



Ethics and Modes of Jouissance

Christian Hoffmann

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Ethics and Modes of Jouissance

Éthique et mode de jouissances

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Christian Hoffmann

Abstract:

The Freudian cut of the subject allows for the elaboration of an ethics of subjective responsibility and its singular mode of jouissance.

Résumé:

La coupure freudienne du sujet permet d'élaborer une éthique de sa responsabilité subjective et de son mode singulier de jouissance.

Keywords: division of the subject, ethics, jouissance, subjectivity

Mots-clefs: division du sujet, éthique, jouissance, subjectivité

I am going to be developing the idea that, for psychoanalysis: The subject has an ethics of responsibility¹ for his singular mode of jouissance. In order to do so, I am first going to be looking into the *The Freudian Cut of the subject*.

We find the premises of a psychoanalytic conception of the subject in Freud with regard to the drives, and especially when it is a question of the about turn of the drive, the about turn that is necessary for the development of the drive through the passage from the passive form to the active form, between for example “seeing” and “making oneself seen”.

The other phase of the drive in which the subject is pointed out is that of the “other subject”, as Freud calls it, the one that must enter into the loop of the drive so that satisfaction may be produced. This stage in the relation to the other party through the entry of an “other subject”, a partner, in the loop of the drive shows just how much the subject's

psychical and corporeal interiority are articulated with the social dimension.

But it is in Freud's final text, on “*Ichspaltung*”², that he not only provides us with the solution to the refusal of femininity as the rock of both castration and of analysis for the two sexes, but also familiarizes us with the notion of the subject of the unconscious that grapples with the drive, with jouissance, and with social structures, and which makes itself felt above all through prohibitions.

In this final piece of writing from 1938, Freud introduces the cut in Being. The “*Ich*” of the “*Spaltung*” allows itself to be translated as the “cut” or the “division” of “Being”. For example, the expression “*Mein ganzes Ich*” is translated as “All my Being”. One can complete this with the Being of the “I” or of the subject. This division between statement and enunciation should not bother us any further.

This division of the subject is the Freudian discovery of the solution to the refusal of

femininity and to its analytic bedrock, namely that, faced with a psychical trauma such as the trauma of a psychical danger linked to the pursuit of the satisfaction of a drive, when a choice is set out:

- to give up on the satisfaction by acknowledging the danger
- or by denying the reality of the danger in order to maintain the satisfaction

the child responds to the conflictual situation with two opposing positions. On one hand, he refuses the reality of the danger and does allow himself to be refused anything, and simultaneously he acknowledges this reality by transforming the anxiety to which this danger has given rise into a symptom.

The solution by means of the symptom is paid not only at the price of suffering, in which we recognize *jouissance*, but also at the price of a “cut” in the Being of the subject. There is no recovery to be expected from this division of the subject, the kernel of which is constituted by the drive and its satisfaction, *jouissance*, and the dangers of the social structure. In short, as we recognize today, there is no subject without a symptom, that is to say, no subject without *jouissance*.

The Lacanian subject is founded in this Freudian “*Ichspaltung*”. It is first and foremost defined by the signifier of the Desire of the Mother which is embodied in the phallus. The phallus that pre-exists the subject is the signifier of the Desire of the Mother.

The subject rigged out with this signifier with which his Being has identified will go on to be embodied in his body by incorporating his image in the mirror of his mother, who has invested in it with her libido. Thereafter he has a body and he is ready to construct his subjectivity in the social body that is in tension between his semblable in the mirror and the Other, the figure of absolute otherness, beyond the mirror and the wall of language, this Other from which he expects in exchange for his speech a return of his own message in an inverted form. In short, an Other who is supposed to know better than he what the truth of his speech is all about.

This subject who is not reduced to his image (the foundation of his ego), nor to his speech, lives in a world of symbols that are articulated by the social discourse and which will allow him to articulate his subjectivity and his mode of *jouissance*, for which we now know the subject to be responsible. This responsibility is the responsibility of his subjective division which is the result of his having chosen his mode of *jouissance*.

Now we may ask ourselves the question of how this, of how the *id*, enjoys. Very early on, Lacan substituted the subject for the Freudian *Es*. This “*id*”, which is not the ego, is constituted in Freud’s theory by everything that the being brings in its coming into being and which constitutes the *jouissance* of the living being. Once again, we may note this notion of “Being” which falls from Freud’s pen in his later work, notably in his “Outline of Psychoanalysis”.

The “*id*” leads us directly to the body that enjoys itself and which does so over and above any consideration of sex. This *jouissance*, which Lacan qualifies as fundamental or “mortal”³, stands in contrast to sexual *jouissance*, in so far as the latter is bounded by a limit. This *jouissance* takes the road that leads towards death⁴, and it is directed against one’s own body or the body of the other party. In short, to enjoy a body, as Lacan says, more often than not consists in demolishing it.⁵

This mortal *jouissance* of the living being is articulated in the unconscious with the death drive and its play of repetition. And it is through the intermediary of language, in so far as the unconscious is constituted by the traces of the experiences of childhood *jouissance*, that the search for *jouissance* will be articulated to the signifying trace which carries, as does any trace, the signification of the loss.

This anchoring of mortal *jouissance* in the unconscious through the productions of language that give signification to the loss of *jouissance* introduces sexual *jouissance*.

Lacan calls sexual *jouissance* “phallic *jouissance*” because the mortal *jouissance* is sexualized by the phallus. Since Ancient Greece, the phallus

has always to be understood as the signifier of desire that introduces the signification of loss and, as a consequence of this, the limit that is imposed on the search for *jouissance*.

This is put very well by the Enlightenment philosopher Julien Offroy de La Mettrie in *L'art de jouir*: "If I have lost my days in voluptuousness, oh!, great gods, that I may have them back to lose them all over again!"⁶

The speaking and enjoying body, in so far as it is constructed on the basis of the discourse that organizes the social bond, is now inviting us to ask ourselves just how *id* enjoys in the social sphere.

Let us take the question of violence and the question of pornography⁷, and try to understand why today there is a rise in the power of these two phenomena in the social sphere.

No one would dispute the fact that our social bond is marked by an exigency of *jouissance* that pushes one towards *ever more sex* to the detriment of a sexuality that would be synonymous with eroticism. This absence of Eros in *jouissance* opens the field to the death drive through the de-sexualization of the social bond.

The will to *jouissance* stands in opposition to desire and to the clothing, by means of the phallic signifier, of the drive that limits *jouissance* by sexualization. Thus we may distinguish sexual *jouissance* from another more primary *jouissance* which is the *jouissance* of the living being in which the body is enjoyed in an autism that opens up a point of access to "destructive rage" as Freud put it in his *Civilization and its Discontents* by looking at the disturbing "non eroticized aggression and destruction".

The death drive takes over the terrain that has been cleared by a social bond that has taken up ranks under the iron rule of the will to *jouissance* that walks in step with the laws of the marketplace and of ever more consumption of objects that very quickly go from "up" to "down" on the market, which simply fans the flames of the exigency of *jouissance*.

Pornography and violence set the scene for ever more *jouissance* of a body that has been desexualized by the absence of libidinal investment in the bond.

This *jouissive* rage of violence that embraces pornography finds its master in a demanding social superego that requires *jouissance* at any cost, including that of death.

In short, when politics does not pledge a social bond based around values such as *singularity, reciprocity and community*⁸, which form the fabric of politics and of the interiority of the citizen that the subject is, then desexualized violence, that is to say, limitless violence, finds its *jouissance* in this desertification.

One of the easily ascertainable features in our social bond today is the dis-investment of libido in work.

This is putting the bourgeoisie of the wage system in great difficulty and a large part of the youth are finding it hard to invest libidinally in knowledge.⁹ Without forgetting the slippery political slopes linked to the weakening of the middle class of teachers, psychoanalysts and other citizens.

Psychoanalysis is not an ethics of *jouissance* that would pledge a new creative desire in culture to the subject who grasps himself in his body by developing new strategies of *jouissance*, which is what Michel Foucault called for. We can in a certain sense see the failure of Foucault's project which did not know how to go about avoiding the withdrawal of identity into new forms of *jouissance*, in other words, the construction of egos. On the other hand, psychoanalysis can help a subject to rid himself of a weight of *jouissance*, hence Lacan's idea that in each analysis there is a student of Aristotle.

This is not devoid of a political resonance due to the fact that what one may rightfully expect from the effect of an analysis on a subject who wields some power runs counter to Alcibiades, that is to say, he enjoys power less and is thus able to devote his desire to public life.

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Notes:

¹C. Hoffmann, *Des cerveaux et des hommes*, Erès, 2007.

²Freud, S., "The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence", (1938 / 40) translated by J. Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XXIII, Hogarth Press, London, 1964, pp. 271 – 8; reprinted in *Penguin Freud Library Vol. XI: On Metapsychology*, The Penguin Press, Harmondsworth, 1991, pp. 457 – 64; retranslated by G. Frankland as "The Splitting of the Ego in Defence Processes" in *The Unconscious*, Penguin Modern Classics, London, p. 101-6.

³J. Lacan, *Le savoir du psychanalyste*, unpublished, lesson of the 4th of November 1971. Cf., J. M. Jadin & M. Ritter, *La jouissance au fil de l'enseignement de Lacan*, Erès, 2009.

⁴J. Lacan, 1969-1970, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, The Seminar Book XVII*, translated by R. Prigg, 2007, Norton & Norton, New York, p. 17-18.

⁵J. Lacan, ...ou pire, *Le Séminaire livre XIX*, Le seuil, Paris, 2011.

⁶J. O. de La Mettrie, *L'art de jouir*, Joseph K., 2011.

⁷S. André, *No sex, no future*, La Mulette, 2011.

⁸P. Rosanvallon, *La société des égaux*, Seuil, Paris, 2011.

⁹C. Hoffmann & J. Birman, "L'autonomie des universités et la nouvelle condition étudiante", in *La célibataire*, Issue 23, EDK, 2011.

The author:

Christian Hoffmann, PhD

Psychoanalyst. Professor in clinical psychopathology at Paris Diderot University, Sorbonne Paris Cité. Director of the Graduate School "Research in psychoanalysis and psychopathology". Researcher for the Center for Research in Psychoanalysis, Medicine and Society (CRPMS).
Université Paris VII Diderot
Campus Paris Rive Gauche
Bâtiment Olympe de Gouges
11, rue Jean Antoine de Baïf
75013 Paris
France

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