. Everything that did not fit within the extremely narrow normalizing discourse was declared a perversion. The norm was not so much legal or medical as a unified paranoid-state norm. The word sex seems to have disappeared from circulation. No sex, no problems. And sex does pose a problem; a problem as a question, as a field for reflection, and as concern: ‘Sex troubles the entire constitution of our being: politically, ethically, ontologically, and even aesthetically’ (Nancy and Goh 2021: 5). Sex shakes, worries, excites not only itself, even if it were possible to talk about it as something in itself, but from all sides, in all aspects of human existence.

#### (2) *Sex in Perestroika*

Perestroika was the time in-between two strict political regimes. It brought back what was repressed before, including sex, including psychoanalysis, including *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, a book immediately published in a million copies.

The repression of sex was an essential feature of the moral character of Soviet man. The euphemism for sex, which sounded behind the scenes of social space, in marriage was the idiom ‘conjugal duty’, the duty of social reproduction. In marriage, a Soviet person had to do ‘this’. Here was another euphemism – ‘this’.

In 1997, one of the last products of Perestroika appeared on the TV-screens – a program dedicated to intimate life, called ‘About This’. The word sex was absent here, too, but it was clear to everyone what does it mean, ‘this’. During Perestroika appeared another quilting point: the return of the repressed. And the return was marked by the empty demonstrative pronoun ‘this’.

Perestroika opened the doors to sex and commerce. It is interesting that Lacan in his Seminar XIV said that sexual act was ‘built into something called sexual market or sex commerce’ (Lacan 2023: 415). The new attitude to life was formed, the new generation appeared – generation of shopping and fucking. It was time when it was really great for a young ambitious girl to be on the cover of the magazine ‘Dating’ advertising sex-service.

### (3) *Sex after the end of Perestroika*

Everyone is well aware of the catchphrase ‘There is no sex in the USSR’. These words were spoken by a participant of the first Soviet-American telebridges in 1986. During the Leningrad-Boston telecommunication, the administrator of the Leningrad Hotel Lyudmila Ivanova, in response to an American woman’s question whether there is advertising in the USSR in which, like in the American one, everything revolves around sex, said: ‘Well, we have sex... we don’t have sex, and we are categorically against this! Sex is debauchery’. And today I often meet people who nostalgically say that Perestroika brought from the West two evils that did not exist in the country before: sex and drugs. This combination of two ‘vices’ coming from outside makes us think about jouissance in the Lacanian sense of the word, and about the attempt to put a dam of social repression in its path.

After Perestroika, sex – along with drugs and pornography – was declared a false value that came from the West. The heterosexual family was declared a primordial Russian value, while the West is rotten via homosexuality. The Freudian notion of bisexuality became outlawed. It seems weird but the whole politics began turn around patriarchal homophobia.

## **5. Sex and politics**

The whole political discourse is constructed around sexuality. To be more precise politics is constructed against homosexuality. It resonates with the words of Oscar Wilde, ‘everything in the world is about sex, except sex. Sex is about power’.

Homosexuality is the main reason of decaying of the so-called Collective West as collective enemy. The origin of the idea of decaying West is Soviet Union, but if in the Soviet Union the reason of confrontation was basically economically-ideological, in the new Russia it became sexually-ideological, or even in a way non-ideological. As Lacan predicted, jouissance as such would be a sufficient reason in the future for the paranoiac-narcissistic confrontation.

In the end of the twentieth century it was difficult to imagine that bisexuality and transsexuality would become the forbidden words. Heterosexual family again in the very core of the political construction. Via mass media homophobia as a virus in no time has spread around millions of humans. Familialism and statism dance together.

For Freud diversion from choosing an object of the opposite sex is not a pathological deviation. And the point is not only that heterosexual choice does not seem to Freud to be the norm, but that this choice also requires an explanation; and the explanation of this or that by a natural, biological or chemical given us not at all convincing. In one of the 1915 notes, Freud writes:

Thus, from the point of view of psychoanalysis the exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is also a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact based upon an attraction that is ultimately of a chemical nature.

Freud 1905d SE VII: 143

Nowadays scientific ideology normalizes sex precisely from the standpoint of the natural. A heterosexual family, according to positivist scientists, is natural norm. But sex is not so much about natural as about technology.

## 6. Sex-technology

Sexuality is not only historical, but also technological. To clear it up here are some simple questions: didn't the advent of contraception change sexuality, and did not Freud regularly write about such a factor of neuroticism as interrupted coitus caused by the lack of contraceptives? And didn't the advent of video strengthen the connection between sexuality and technology? In the analysis, I had many examples of discovering and viewing pornography tapes hidden by parents, and their influence on the design of sexuality. And didn't the advent of the Internet change the sexual relations between humans?

We constantly talk about the psycho-excess of sexuality, in which 'psycho' makes up for the original lack, the lack of the organic, which Freud writes about as organic helplessness of the newborn. The replenishment of organic helplessness can be understood metaphorically as fire and desire, as an abstract phantasmatic replenishment and as a concrete technical replenishment. Let me remind you, that man according to Freud, is God on prosthesis.

Psyche and technique are inherently connected. Technique should be understood here in the expanded sense of the word. Not only the stick and the spaceship are techniques, but also the symbolic register is automatic and technological. If the elementary particle of this register is a signifier, then the question arises: is its origin natural? Moreover, is the letter given by nature, or should we talk about the technique of inventing letters, writing, reading, and counting?

Man's technology goes beyond the limits of man, and man goes beyond his limits through technology. Technology always already includes excess, an excess of being. Writing techniques and speaking techniques are as relevant as telecommunications techniques and sexual techniques. It is for this reason - because of sexual technology - that we are not talking about media, but about technology.

Techniques is different: there is a technique of sex like the Kama Sutra, an ancient Indian treatise of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD and there is a sexual technique, prosthesis. Here we also touch on the aesthetic aspect, since we are talking about technology.

Libido is connected with technology and aesthetics: 'There is no libido without aesthetics, and this is why Lacan speaks of the "erogenous function of beauty". But the libidinal aesthetics is in essential way prosthesis [*une prosthésie*]' (Stiegler 2012: 235). The

erogenous function of beauty is replenished by libido-aesthetics as prosthetics, which refers to anesthetics, anesthesia as a loss of sensuality. Prosthetics is not complete without anesthesia, and sexuality is not complete without prosthetics, including industrially produced prosthetics.

Technical prostheses are located between me and myself, between me and an other. One of the fundamental new concepts in this area is *teledildonics*. This sex technology transmits sensory and other information over a two-way digital communication channel. But we are not just talking about masturbation (dildonics), but about it with a remote (tele) partner. There is another, and there is no other. S/he is not present, but tele-present, his presence is carried over a distance, and it does not matter how far, from the next room to the other hemisphere of the planet. The other is at a distance, sex is a remote sex.

The idea that one can talk about masturbation in any way in connection with the sex industry is that the other, from this point of view, is an instrument of encounter with oneself, necessary for self-affection. Freud believes that the instrumentalization of sex with the help of condoms turns it into masturbation, which can be one of the causes of melancholia. Ultimately, it is difficult to separate sexual intercourse with an other from masturbation with oneself, even if no condoms are used. The sexual act in any case requires self-stimulation. It is not surprising that in the Russian language all verbs denoting sexual intercourse, sex with another, are reflexive. Recurrence indicates self-stimulation, autoeroticism, masturbation, which 'in itself' is paradoxically devoid of return. Returnability passes the relationship with oneself through another. Autoeroticism converges with alloeroticism, and in this return we make distinctions, it is here that we first of all have to distinguish the other and through the other, ourselves. Based on polymorphic-perverse sexuality, we can say that if the subject needs another, it is for the sake of returning partial attractions to oneself. Sexuality is reduced to the jouissance provided by partial objects; and sex industry supplies consumers with more and more partial objects, lathouses from the alethosphere. Why do you need another person if there is an endless supply of partial sex-lathouses. These objects free one from the need to deal with another person, despite the fact that her/ his body is involved, connected to teledildonics devices.

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