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Unspeakable: Perversion, Psychoanalysis, *Prosopopoeia*¹

Keywords

Freud, Lacan, Miller, perversion, psychoanalysis, *prosopopoeia*

Abstract

In order to speak in the voice of “the pervert,” psychoanalysis inevitably find itself performing the classic rhetorical act of *prosopopoeia* whereby an imagined, absent, or dead person is represented as speaking. To re-read Jacques-Alain Miller’s classic essay “On Perversion” (1996), for example, we find that the pervert is adjudged to be “unspeakable”—in every sense of that word—and so they can only be ventriloquized by the figure of the analyst. If the analyst seeks to speak on behalf of the pervert, however, this essay argues that the perverse speech act is itself a form of *prosopopoeia* which can ventriloquize the subject position of the hysteric, the neurotic, the psychotic, and even the analyst themselves. In conclusion, the essay argues that Miller’s account of the relationship between the analyst and the pervert, where each are seen to ventriloquize the other, bespeaks of a certain *prosopopophilia*—a love of *prosopopoeia*—that is the condition of being a speaking subject in the first place: I am always speaking for and as the other—even or especially when I am speaking as “myself.”

Neizrekljivo: perverzija, psihoanaliza, prozopopeja

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Ključne besede

Freud, Lacan, Miller, perverzija, psihoanaliza, prozopopeja

¹ This essay was first delivered as a paper at the symposium *Perversion and Its Discontents* at the Institute of Philosophy, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, in May 2023. I am very grateful to Boštjan Nedoh for the invitation to speak and to the other participants for their helpful feedback. In what follows, I have preserved the original oral format for reasons that will hopefully become obvious.

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Povzetek

Da bi psihoanaliza spregovorila z glasom »perverzneža«, se neizogibno znajde v klasičnem retoričnem dejanju prozopopeje, v katerem je namišljena, odsotna ali mrtva oseba predstavljena kot govoreča. Če na primer ponovno preberemo klasični esej Jacquesa-Alaina Millerja »O perverziji« (1996), ugotovimo, da je v njem perverznež označen za »neizrekljivega« – v vseh pomenih te besede –, zato ga lahko ventrilokvizira le lik analitika. Medtem ko si analitik prizadeva govoriti v imenu perverzneža, pa pričujoči prispevek trdi, da je perverzno govorno dejanje samo po sebi oblika prozopopeje, ki lahko ventrilokvizira pozicijo subjekta kot histerika, nevrotika, psihotika in celo samega analitika. Na koncu članek trdi, da Millerjev opis odnosa med analitikom in perverznežem, v katerem vsak od njiju ventrilokvizira drugega, kaže na določeno prozopofilijo – ljubezen do prozopopeje –, ki je pogoj za to, da smo sploh govoreči subjekt: vselej govorim za drugega in kot drugi – tudi ali predvsem takrat, ko govorim kot »jaz sam«.



In this paper, I would like to tell you why I am so happy to be here today. It's not because I enjoy talking about psychoanalysis or anything like that. As a matter of fact, psychoanalysis doesn't make people like me happy at all: we really have nothing to say to the likes of you and, quite honestly, we find all your theoretical gobbledygook boring and ridiculous. To tell you the truth—which is the kind of nauseating personal “confession” I know people like you really want to hear—I am happy to be here at this symposium on perversion for one reason only: *I am a pervert*. If you psychoanalysts know anything about us perverts, after all, it is that we are happy wherever we are: we perverts just love being perverts; we feel no guilt, shame, or trauma; we experience no lack, no lost or missing object; we heroically act *on* our perversion in the real world rather than pathetically acting it out in fantasy or therapy; we exist in the now of a permanent *jouissance* rather than in the infinite regress of the chain of desire; and we ask no question to which that mythical “subject supposed to know” called the analyst is supposed to have an answer, because we already know the answer ourselves. For psychoanalysis, we perverts thus belong to that set of hopeless, incurable cases that are simply deemed unanalyzable—like psychotics or the Irish.² Did I mention that

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² See Martin Scorsese's *The Departed* (2006) for the most recent iteration of Freud's (probably apocryphal) animus towards the Irish. In the film, Matt Damon's character states that

I'm Irish, too, by the way? In our incurable happiness, though, I'm sorry to say that we perverts seem to make you psychoanalysts very unhappy indeed, but please don't be sad because (like one of my illustrious predecessors) I am here to teach you how you can be more like us: *Encore un effort*, psychoanalysts, if you want to be perverts!

To speak in the voice of “the pervert” which I will be trying, more or less unconvincingly, to do in this paper, we inevitably find ourselves performing the classic rhetorical act of *prosopopoeia* (προσωποποιία, from the Greek *prosopon* [πρόσωπον, face] and *poiein* [ποιειν, to make]) whereby an imagined, absent, or dead person or inhuman thing is represented as speaking or acting. It is possible, of course, to see the entire history of psychoanalysis as a series of (more or less convincing) ventriloquisms of the master's voice whereby Lacan speaks for Freud, Žižek for Lacan, and so on, but arguably the pervert alone remains, in every sense of the word, *unspeakable*. As is well known, perverts pose a peculiar empirical problem for the psychoanalyst insofar as they rarely present themselves for analysis in the first place and so can only be spoken *for*, around and about, or on behalf of, by the (emphatically non-perverse) analyst. For psychoanalysts, though, perverts also constitute a more serious theoretical problem for the analytic process itself because their real problem is that they seem to have no problem with their problem or, even worse still, they really may not have a problem in the first place: they simply exist, Zen-like, in the silence of pure *jouissance*. If the pervert unproblematically enjoys their own symptom, which is thus not even a “symptom” anymore, this state of blissed out beatitude threatens to render the analyst figuratively and literally redundant: what nineteenth-century psychiatry notoriously diagnosed as the incurable pervert who is happy in their perversion may thus be the harbinger of that other aggressively anti-psychoanalytic figure who can be found at the other end of the Freudian century, namely, the serotonin-enhanced subject of modern psychopharmacology. In this singularly unhappy state of affairs, perversion not only “disappears on the couch,” as Jacques-Alain Miller puts it in a classic essay, but also threatens to make the analytic couch *itself* disappear.³

“What Freud said about the Irish is, we're the only people who are impervious to psychoanalysis.”

³ Jacques-Alain Miller, “On Perversion,” in *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud*, ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jannus (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 306–20.

This paper is a set of more or less perverse speech acts, written in response to Jacques-Alain Miller's "On Perversion" (1996), on the curiously asymmetrical dialogue, or perhaps internal monologue, between the psychoanalyst and the pervert. To be sure, Miller's famous talk may be read as the classic, even symptomatic, act of perverse *protopoeia*, because despite or because of the pervert's acknowledged inaccessibility to analytic scrutiny, he proceeds very happily to analyze this most unanalyzable of subjects. It is apparently no problem at all that the pervert doesn't "ask to undergo analysis," Miller alleges, nor that they "cannot communicate" their knowledge of sexual enjoyment to others, nor even that they prefer the company of "a tiny, secret society of initiates" to the (presumably) endless cocktail party that is the social life of a Lacanian psychoanalyst. As Tim Deans argues in an excellent essay on Lacanianism and perversity, none of this matters because the "absence of perverts in analysis allows one to say whatever s/he wishes about them."⁵ For Miller, predictably enough, what he wishes to say about the pervert is that their so-called "happiness" is really just the misrecognized or disavowed symptom of a pathology which, as Freud himself had argued almost a century earlier in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), takes its pleasure from the "wrong" object: "he [the pervert] has found sexual gratification," the former concludes, "but it is not the right kind."⁶ Yet, it is possible to argue that Miller's essay also manifests a certain *Unbehagen*—a *mal-être*, discontent, perhaps even another "wrong" kind of happiness—with its own happy *protopoeia* of perversion: "perversion throws the analyst's most intimate judgment into question," he confesses, "throwing into question the point up to which he himself has moved on the path of sexual enjoyment."⁷ If the analyst ultimately fails to convincingly speak for the pervert, this paper will propose that it may not be because the latter is incurably silent, resistant, or unspeakable, but rather because (and as Miller obliquely appears

⁴ Miller, 306–9.

⁵ Tim Deans, "The Frozen Countenance of the Perversions," *Parallax* 14, no. 2 (2008): 102, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13534640801990608>. In Deans's own verdict upon Miller's essay, to which I am obviously indebted in what follows, "The so-called pervert's basic satisfaction, his sense of not needing psychoanalysis to make him happy, is being construed as potentially pathological. It is not only that perverts stay away from analysis because of a history of mistreatment, but also that allegedly perverse modes of enjoyment are seen as a rebuke to analytic know-how. In appearing as untroubled, the happy pervert apparently troubles the psychoanalyst" (Deans, 101).

⁶ Miller, "On Perversion," 309.

⁷ Miller, 308.

to suggest here) the pervert speaks for *them*: what I wish to hypothesize here is that perversity is itself a kind of *prosopopoeia*, which is uncannily able to ventriloquize the voice of analysis itself, and which (like all acts of ventriloquism) carries with it the existential risk of irony, parody, mechanical repetition, redundancy, and even death for its victim. In the remarkable conclusion to Miller's essay, where the subject supposed to know finds themselves asking the question of their own enjoyment and the subject who is supposed to have a question finds that they already know the answer, the pervert thus disappears from the analysand's couch only to reappear in the analyst's chair speaking, as it were, *ex cathedra* (literally, "from the chair"). Who or what, then, speaks in the voice of the pervert?

"How very interesting"

In the same way as Michel Foucault's history of madness, the psychoanalytic history of perversion seems to be the history of a silence.⁸ It has already been noted by Deans, for instance, that Freud's case histories contain "clinical testimony from several hysterics (Dora, Anna O., Emmy von N., etc.), from two obsessional neurotics (Rat Man, Wolf Man), from one phobic (Little Hans), and indirectly from a distinguished psychotic (Schreber)," but the pervert, alone, never speaks in their own voice.⁹ At one level, of course, the early Freud's ambition is precisely to explode the nineteenth-century sexological theory (descending from Krafft-Ebing, Moll et al.) that there is a generic psychosexual personality type called the "pervert": everyone and everything is perverse.¹⁰ Yet, despite or because of perversity's unspeakable universality, everything still proceeds in his early work as if there really were an individuated subject of perversion, typically diagnosed as an "invert" or homosexual, whose determined pathological symptoms can be made to speak for them. To briefly rehearse his essay on "The Sexual Aberrations," which is the first of his classic *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud famously argues that sexual perversions are either "(a) actions of *extending*, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union; or (b) actions of *lingering* over the in-

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⁸ Michel Foucault, *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Plon, 1961).

⁹ Deans, "Frozen Countenance," 99.

¹⁰ In Miller's gloss upon the early Freud, perversity is the norm of the drive: "Perversion is natural, that is, primary. Perversion is more primal than the norm, that norm being secondary or even cultural." Miller, "On Perversion," 313.

termediate relations to the sexual object normally rapidly traversed on the path towards the final sexual aim.”¹¹ While Freud’s definition of perversity is notoriously broad enough to encompass such apparently “normal” sexual practices as gazing, kissing, or foreplay, which all derogate from the territory of strict genital copulation for the purposes of reproduction, he then goes on to identify a qualitative threshold beyond which the “normally” perverse becomes positively pathological: what defines perversion as a pathological symptom is a certain spatial or temporal *fixity* [*der Fixierung*] that leads it to not merely supplement but to wholly substitute itself for the normalized sexual activity of heterosexual intercourse.¹² In their pathological “stuckness” upon their enjoyment which leads them to say “no” to any supposedly normal sexual object or aim, the pervert allegedly begins to speak their own symptom for the first time.

To make the pervert “speak” in and as themselves for the first time in history, however, Freud must ironically become the original unhappy or discontented perverse *ventriloquist*. It has already been observed by Arnold Davidson, amongst others, that his allegedly universal theory of perversion ironically ends up reproducing, albeit without the residual moralism, the discredited psychosexual subject positions of many of his sexological predecessors.¹³ As “The Sexual Aberrations” makes abundantly clear, Freud’s pervert remains more or less synonymous with historically overdetermined figures like the “invert” or homosexual and this gesture will persist into Lacanianism as well: the homosexual is taken to speak for “perversity in general.” However, we can already begin to glimpse the ventriloquist’s own lips moving when Freud himself acknowledges that, in the majority of cases, we can only “discern the pathological character in perversions not in the content [*Inhalt*] of the new sexual aim, but in its relation [*Verhältnis*] to the normal.”¹⁴ For Freud, at least according to the strict letter of his text if not perhaps its normalizing spirit, the pervert thus appears to occupy a kind of libidinal empty place which subtracts itself from any determined psychosexual subject position or object choice into a pure and empty relationality: what they enjoy is explicitly not some positive sexual “content,” e.g., ho-

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¹¹ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality: The 1905 Edition*, ed. Philippe van Haute and Herman Westerink, trans. Ulrike Kistner (London: Verso, 2016), 13.

¹² Freud, 22.

¹³ See, for example, Arnold I. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Freud, *Three Essays*, 22.

mosexuality et al., but what we might call the negative, virtual, or potential set of “relations” between drives, attachments, and objects. If the pervert only exists in the interstices between libidinal subject positions, which is to say as the possible extension, variation, supplementation, or substitution of every single position in the sexual field by every other, then they can occupy no (normal or perverse) position of their “own”: they are, constitutively, what is out of place. In the very historical moment when they are first called upon to speak in their own voice, Freud’s pervert reveals themselves as a kind of libidinal Bartleby: they would prefer not to be analyzed.

In Freud’s once obscure but now somewhat notorious late case study “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman” (1920), a case which should, according to his own clinical criteria, be almost a textbook study in perversion, what we might call the perverse analysand’s empirical and theoretical *undiagnosability*, as opposed to any positive symptomatic behavior, revealingly becomes the non-symptomatic symptom of their perversity.¹⁵ To recall Freud’s own diagnostic process of more or less total elimination in this case study, the young woman who is its subject is (uniquely amongst such studies) neither named nor given a pseudonym but remains entirely anonymous; she is said to be “not in any way ill [. . .] nor did she complain of her condition”; she is judged to be both “brazen” and “deceitful” in her exhibition of her homosexuality; she is said to have no desire to undergo analysis voluntarily and barely engages with the analytic process; she has, according to him, “never been neurotic, and came to the analysis without even one hysterical symptom,” indeed, by the end, it is not clear whether she is even homosexual and, of course, the word “pervert” never appears anywhere in his text.¹⁶ It is thus hardly surprising that feminist and queer readers of this essay object that Freud reduces the young woman to a kind of ventriloquist’s dummy or mouthpiece for his own heteronormative speculations about the alleged “causes” of her homosexuality.¹⁷ As we have already begun to see in the case of “The Sexual Aberrations,” though, we arguably find the pervert

¹⁵ See also Deans’s discussion of the same essay in “Frozen Countenance,” 99–100.

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman (1920),” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 18:146–72.

¹⁷ See, for example, the essays collected in Ronnie C. Lesser and Erica Schoenberg, eds., *That Obscure Subject of Desire: Freud’s Female Homosexual Revisited* (Philadelphia: Routledge, 1999).

in the unhappy gaps or lacunae—the discontents—which haunt Freud’s own relentless will to normalization. For Freud, what comes to define the subject position of the pervert in this text is precisely an oscillation between other more determined subject positions, speech acts, or language games and, in particular, between the positions of the hysterical and obsessional neurotic and their own defining enunciations of lying by telling the truth and telling the truth by lying. If the pervert is thus characterized by a kind of undiagnosability, Freud’s account of the young woman’s curious engagement, or rather lack of engagement with the analytic process itself, perhaps helps us to glimpse why this might be: “Once when I expounded to her a specially important part of the theory, one touching her nearly,” he recalls, “she replied in an inimitable tone, ‘How very interesting,’ as though she were a *grande dame* being taken over a museum and glancing through her lorgnon at objects to which she was completely indifferent.”¹⁸ In Freud’s own normalizing interpretation, the young woman’s merely academic interest in the process of analysis is nothing more than a classic act of resistance, which he describes as a kind of analytic equivalent to the “Russian tactics” in warfare of retreating or withdrawing to a position that proves unconquerable,¹⁹ but it is at least possible to wonder whether her real position is ironically closer to the classic German military tactic of attacking what Carl von Clausewitz calls the enemy’s *Schwerpunkt* or “center of gravity”:²⁰ what arguably disarms Freud here is that this young woman—who exhibits an analyst’s theoretical or conceptual mastery of the analytic process but signally lacks any sense that she personally is the analysand—is actually speaking in the voice of the *analyst*.

“I always lie”

In the opening pages of his paper “On Perversion” (1996), which was originally delivered as a talk to the Paris-New York Psychoanalytic Workshop, Jacques-Alain Miller briefly laments that the pervert simply never presents themselves

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¹⁸ Freud, “Psychogenesis,” 163.

¹⁹ See Mary Jacobus, “Russian Tactics: Freud’s ‘Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,’” *GLQ* 2, nos. 1 and 2 (1995): 65–79, https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2-1_and_2-65, for an account of the “Russian” metaphor in Freud. In the *Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality*, Freud revealingly associates this form of resistance with obsessional neurosis rather than perversion.

²⁰ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

for analysis (“We might conclude that perverts are unanalyzable, but the fact is they simply don’t come asking to undergo analysis”)²¹ before immediately proceeding to speak, nevertheless, of a figure we will term the “perverse analysand.” It is revealing that the Lacanian theory of perversion has even less of a basis in empirical observation than its Freudian predecessor: Lacan’s own classic example of a real, live “perverse analysand” is the distinguished, but sadly no longer empirical, figure of the Marquis de Sade.²² As Miller himself observes, the psychoanalyst’s hunt for the elusive figure of the pervert inevitably seems to lead away from “reality” and into the field of literature. “No other clinical structure involves as many literary references as perversion,”²³ but this insight never leads to sustained reflection on why the space in which people, by definition, can only ever speak on behalf of the other should also be the privileged place of the pervert. To explain why perverts do not come to analysis in the first place, Miller speculates that they are something close to the opposite of, say, neurotics, who present themselves in order “to seek out the lost object”: the pervert, on the contrary, believes that “they have found it [the object]” and so “can expect nothing from analysis.”²⁴ For Miller, every analysand needs “a certain void or deficit in the place of sexual enjoyment” to want to undergo analysis in the first place, but the pervert instead experiences something close to a *void of a void* of enjoyment that he calls the “inertia” of *jouissance*: “The pervert has the answer,” he writes, “an immutable, constant share that is always ready to use it is *at hand*, an *at hand* enjoyment.”²⁵ If the pervert feels that they do not need analysis because they are already happy, which is to say they desire nothing because enjoyment is always easily within reach, Miller goes on to contend that they, nonetheless, suffer from a lack of satisfaction with “satisfaction” itself. In the analytic process, Miller confidently predicts, the allegedly happy pervert would surely discover that their “right” object of pleasure was the wrong object all along or, better still, that every object is somehow wrong and so, like every other unhappy analysand, they really do have a question to which the analyst may be supposed to have an answer: “The pervert has found the object, that is his problem; he is certain about his ways of obtaining sexual gratification, but that is not why he comes to analysis,” he declares, “Perhaps he feels it is not what it ought to be;

²¹ Miller, “On Perversion,” 309.

²² See Deans, “Frozen Countenance,” 101–2.

²³ Miller, “On Perversion,” 312.

²⁴ Miller, 309.

²⁵ Miller, 310.

he has found sexual gratification but it is not the right kind. Either you don't find it, or if you do, it is not the right kind."²⁶

To speak of this paradoxical (indeed almost oxymoronic) figure of the "perverse analysand," whose very lack of any reason to undergo analysis becomes the very reason *why* they need it, what Miller really seems to be talking about is not a "real" empirical subject so much as a hypothetical indeed even fictional placeholder in his own thought experiment: "He do the pervert," to misquote Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, "in different voices." It is inevitable that we analysts must end up speaking for perverts, he argues, because even on the vanishingly rare occasions that a real live perverse analysand presents themselves at our clinics they remain curiously absent: "either perversion disappears on the couch, or the patient disappears from the couch."²⁷ According to Miller's account of his own clinical practice, his perverse analysands are inevitably homosexuals once again who have courageously broken out of the diminishing circle of pure enjoyment to begin the process of seeking the truth of their desire: "We are," he ventriloquizes his perverse clientele, "among the most honest, the most truth-seeking, the most self-searching patients."²⁸ However, the truth Miller's perverse analysand has come to tell, paradoxically, is that all perverts are pathological liars. If perverts are empirically unanalyzable, then anyone who comes to analysis and claims to be a pervert is, almost by definition, not a "real" pervert but something else: a neurotic, a psychotic, perhaps even (to recall Freud's encounter with the young woman again) a kind of wannabe analyst who thinks they know better than the subject supposed to know and is engaging in a rash or precipitate act of self-diagnosis. For Miller, in what could almost be a verbatim quotation from Freud's case study of the brazen but deceitful young homosexual woman, any analysand who openly diagnoses themselves as a pervert is thus automatically suspicious: "You mustn't take at face value the subject's announcement that he is a homosexual," he warns, "One man may believe he is a homosexual because he slept with a boy once when he was fourteen, and another may believe he is not a homosexual even though he sleeps with two or three different boys a week."²⁹ In Judith Feher-Gurewich's verdict, which takes

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²⁶ Miller, 309.

²⁷ Miller, 309.

²⁸ Miller, 307.

²⁹ Miller, 308.

Miller's professional skepticism about the self-diagnosis of the perverse analysand to its logical conclusion, the only "true" pervert, if indeed they exist, is the analysand who *lies* about being a pervert: "I have not yet encountered the rare specimen who would admit to being a pervert."³⁰

In their pathological commitment to telling the truth that they are lying or lying that they are telling the truth, the perverse analysand thus becomes a kind of Lacanian equivalent to Aristotle's notorious Cretan liar: "I am a pervert," they tell their analyst, "and all perverts are liars." To say a statement like "I am a liar," as Lacan famously reminds us in Seminar XI, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973), we do not necessarily fall into the classic logical contradiction described by the Greek philosopher because there is always a structural gap or interval between what he calls the "enunciating subject," who speaks a statement in the first place, and the "subject of enunciation," who is spoken of or about in the statement itself: I can thus still speak the truth that "I am a liar" without fear of self-contradiction even or especially if the "I" that I happen to be speaking about in the statement is said to be "a liar." It is the particular task of the analyst, Lacan argues, to retroactively construct the enunciating subject, who may well be telling the truth of their desire, from the subject of enunciation, who may equally be a pathological liar, by an act of ventriloquism which sends back the enunciation to the enunciator albeit in an inverted form: "He says to him—in *this* I am deceiving you, *what you are sending as a message is what I express to you, and in doing so you are telling the truth.*"³¹ As Slavoj Žižek elaborates, the liar's paradox typically expresses itself in two ways in analysis: a hysterical neurotic will, for example, be revealed as a subject who lies about their desire by telling the truth ("I really didn't kill him, officer, but, between you and me, he is my worst enemy and I've been wishing him dead for years!"), whereas an obsessional neurotic will be revealed as a subject who speaks the truth of their desire in the form of a lie ("I hereby declare this meeting closed, sorry, I meant to say open!").³² For Miller, though, what is remarkable about the

³⁰ Judith Feher-Gurewich, "A Lacanian Approach to the Logic of Perversion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 191. See also Deans, "Frozen Countenance," 102–3.

³¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 139–40.

³² Slavoj Žižek, "Desire=Drive=Truth: Knowledge," *Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious*, no. 1 (1997): 147–52.

perverts he treats in his own clinic (who say “I am homosexual” even though they had one isolated same-sex experience in their youth or, alternatively, say “I am heterosexual” despite having same-sex encounters every week) is that they seem to shuttle or oscillate undecidably between the polarities of the hysterical and obsessive neurotic (between lying to tell the truth and telling the truth to lie) so that it becomes impossible to determine what, if anything, their original or “true” subject position may be: *they are neither telling the truth nor lying*. If the analyst seeks to ventriloquize the pervert’s statement to reveal the truth of their desire to give them back their “own” voice by speaking back to them, they are ventriloquizing what is *itself* an originary act of self-ventriloquism or *prosopopoeia*: the pervert never speaks in their own voice but, so to speak, in place, or on behalf, of the pervert. In Mladen Dolar’s arresting phrase, which is itself a ventriloquism of Plutarch, the floating or subjectless speech act called the pervert is “a voice and nothing more [*vox et praeterea nihil*].”³³

“Is that to say that the analyst is a pervert?”

In *taking the place of the subject who takes the place of the pervert*, which I would argue is, more or less, the ambiguous position occupied by Freud’s young homosexual woman as well as Miller’s own homosexual men, the pervert once again begins to encroach upon or occupy the subject position of the analyst themselves: they both claim to speak, more or less knowledgeably and authoritatively, *on behalf of the pervert*. To explore this obscure structural affinity between the pervert and the psychoanalyst, which persists in spite or perhaps because of their mutual contempt, to its end, I want to conclude by returning to Miller’s fascinating and speculative conclusion to his essay “On Perversion” where he openly, if briefly, hypothesizes about the possibility of what we might call a “perverse analyst”: “Let us conclude on this point,” he tells his audience, “if the true pervert makes himself be object *a*, we can very simply deduce from Lacan’s formula why it is incompatible with analysis. The analyst, in the analytic operation, makes himself be object *a*. Is that to say that the analyst is a pervert? Certainly not.”³⁴ It is at this point, unhappily, that we must begin to ventriloquize the ventriloquist themselves because Miller himself is forced to stop speaking due to a lack of time. As he is obviously recalling here, though, the Lacanian

³³ Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006).

³⁴ Miller, “On Perversion,” 318.

pervert is famously characterized by the operation of “disavowal [*Verleugnung*]” (and in particular the disavowal of castration by the father), which allegedly leads them not to pursue their own enjoyment, but rather to become the object or instrument of the other’s (and in the first instance the mother’s) *jouissance*.³⁵ Yet, in the process of analysis, as Dominik Hoens also observes, this is precisely the stance or position that the analyst themselves must take vis-à-vis the pervert: they must make themselves, via the process of transference, the perverse analysand’s, and arguably every analysand’s, object *a*.³⁶ If the Lacanian pervert remains in some sense genuinely unanalyzable, however, Miller’s remarkable conclusion here is thus that it may not be because of the old Freudian saw that they are far more aggressively resistant to analysis than the hysterical or obsessional neurotic—what could be *more* analyzable, after all, than a classic strategy of resistance?—but because, as I have proposed throughout this essay, they are, in a certain sense, singularly *open* to, indeed already *in*, analysis: the pervert, lacking any determined clinical position of their own from which to speak, usurps the classic subject position of the analyst themselves as the one who speaks *for* the pervert. In their most audacious act of self-*prosopopoeia*, then, the pervert is unanalyzable because they are *already* speaking from the structural position of the analyst: they make themselves the instrument of the very subject who is supposed to be the instrument of them.

To bring “On Perversion” to a close, Miller thus finally begins to speak about the pervert as a species of analyst, but this makes it all the more curious that he appears to disavow, and I use this term advisedly, the counter-factual hypothesis that the analyst themselves may be a “pervert.” It is sometimes argued that the curious Lacanian fixation upon the homosexual as the privileged form of the pervert is a manifestation of the very symptom they seek to diagnose in their perverse analysands, namely, disavowal: “*I know very well that human sexuality is perverse,*” Deans parodies the Lacanian analyst, “*but all the same only some*

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³⁵ See Jacques Lacan, *La relation d’objet, 1956–1957* (Paris: Seuil, 1994); Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety*, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2016); Jacques Lacan, “Kant with Sade,” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 623–44, amongst the many discussions of structural perversion in his work.

³⁶ Dominik Hoens, “Towards a New Perversion: Psychoanalysis,” in *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII*, ed. Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 88–103.

*subjects may be classified as perverts.*³⁷ Accordingly, it is tempting to diagnose Miller's simultaneous denial and admission, which is to say disavowal, of the possibility that the analyst themselves may be perverse as a symptom of their own perversity: "The analyst [. . .] makes himself be object *a*," he concedes, but adds "Is that to say that the analyst is a pervert? Certainly not." Yet, I don't want to go down the somewhat banal and predictable route of triumphantly diagnosing the psychoanalyst as a pervert here—which would risk confirming the essential rectitude of the diagnostic category of perversion in the first place, as if it really did exist "out there" in some proper place—but to describe what we may call the theatre of originary *prosopopoeia*, of a necessary placelessness which can only be ventriloquized by the other, in which pervert and analyst alike are compelled to perform. For Miller, presumably, any analyst who makes themselves an object *a* would still not be a real pervert because, as we saw earlier, they are only speaking back or ventriloquizing the pervert's enunciation for them so as to reveal, in inverted form, what the latter is really saying: they are, so to speak, speaking the truth of the pervert's own speech act. If Miller thus appears to be speaking as an analyst amongst analysts when he speaks about the act of ventriloquizing the pervert, however, I cannot help but be struck by the fact that, strictly speaking, what he is really doing here is *ventriloquizing the analyst*: he is speaking the truth of the analyst's own, apparently now untrue or lying, statement or enunciation ("The analyst [. . .] makes himself be object *a*,") back to the analyst in a further inversion of the latter's own inversion of the pervert's statement ("Is that to say that the analyst is a pervert? Certainly not."³⁸ Who exactly, then, is speaking for whom in this curious libidinal echo chamber, the pervert, the analyst, the pervert or analyst's super-ego, or perhaps just the "it speaks" (*la ça parle*) of *prosopopoeia* itself?³⁹ In ventriloquizing the analyst ventriloquizing the pervert ventriloquizing the analyst, Miller's essay arguably symptomizes what we might call the structural *prosopophilia*, which is to say the (perverse) love of *prosopopoeia* itself that is, in Lacanianism, the condition of being a speaking subject in the first place: I am always speaking for and as the other even or especially when I am speaking as "myself."

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³⁷ Tim Deans, "Frozen Countenance," 107.

³⁸ Miller, "On Perversion," 318; italics added.

³⁹ For a classic study of *prosopopoeia*, see Paul de Man, "Autobiography as Defacement," *MLN* 94, no. 5 (December 1979): 919–30, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2906560>.

In conclusion, though, I want to go back to what I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted: I'm here to make you happy. It's really my vocation in life, making people happy, and so I won't take "no" for an answer. After all, you and I have so much in common: we are both experts in our respective fields, we both prefer the company of our little group of initiates to the ridiculous moralism of "normal" society and, let's be honest, we both get our kicks in the same way: putting masks or faces on, role-playing games, fetishes and all that kinky stuff. To tell you the truth, though, what makes me happiest of all is making *you* happy, so please don't be shy about saying what it is you really want from me: I can be a psychotic, a hysteric, or a neurotic and I'm even willing to be the instrument of your *jouissance*—your very own *objet a*—if you want me to talk dirty to you. If you don't want to say anything at all, though, please don't feel embarrassed: I feel like we're getting to know each other so well now that I can already guess what you are going to say and, frankly, I think I can say it better myself anyway. In any case, please just lie back on the couch, make yourself comfortable, and take a deep breath—I promise this won't hurt a bit. So . . . are you happy now?

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