

## Why perversion?

### ‘False love’ and the perverse pact<sup>1</sup>

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(Final version accepted 20 December 2004)

*In this paper, the author works with the awareness that perversion is a socially, historically and theologically loaded term, at the same time as it may be the latest frontier in psychoanalysis, both clinically, and in relation to contemporary art and culture which emphasize the perverse. Positioning itself against tendencies to deny the existence of a category of ‘perversion’ or, inversely, to abuse it for the power that accrues from the act of diagnosing, she also points to other liabilities in the history of the treatment of this term, such as the narrowing down of perversion to the exclusively sexual domain, or, alternatively, the overextension of it to polymorphously erotic practices that enhance sexual excitement. The paradoxes of perversion and the difficulties of distinguishing the perverse from the non-perverse are addressed. The case is also made that, in order to understand perversion, one must unlink it from the narrow notion of sexual practice and see what is involved on a deeper level—an approach initiated when psychoanalysis turned to perversion as a defense against psychotic anxieties, and began considering the necessary place of perversion in the transference–countertransference. Two features common to both sexual and non-sexual perverse relations are the seductive and bribing aspects of perversion, and its means-ends reversal. Perversion is a haven for the disguising of hatred and suspicion as excitement and (false) love. Displaced child and beating father; entitled child and seductive mother; are both prototypes of psychoanalytic reflection on parents who excite, deceive and corrupt their children and establish perverse pacts with them. The notion of the perverse pact is foregrounded in Alice’s analysis, where first the resurrection and then the dismantling of such a pact were effected through various analytic means.*

**Keywords:** perversion, perverse pact, means-ends reversal, ‘false love’, sexuality

### Perversion—A controversial term

Perversion occupies a unique position in psychoanalytic thinking today. A controversial category,<sup>2</sup> it is used more symbolically than other diagnostic terms. ‘Perversion’ is a complex notion that resists simple definition and eludes stabilization. It has changed

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<sup>1</sup>An early version of this paper was written at the invitation of the IARPP Online Colloquium Committee, moderated in November 2003 by Tony Bass and Adrienne Harris, whom I thank for her inspiring input. I am also grateful for the panel’s online discussions, and for comments by Glen Gabbard, Jessica Benjamin, Rina Lazar, Gavriel Reisner, and the many readers, anonymous and non-anonymous, of this essay.

<sup>2</sup>DSM-IV calls it ‘paraphilia’. However, even such a disingenuous and Latinate term retains (in its prefix) the significance of ‘across’, ‘around’, that is, a location that is off-center, at the margins, not there, deviating.

with history and with culture, and particularly with shifts in the psychoanalytic sensibilities. Parallel to the expansion and diversification of psychoanalytic awareness, the conception of perversion is being deconstructed and disseminated across the pathological and the normal.

Perversion can be used, and has been used, unwittingly for the most part, as a political tool, whether outside psychoanalysis or inside it. Religiously, socially, and individually, the concept carries explosive connotations. As Stoller writes, 'Analysts dislike and fear perversion' (1975, p. 53). It is a term so condemnatory and charged as to make mental-health professionals want to delete it from the psychoanalytic vocabulary altogether (as we can see in *DSM-IV*). In effect, I suggest that we are witnessing today an unfortunate bifurcation in psychoanalysis, whereby some analysts may want to avoid contending with the thorny issue of the existence of perversion and are ready to abandon the use of this concept, while others may use this diagnosis from positions of power, seeking to protect themselves against the searching self-scrutiny implied by the realization that perversion is to an extent in every one of us. But erasing its history of moralizing, indictment of difference, marginalization and attack on the other will not make the specificity of perversion disappear. It will only make us lose our clinical understanding of important distinctions within human experience. While a great part of the critique of perversion is resoundingly justified, there is also a view, with which I agree, that sees perversion as:

the latest frontier in psychoanalysis, replacing the borderline and narcissistic as the area in which the most exciting new work and thought are being accomplished with the greatest impact on the advance of clinical and theoretical knowledge (Fogel and Myers, 1991, p. 2).

### **Interrogating perversion**

In this paper, I shall put forth a particular alloy of several theses. I shall reiterate, first, and in the light of Freud's writings on sexuality and perversion, that perversion is on a continuum with 'normal' sexuality; in fact, perversion is intrinsic to normality (Freud, 1905); perversion (masochism) is 'merely an exacerbation of ... sexuality' (Laplanche, 1992). Second, I shall propose that perversion does not limit itself to the sexual perversions, but is rather a special case of perverse modes of object-relatedness and responses to the demands of reality which are perverse. Consequently, perversion often manifests itself as a disguised, often sexualized, enactment of hatred and destructiveness which is actualized within a relational structure, what I call the 'perverse pact'. The first point will be elaborated shortly, while the second and third points will be expanded upon throughout the paper, especially in its clinical narrative.

My earlier work on sexuality stresses its otherness, its 'abnormal'—poignant, excessive and enigmatic—dimensions. The realization that the polymorphously perverse is what makes sex (more) exciting is a quintessentially psychoanalytic insight that has been formulated by Freud (1905), then forgotten, and is now being retrieved, through the writings of Stoller (1975, 1979, 1985), Kernberg (1991, 1995), McDougall (1995), Stein (1998a, 1998b), Dimen (2003) and others. Accepting that

the straight and the perverse in sexuality<sup>3</sup> are not neatly separate categories confronts us with a curious and profound paradox of perversion—where the deviation from the normal (e.g. the reproductive) is at the same time the quintessentially ‘human’.

By breaking free of ideas about biological heat cycles, procreative imperatives and the myths of compulsory regular discharge, as well as from religious commandments and prohibitions, humans have created a richer, more human, more individual, more intersubjectively intentional sexuality. By partially debiologizing sexuality, we have made it into an expression of love and hate, an anti-anxiety potion and a seductive tactic, an art and a courtly religion. Rather than merely a biological need, sexuality is a practice, an experience and a relation, which, at the same time as it is a configuration of bodily arousals, is deeply fulfilling or sadly sordid, highly sacred or abjectly filthy, and in any case heavily signifying. Thus, a bodily appetite is turned into something else; and the less preprogrammed, the less rigid, the more human and deviant from norms it is, the more signifying it becomes.

If this ‘perversion’ of unmediated appetite is what human sexuality is, what then is perversion? And who is to tell where the dividing line is between (a) the symbolizing and artifact-creating individual or culture that desires the colorful and sensuous cross-dressing and gender-crossing to enliven and enrich life and identity and to protest against oppressive pressures, and (b) the alienated individual (or social group), driven to travesty by the need to degrade human compassion, to fake intimacy and to betray those it seduces? After all, the ritual, the substitution, the as-if, the camp, the masquerade, the impersonation, literal or symbolic, appear not only in sado-masochistic relations, or in those loathing their gender or the other gender; they also permeate fashion, sexy clothes, fragrances, jewelry and plastic surgery. Playful practices of exposure and exhibition alternating with masking and dressing-up all link with and amplify the dramatic flair, the seductive whiff, the exciting-because-unspoken, the accessory-like and the deliberately superfluous which mark the erotic (there is something like ‘erotic intelligence’, delightful to the appreciative observer). Is the perverse not, as Morgenthauer (1984) writes, the general human tendency to uphold the reign of colorful sensuality, ritualized play and pleasurable seductiveness as they are usually displayed in cultural customs and events?

### **Perversion and culture/Perversion and art**

The perverse has asserted itself throughout history and saturates our culture. Cultural theorist Jonathan Dollimore (1991) fascinatingly shows how the notion of sexual perversion, particularly its pre-Freudian, medicalized version, is a reincarnation of the theological dilemmas that have haunted Western history imbued as it is with a monotheistic belief system in a God who is both perfectly good and all-powerful. Such a belief flies in the face of human suffering and its frequent willful infliction. Dollimore

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<sup>3</sup>Although I disagree with his idealization of perversion, literary critic Jonathan Dollimore (1991) offers an impressive historical-philosophical summary of how perversion functions from *within* the ‘natural’ and the ‘good’ to subvert it. Evil at the core of good and a consequence of it (or its absence or ‘privation’) has been a theological tradition begun by Augustine which has led to many a paranoid-persecutory ideology.

shows how the solution to this profound ethical contradiction (where God is good but evil is perpetuated, or where God is powerful but does not prevent evil) was found by putting the onus of ‘perversion’ on humans who are born with the desire for the forbidden, have, consequently, fallen from God’s grace (cf. Milton, 1667; Augustine, 1972, XIV.13: 572) and now forever suffer the consequences of this fall. By calling *man* perverse and fallen, both God’s benevolence and His might is saved. A version of this notion that there is something perverse in the tension between divine benevolence and human suffering finds a more immediate expression in the fact, noted by many thinkers, that perversion profoundly originates from within civilization, growing from the very interior of the normative culture it threatens. In this sense, Freud and Foucault, from opposite directions, assert that perversion—either through its repression (Freud, 1929) and the reconstitution of its energy in a sublimated form, or as a vehicle and product of power (Foucault, 1976), is inextricably linked with culture.

Art critic Donald Kuspit maintains that versions of perversity which pervaded past cultures are intensified in the self-conscious and self-reflective era that is our own. According to Kuspit, the modern in visual art coincides with the history of representation of perversion:

...some of the most famous, innovative works deal with perversion...

Beginning with Manet’s *Olympia* ... Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* ... then to the dolls that Hans Bellmer made ... and ... Cindy Sherman’s ... grotesquely dismembered dolls, [these works depict] fragments that don’t add up to a complete body ... Egon Schiele’s nudes, Balthus’s adolescent girls, Piero Manzoni’s canned shit, and Gilbert and George’s shit cookies ..., one realizes that many of the masterpieces of modern art depend on perversion to make their dramatic point. [internet]

What Kuspit calls the ‘recent outbreak of perverse imagery’ is to a great extent an engagement with the theme of woman/women displayed for the voyeuristic gaze. Cold, provocative, flaunting their nudity with indifference, these figures play variations on their prototype, Manet’s *Olympia*, the emotionally superficial prostitute. Kuspit sees this kind of present-day art as a revenge of the male artist on the female body, that, in arousing desire, is experienced as humiliating, and hence is treated with contempt or irony. Under the artist’s hands, the feminine body becomes de-sublimated; the evenly vacuous, indifferent gaze of the exposed woman meets a shallow, passive look of the spectator-voyeur, a look that devalues the female body, annihilating its personhood and subjectivity by dissecting it into its parts and bodily functions, while at the same time preserving it as a seductive object. Looking at contemporary art, we become aware that there are two basic ways to destroy or negate the human body in its undivided, whole aliveness: one is to represent/show it as cut into parts, flayed, excrementalized bloodied, reduced to senseless flesh; the other is to render it into a mechanized and digitalized entity, a robotized mechanism, occasionally multiplied into an anonymous crowd of uniform, faceless robots. Last year’s exhibition of Young British Artists was a powerful display of these two tendencies (the Saatchi Gallery, London, 2003; see also Chasseguet-Smirgel, 2005). One obvious way of interpreting these manifestations is that by showing the body as already castrated, one escapes the sharper dread of imminent, impending dread of castration.

Obviously, perversion is far from being simply ‘unnatural’ copulating. It is, rather, the reign of the artificial, the virtual, the area of genetic modification, holocausts and genocides, capitalist fetishes, nightmarish products of physical tampering, nuclear spills, cloning experiments. Most of these phenomena and manifestations are soaked with outright or disavowed cruelty and destructiveness alternating with ghastly alienation supported by cyberspace framing assaultive advertising and tele-relations of the most artificial kinds.<sup>4</sup> This teeming of contemporary life with perverse manifestations is a highly complex phenomenon that cannot be explored here, but for our purposes we can conceive of it as the exposure and vindication of both Freud’s and Foucault’s insights concerning the existence of perversion at the heart of civilization. What we (analysts) need to do in order to understand perversion (rather than use it to condemn others and to defend ourselves) is to recognize the stark link that exists between the perverse and the civilized. This is true whether we regard our present culture as falling apart at the center and bursting forth with the de-sublimated perverse manifestations (as mentioned above), or as always having had a core relationship to the perverse. I am addressing the broad cultural sense of perversion at some length, because I believe this frame is necessary for understanding individual (clinical) perversion, after all, perversion in the sense we are dealing with here is far wider and more pervasive than sexual perversions and implies at the same time that it makes no sense to delineate a conclusive, clear-cut line of demarcation between the perverse and the non-perverse.

### Where/what is the difference?

This said, we are in no way exempt from the task of exploring the question of ‘real’, or clinical perversion, which can gain some clarity by highlighting the sense of gradualness it contains. A paradigmatic example will serve our purpose here. If a man (or a woman: decidedly most cases are men, although I would not exclude women) *gets turned on* by a woman wearing high-heeled shoes, he will respond sexually to the erotic attractiveness of such shoes, the way they shape the line of her legs, their evocative theatricality, the way they make the woman look taller, slimmer, more ethereal or more sensual. The shoes function for him as enhancers of the woman’s sexual attractiveness. Another man by contrast would *need* or *require* the woman to put on high heels in order for him to get sexually aroused. His sexual excitement would be lacking, or even absent, without this compulsory item. The stilettos have an indispensable role in creating his excitement and desire. This is a further stage on a road that can end in the man giving up the woman altogether and *needing only the shoe* as the requirement to get turned on and reach sexual release. The shoe now functions as the necessary and sufficient condition for sexual desire and gratification. It is no longer a metonymy for the woman’s femininity;<sup>5</sup> it has

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<sup>4</sup>One of the sculptures of Jake and Dinos Chapman at the Saatchi is entitled thus: ‘Zygotic acceleration, biogenetic, desublimated libidinal model’.

<sup>5</sup>While Freud would see the high heel as the woman’s missing phallus, Spezzano (2004) writes about men who experience women’s apparel as singularly feminine and as potentially painfully flaunting her femininity in the desirous man’s eyes.

become *the thing itself, a fetish*, erasing and replacing the need for the flesh-and-blood woman, triumphantly seeking the signifier over the signified. The woman's body, her breath, her live, willful presence—her soul—is eliminated in favor of the shoe that has substituted her, that has symbolically 'killed' (or castrated) her and become itself the oxymoronic object of desire, a well-controlled mystery. In a sense, the shoe-worship is the endless deferral of meaning, the sarcastic sliding of the signifiers in a chain of no-exit.

Although the fetish may look like a conditional stimulus that has come to function as a trigger of a conditioned sexual response, psychoanalysis has given us some knowledge of the pain, the dread and the hatred that lie underneath the ritualized object-thing. It has made transparent to our minds the lacerating memories and fantasies that animate perverse scripts, and how their carefully detailed rituals not only forestall nameless dread and deep shame, but also transmute them into triumph and revenge. This is done by turning the tables on the other who represents the child's original adult object, who once, in gratifying their own needs, tantalized, humiliated and betrayed the child. Stoller (1975) calls perversion (and later, sexuality as a whole) *the erotic form of hatred*. Such notions connect ubiquitous perverse desires with all human affairs—whether sublimated or used in defiance and hostility. Perversion is thus not only polymorphous sexual anarchy, but also a powerful means of expressing hostility and hatred. The conjugation of hatred and sexuality is an affront to our romantic sensibility, which sees sexuality as inherently linked to love (or at least to attraction and longing). It is also a source of tremendous difficulty in our clinical work, as we shall see.

Freud (1905, 1922, 1923, 1927, 1938) is notorious for being of two minds regarding perversion. He did indeed put a normative spin on all forms of sexuality that strayed from straight intercourse, forms which he considered arrested states of infantile sexuality in those adults who feared an experience of castration awaiting them on the threshold of the oedipal phase. This view of Freud not only rendered normative the so-called 'oedipal' anxiety in sexuality; it also unfortunately made the Freudian theory of perversion, in Fonagy's (2003) language, 'overspecified', that is, too constricted, envisioning one narrow, linear developmental scenario. But perversion is not just the defensive, transgressive defiance of the threat of castration by the father. Freud's later<sup>6</sup> multi-vocal assertions about perversion set the stage both for the generalization of his castration dynamics into cultural analysis and Lacanian theory, at the same time as they marked a wider and more acute sense of what perversion is about.

Thus, conceptions of perversion deepened when analytic thinkers turned from conceiving of perversion as a defense against oedipal castration anxiety to seeing perverse relations as functioning to protect a crumbling, possibly pre-psychotic self. Perversion was now linked to psychotic phenomena in the sense that perversion

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<sup>6</sup>In 1919, Freud elaborated perversion into a projective *fantasy* scenario in his 'A child is being beaten', and in 1922 he asserted that perversion might be related to aggressive impulses, not just to libidinal ones. He played with the possibility that perversion is a symptom not principally different from a neurotic symptom, but he also postulated severe splitting and disavowal at the root of (fetishistic) perversion.



was seen as functioning to contain and deal with psychotic parts of the personality, which enabled the rest of the personality to function ‘normally’ (Glover, 1933). Only retrospectively are we able to see that this change created a most interesting situation: the more the view of perversion tended toward the psychotic pole, the more the theory of sexual perversion was extended and generalized into the non-sexual realm. When we say psychosis, we mean a tenuous or annihilating relation to human psychic reality. In psychosis, we address the human, since in psychosis the human is both deeply negated and differently expressed. What is it about the human that is subverted—yet protected from even further destruction—in perversion? Various terms have been used in an effort to answer this question, terms which were influenced by different conceptual traditions: the oedipal predicament (Freud, 1905, 1927; Sachs, [1923] 1986; Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1978, 1985), whole object relations (Klein, 1946; Steiner, 1982, 1990), genitality (Gillespie, 1956; Greenacre, 1968; Bak, 1971), sexual difference (Lacan, 1956–7; Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1978, 1985), the depressive position (Klein, 1935; Joseph, 1971, 1988), one’s identity or self (Gillespie, 1964; Greenacre, 1968; McDougall, 1972, 1995; Limentani, 1987; Bach, 1994). In any case, the transition from the narrowly defined concept of sexual perversion to the broader understanding of perversion ‘per se’ happened gradually, mostly by Melanie Klein and the Kleinians in Britain and by Chasseguet-Smirgel and McDougall in France, without the shift seemingly needing to be explained or justified. Perverse relations and perverse transferences increasingly joined and even replaced sexual perversions proper in the essays that appeared in the psychoanalytic literature. To ‘character perversions’ (Arlow, 1971) were joined clinical accounts of ‘perverse organizations’ (Steiner, 1982, 1990, 1993), and perverse relations and transferences (Meltzer, 1973; Khan, 1979). A special category, ‘transference perversion’, was proposed (Etchegoyen, 1978) in a call to consider perversion a specific disorder with a typical transference configuration. Ogden (1997) then made the case that perversion can only be treated by processing not only the perverse transference, but also a perverse countertransference.

### **Perversion is conceived as increasingly (object) relational**

The extension of sexual to non-sexual perversions brought non-sexual perverse modes of thinking and relating right into the transference–countertransference fulcrum of the clinical situation, and led to the realization that some perverse aspects of sexuality exist in the realm of the perverse in general. Two features common to both sexual and non-sexual perverse relations are (1) the *seductive* and *bribing* aspects of perversion, and (2) its *means-ends reversal*, that is, the turning of the means into an end in itself, and the bending of a purported end into a means for something else, i.e. a hidden agenda. Perversion as a mode of relatedness points to relations of seduction, domination, psychic bribery and guileful uses of ‘innocence’, all in the service of exploiting the other. Freud’s early theory of perversion as the use of the procreative end as a means for excitement and pleasure in its own right is well known. What is perhaps less known is its use as a portrayal of what happens in perverse relations in general: perversion, whether sexual or otherwise, is the use of

the ends of sexuality as the means to control the other and to destroy intimacy when intimacy is experienced as threatening. Perversion is the induction of helplessness (Richards, 2003) and the perpetration of hostility and cruelty in the name of love and caring. Perversion is the psychic act of penetrating without being penetrated (Parsons, 2000).

We may say, with the French analyst Christian David (1971, 1975, 1996), that the sexual component in a perverse script may be the most conspicuous, plainly powerful element, but the perversion is essentially emotional. In effect, perversion is profoundly relational and relationally intentional. The works of art mentioned above represent the perverse not only by addressing the abjectness of the human body and the mechanization of spirit; they also depict cruelty (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 2005) and powerfully impact and shape the spectator by establishing a perverse relation between the work and the audience. Clinically we see that perverse individuals often have an unusual gift for intriguing, stimulating, impacting on, and fascinating the other. The leash, the rope and tool through which the other is seduced and drawn out, is his/her *excitement*. The excitement in the other can last, or it can give place to anal-like feelings of deadness, mechanization, alienation and disgust. Perversion has a ritualized, mechanized face, often lurking behind a semblance of spontaneous inventiveness. Extended beyond the sexual perversions, perversion at large (Kernberg (1995) calls it 'perversity') is essentially a power strategy geared to derail the other by subtly seducing him into becoming a willing partner and excited colluder in the pervert's project (Khan, 1979; Dorey, 1986). The other is made to share a vague but intense hope of great fulfillment and often love, and, if the strategy is sophisticated enough, the seduction of the other is made to seem like mutual self-discovery, or like a desire originating from within the seduced person, rather than the premeditated strategy of the seducer that it is.<sup>7</sup>

Perversion is a dodging and outwitting of the human need for intimacy, love, for being recognized and excited; it is the scorning of the moral imperative of coming face to face with another human being's depth and unfathomable nature, which becomes palpable when one is in touch with one's longings for the 'inside' of the other, sexually or otherwise. Perversion is the active replacement of intimacy by a sexualized, enticing 'false love'. Lack of real curiosity about the other and the absence of a sense of enigma and wonderment at the other's secret are masked by an intense, omniscient, pseudo-naïve, but clandestine and tendentious interest in the other, an interest and an agenda that can be sexualized or non-sexualized.

Taking the perverse mode of relatedness as a leading thread, sifts through dated sexological definitions of perversion and links us directly with the later thought of Freud, which considers perversion as the enactment of a sado-masochistic fantasy. In his 1919 article on perversion, Freud discusses how a person creates a perverse fantasy of another child being beaten by the father to express, through another child, the feeling that being oneself beaten by the father means being loved and simultaneously being auto-erotically excited by an imaginary relation to a powerful parent. Displaced child and beating father, and/or entitled child and seductive

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<sup>7</sup>See Ovid's (1982) *Ars Amatoria*, Book One. See also Kierkegaard's (1836) *Diary of a seducer*.



narcissistic mother (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1978; Khan, 1979) are prototypes of psychoanalytic reflection on parents who excite, deceive and corrupt their children. In analysis, these types of relations will be resurrected in the transference–countertransference matrix of analysand and analyst, with roles usually reversed, whereby the role of the enticing, corrupting parent will be enacted by the patient, and that of the bewildered, fobbed and fooled, excited and shamed child will fall to the analyst. In order for this to happen, the analysand will attempt to create what I call a ‘perverse pact’ with the analyst. With the notion of the ‘perverse pact’ I attempt to go beyond Etchegoyen’s (1978) assumption of a ‘transference perversion’, and beyond Ogden’s (1997) important suggestion that there is no perverse transference without a perverse countertransference.

### **An analysis of perverse relatedness**

The analysis of Alice illustrates some of the conceptualizations offered above: perverse relatedness, attempts at striking a perverse pact with the analyst, and destructive assaults on the analytic process. The narrative of this analysis also highlights the various processes that helped unpack and modify the perverse mode. The effectiveness of Alice’s analysis did not center so much on the interpretation of unconscious/repressed contents (Freud, 1905) or the enriching of the patient’s experience (Mitchell, 1993). What needed to happen here was the resumption of split-off and projected parts of the personality, and the birth/growth of a ‘true self’. But these tasks could only be accomplished by working through the removal and transformation of perverse structures that had been built upon such defenses as means-ends reversals, faked innocence and sado-masochistic uses of the effects and impacts one has on the other. Alice’s high articulateness, together with my detailed note-taking, offer an opportunity to get inside the perverse experience and to a certain extent, get a glimpse of the dismantling of the structure. I used quotations from what Alice said in order to render visible how she herself arrived at her insights, and how she refused, then struggled with, her inability to make herself truly known to me, that is, to give herself fully to the other. During the analytic process, different conceptions of perversion came to the fore; they will appear below marked with asterisks.

### **The dream of the maddened responsible driver**

Alice tells me a dream: *‘I am in a cab; I’m lying in the rear seat. I take off my clothes. I get up and ask the driver if my breasts are pretty. The driver, a religious Chassidic Jew, sees me and becomes mad with lust but, since he’s religious, and a driver, he doesn’t do anything to me, but goes on driving to the place I need to get to. I think to myself: “What a responsible driver”’.*

She laughs. Her associations then turn to Dan, her ‘boyfriend’, whom has she always trusted, knowing that no matter what she did to him, no matter how she would excite and tantalize him, he would never rape her. *‘The driver jumps up and down with excitement, like a child’*, she goes on. Her description of these movements reminds me of hand movements while masturbating a penis. I keep quiet and Alice

says that Dan told her that she does not ‘hold the writer’s pen’ (a Hebrew expression for being a writer) because she does not hold a man’s penis. I know that I am the driver who holds, but fruitlessly and excitedly masturbates, a penis. Yet she trusts me that, with all her provocations and attempts to derail me, I will not abuse her and I will drive her safely to her destination.

This crucial piece was dreamt in the second year of Alice’s analysis, and it was the first transparent description her analysis produced of how she saw me. Alice came to analysis, so she told me, because of her severe writing inhibition, which threatened her academic career. She was also sexually inhibited: she could not imagine having sexual relations with anybody; in fact, she could not imagine letting somebody see her naked body. Yet she was intensely involved with Dan (who was a married man). They had many common interests but their special relationship consisted of the way they would excite each other, sexually and otherwise, with minimal physical contact and in a manner that was never tender. Mostly, she would arouse him to masturbate himself while talking to him through the door of men’s restrooms or over the phone.

Alice’s concern about her inhibitions appeared together with the realization that, unlike her, Dan, through his writing, was moving forward in his career and leaving her behind. She was beside herself with rage at his betrayal of their contract to forever remain seamlessly soldered together with neither taking any step forward or outward without the other. Most of the first part of the analysis was spent in expressing her outrage, plotting scenes of revenge against Dan, pursuing him by provoking and exciting him, and expressing her loyal love for him while inwardly smoldering with hatred. My hope was that, after completing some mourning over the loss of this relationship, a space would open for Alice to articulate and understand the paralyzing unconscious fantasies presumably underlying her inhibitions. What a mistake.

### **Special girl—abject girl**

Alice described herself as a girl who was special and pampered, who never had to make an effort to prove herself. A brilliant student, she needed only to begin an assignment for her teachers to ‘get the idea’ and conclude that she was a total genius who stood above any rules, and who should be exempted from ordinary demands. At the same time, Alice lived with her parents and a younger brother and sister in a considerably poorer neighborhood than her classmates, which made her feel acutely inferior. Every day after school all the girls would go home in one direction, while she would take the opposite route. It may have been at this point that her ‘going astray’, her taking ‘the other path’, began. As if this recurrent shameful event was not enough, she was hairy, which made her walk with her arms turned downside up so as to present smooth, hairless skin to look like the other girls, whom she felt were popular with the boys, whereas she was the ‘smart one’.

In analysis, Alice was in great anxiety, in constant crisis and emergency. Her manner was spasmodic, hyperkinetic, overemotional and spectacularly hysterical. She would grimace and gesticulate while whining, weeping, and screaming. She was filled with self-pity; she held grievances and felt robbed, exploited, wronged

and betrayed. In marked contrast to her powerful mind, she basically felt she was too weak to take on anything required of her.

At first, I was riveted by her narrative prowess and plenty, but, gradually, my fascination gave way to a feeling of being flooded and overwhelmed.<sup>8</sup> I was trying in vain to contain and understand this excitement. The rushed, thick flow of her speech, glittering with brilliant observations and witty formulations that had felt marvelously intense, even sustaining, morphed into an experience where, as she put it, ‘Things freeze, become increasingly static. *Everything happens inside*, while everything on the outside, in [my] life, is sorely neglected. I feel completely disoriented, swamped. I feel I’ve lost my way amidst the waves of the flood’.

### The eternal foreplay

In addition, I realized after a while that my feeling of being enlivened and engaged by this wonderful storyteller was broken every time I tried to say something. Her face would flicker with a flash of attention, a blip of recognition of my intention, followed by an immediate closing down and shutting out. Her resolution to not let me in was palpable. She seemed preoccupied with some compelling internal presence. Any attempted contact, forward or dialogic movement stopped, then began to whirl around itself. My sense of frustration was acute. She would both excite me and disarm me of any effectiveness or power of expression. It was like being injected with adrenalin and with curare, a muscle blocker, at the same time. I was intrigued, frustrated, embarrassed and tantalized by the continual promise that here, now, soon, just around the corner, things would start to unfold and move. But she countered anything I tried to offer by way of interpretation, advice or a thought that occurred to me with questions about the source of and evidence for my knowledge, and the validity—the superiority—of its opposite. She was battling with me, poking fun at me, while bringing everything down to the same, meaningless, confused plane, to what Benjamin (1988) called a zero-tension level. She feared that, if she let me understand her, I would take control of her and dishevel her, or shame her deeply, through turning on her and belittling her. In short, we did not stand a chance of meeting, of having a good intercourse.

On the contrary, I was the feared enemy who had to be disarmed and seduced through ‘techniques of intimacy’ (Khan, 1979) into forgetting her imminent rage and dangerous retaliation. I felt constantly manipulated, as if she pulled various strings of mine at different, quickly changing moments. She must have felt similarly, in view of how badly she responded to my attempts to describe what was happening to her, or between us.<sup>9</sup> The script that played us was that of one person treating the other as a puppet—a terrible caricature of an analysis.

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<sup>8</sup>See my accounts of other similar ‘cases’ (Stein, 1995, 2000).

<sup>9</sup>My attempts to stop/interrupt Alice’s excitement, as well as that of some other patients with similar psychic structures, were experienced by them as catastrophic. When I tried to intervene with Alice, her excitement abruptly subsided and transmuted into unbearable body tension: she then needed to urinate. There were sessions in which *every time* I began to say something she had to leave the room to go to the bathroom.

Something was taking place that was not avowed or spoken about, but that was all the more powerful for it.

### **The mother—Hatred posing as love**

Alice's family was dominated by her huge, hysterical, overstimulating mother, who was given to anxiety attacks and somatizations whenever one of her three grown-up children did not get home in time. Alongside her lived a humble virtuous husband, who was dedicated to his intellectual work. What was striking in this family atmosphere were the mother's demonstrative, intrusive gestures of professed love and devotion that thickly and noisily covered over a bluntness, an emotional hostility, even covert hatred, toward her two daughters (she spared her son). Mother seamlessly suppressed any of the emotional needs her daughters might have had concerning their developing femininity. It took Alice many years of analysis to recognize this and to state, with shock, that her mother was totally uninterested in her having a love life or getting married or setting up house.

Marcel Proust's (1917) narrator recounts how, when enraged and full of hatred toward his mother, he broke her beloved vase, she smiled lovingly and said that this event will endure in memory as a sign of his deep love for her and their everlasting bond. The furious, spiteful act of hatred was thus effectively rephrased in a single stroke into a gesture of a loving alliance. This Proustian episode illustrates the kind of dyadic relations that existed between Alice and her mother, between her and Dan—and her and myself.

### **Are we three? Or perhaps one?**

At that early stage in the analysis, I understood Alice to be looking for affirmation, love and supplies for herself. Although she tried to dismiss, subvert or confuse me, it emerged that she felt she could not fob me off; for, as she said, I maintained 'a certain something all the time', which both calmed and scared her. She spoke to me about one of my colleagues, a looming figure of a lunatic psychoanalyst who artfully hides her madness. Alice's portrayal of this woman evoked an uncomfortable, eerie feeling of some secret, horrible madness in me, which, I felt, to my inner disquiet, was going to be found out. The projection of Alice's craziness was so powerful as to make me believe—or at least wonder—about what insanity I may be hiding, even from myself. While I was straining to hold the (projected) feeling and not throwing it back into her lap, I heard her saying that she thought I could not stand her, yet I was interested in seeing her four times a week (Alice was one of my supervised cases) because, while faking devotion to her, I needed to be close to her: 'As we know, hatred, for its purposes, needs closeness, right?'

What did I do? I mobilized my thinking and smartness not to be deceived and derided by her. In this effort, too, I was unwittingly mirroring her efforts with me. As she struggled with me and the analysis, Alice reported that she continued to call Dan to taunt him—she was imaginarily and magically 'fucking' him. But she was also 'fucking' me, against my intention and my will, while keeping Dan as her fetish, her phallus, her controlling whip, her protector against our involvement and potential closeness.

Alice needed Dan in order to feel alive but she came to realize the obvious—that she actually hated him. She could not afford to hate him openly, identifying with her mother, who masked hate as love, so she told Dan that she loved him. Her thoughts about Dan were always in terms of victory and defeat, success and failure, winning and losing, never in terms of caring and love. She craved these militant feelings, for they seemed so much safer than the chaotic diffuse, frightening feelings of being a ‘woman’.

### **The perverse pact**

Alice was in agonies of envy about Dan’s intolerable success. She described their relationship as a partnership where one of them got away with murder. After all, Dan and she were ‘accomplices in sin’, theirs was a project of scoffing at the whole world and basking in their own superiority. But, he exploited her, she said, he made use of her for his sexual excitement, mining it to get on with his creative work and leaving her behind. Now she was going to punish him. She harassed him to the point that ‘he felt so helpless that he had to masturbate’. At other times, however, she realized that, when he called her and engaged in some intellectual discourse, he secretly masturbated using her for his excitement. These moments were the peak of detachment and dissociation. It was not love; it was hate. It was ‘the perverse pact’, a relationship between two accomplices, a mutual agreement woven of complex, twisted relations and excited games, embedded in multilayered degrees of awareness and obliviousness. This agreement, whether conscious, preconscious or unconscious, served to cover over and turn the common and mutual gaze of the accomplices from the catastrophic biographical events that had befallen each of them (briefly, Dan’s mother had betrayed him deeply). Since these traumas had left a ‘basic fault’ (Balint, 1968) and a paralyzing emotional enfeeblement, exiting the pact emotionally amounted to falling prey to psychic annihilation.

### **Sadism against exclusion**

Alice believed that by coming to me for analysis I had gained control over her and that it was incumbent upon me to fully sponsor her life. However, she felt with despair that, instead of giving her the good things she desired, I gave her bad, or, at most, inadequate, frustrating things, such as wanting to explore what she felt, what she wanted, what she was afraid of. She was so anxious she felt her hold over her body slipping away, collapsing under her; she tried to wiggle out of this state, but she would feel her body shrinking. Yet her noisiness made it difficult for me to emotionally resonate with her agony. I felt repulsed by her moans and screams, writhings and spasms in her legs. When I tried to articulate how she experienced me, she again had the images of the madwoman in the attic<sup>10</sup> who hides her craziness behind an analytic façade. Yet she also began to experience me sporadically as

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<sup>10</sup>Of course, we describe each other, overtly or covertly, in the same terms. Usually this would be seen as her projection on me of her internalized bad object. Relationally speaking it is the impasse of complementarity (Benjamin, 1988), where the bad object is tossed back and forth like a hot potato (Davies, 2003).



representing ‘psychology, truth, integrity, beyond and above the personal’. She saw me alternately as powerful and potent, productive and sexual but also, on an unconscious level, as deeply damaged as herself. This helped her to calm her painful envy of me. In my attempts to reach Alice’s anxiety behind her painful envy, suspicion and hatred, I persistently tried to assuage her hysterics and arrive at some differentiation in her emotional chaos.

### **Confrontations, recollections**

As said, I often felt an enormous desire to flee Alice’s shrieking barrage of frustration, disappointment, and rage with which she tried to hold on to me. Yet, I held on, trying to keep our process going. Amidst her assaults, she gradually began to describe the beginnings of her perverse functioning in childhood. She talked about her beginning to weave invented stories to make herself look good, which she gradually ‘almost’ or ‘practically’ came to believe in. She remembered that at first her confabulations sounded to her jarringly false, she was even a little scared of her lies, but then the stories became normal, credible and exciting tales that came more and more to sound like the truth. At this point, at the end of the second year of analysis, Alice had the ‘mad responsible driver dream’ mentioned above.

### **Acknowledging, recognizing**

The next crucial moment came when Alice told me that she often understood what I was saying, but she would not show it or talk about it. This was her way of acknowledging that I had an impact on her. She also said that it humiliated her to think about what I was saying. Her shame became gradually speakable. ‘You talk to me in such simple language, not only you don’t ever use psychological terms, you don’t even say general things as one would expect. You translate what’s happening here to something more basic. It responds to a need, because it always touches something deep in me, but it also hurts me ... I also have a feeling that you know things you don’t tell me. This is truly ambivalent. I trust you, but I also feel that you insult me, you understand?’

Perversion has been traditionally conceptualized as \*conflict around genitality\*. One could say that Alice dodged a ‘genitality’ that she dreaded; she was phobic about ‘doing it’, having sex, writing, exposing herself, expressing her subjecthood. Her dread arose from a deep sense of shame, although her direct experience was of not being up to these tasks, lacking the knowledge and resources it takes to be grown up—she feared she ‘did not have it’, that she was not a woman, that she was ‘castrated’.<sup>11</sup> Her inhibitions were not neurotic; her fears of being a little girl were not directly amenable to analytic work. Rather, she replaced or camouflaged her sense of paralysis with incessant transgressive acts, by flaunting boundaries and scorning limitations.

When she could admit to me that she understood what I was saying but could not repeat it, she laid down her defensive deafness. But, she clung to her complaints that she could not trust me and that I could not give her anything. At this point, an

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<sup>11</sup>She had the painful conviction that her vaginal labia were seriously deformed.

opening was made to substantially work on her envy (Harris, 1997, 2003). I talked to her about how painful it was, and that this constant pain did not let her sit down and do her work, write, feel good about herself. I talked about fantasies and thoughts of a little girl who felt humiliated and excluded from what the grown-ups were doing; who sometimes just went to sleep to forget everything, but at other times, in her desperation, inflicted pain on herself. Alice wept, cried, whined, felt psychic pain and disgust, which then became a stabbing physical pain that ran through her body, 'going up and down'.

Still, she clearly trusted me to mercifully handle and contain the shame that was involved in the owning of her understanding of me (and herself). Her fear and dread of being with me changed into embarrassment and shame, ushering in an excruciatingly difficult phase of our work. To escape some of the pain of shame, she would become depersonalized, her speech would sound unreal to her, her voice would abruptly change and feel not her own. Moments of searing vulnerability alternated with recurring episodes of unleashed aggressiveness which made me feel intermittently caring and intimidated.

### **Lethal mother**

Dreams of a mad, screaming mother followed, in which Alice felt horrified and utterly helpless about her ability to calm this woman, let alone to make contact with her. Images arose of Alice as a drowned, suffocated, but 'not-dead' girl whose lungs, ears, body and brain were flooded with an alien substance, a mother-water that penetrated her pores and was absorbed by her tissues. At this point in the transference, I was omnipotent and wielded hypnotic, deathly power over Alice. I touched her in her dreams with blue fire or iron bars that I held in my hand, where she 'knew' that the moment I touched her she would fall into a deep sleep or die. In the dream, she screamed and begged me to spare her life. She was paralyzed with weakness, while I was acting, she felt, like someone taking control over a mad person in a hospital, giving her an injection, or just poisoning her into silence. The dream was an awful rendition of mother's toxic arms, of the extent to which maternal intrusiveness was dangerous, of the menace that lurks in real contact.

She now acutely felt how her mother never kept any distance from her and was always near her with blue lights, which Alice had mistakenly taken to be the magic wands of a kind fairy, but which in truth, she thought, were hot iron bars that could kill when touched. Behind Alice's smartness and her exhibitionism lay profound distrust, born out of fear, hatred and memories of betrayal. These affects congealed around the external figure of the mother transformed into a terrifying inner 'alien' bad object that subsequently had to be externalized (Fonagy and Target, 2000, 2004).

Deep within many psychic disturbances lie paranoid anxieties, which emerge in later, intense phases of the analytic process, when a person's schizoid core (Guntrip, 1968) is exposed. Perversion is \*avoidance of direct—straight, guileless—contact\*, owing to the fantasy, or the accumulated learning, according to which intimate contact is deadly and threatens with psychic obliteration. Contact may quickly become merger with an arch-fiend, terrifying in its cannibalistic or annihilating intentions.

### **How are relations between people possible?**

After this period of my holding Alice's projections, her terror abated somewhat, and she began reflecting on relations between people and on her capacity to have relations. She realized, in her own words, that 'focusing intensely on the other is not love, rather, it is avoidance of everything else'. She saw more clearly that Dan had no idea how she really felt, and she concluded, radically, that 'Nobody can know what is going on inside the other. That's why it is impossible to speak with another human being'. This extreme Beckettian view was modified by her realization that 'if one speaks with the other about what is going on inside one, then *one must speak as if the other did not exist*'—by which she meant that one had to speak without focusing on the effects one is at that moment having on the other. Hence, she began to address her 'identity diffusion' (Erikson, 1959), the parts of herself that she reflexively projected to the other and introjected back again in a vertiginous seesaw of confusing and horrific enmeshment.

These important insights reached by Alice provide us with the notion that perversion is \*a double effort (1) to erase difference\* by assuming—and seductively 'demonstrating' through creating a semblance of intimacy—that one knows the other from the inside out, that people are knowable by the force of one's will; and \*(2) to evade intimacy by not expressing, not even contacting, a core part of oneself. \*Perversion is an effort to penetrate\*, to control, but also to assuage feelings of loneliness and self-hatred, \*yet stay away and not let oneself ever be penetrated\*.

### **Catastrophe abates**

Five years into our work, Alice told me that she had only recently reached the feeling of being in analysis. She linked it to the decline in her sense of foreboding and psychic catastrophe and the strengthening of her sense of reality. Gradually and with difficulty, 'things receive their difficult but correct course'. To my pleasant surprise, being with her felt good more and more often. Her relations with people had become less coercive and needy. Though she still avoided open contacts with people, she relied less and less on feigned intimacies.

### **In perversion, lies and truth change places**

\*Perversion is both lies posing as truth, and truth looking like a lie\*. The difference between the two became increasingly more defined for Alice. I spoke about a certain truth, which she must have felt in her childhood, a truth about herself and about her environment, that she must have experienced with no confirmation from others, and that, therefore, then turned into a lie. We now realized how this would repeatedly happen with me as well. She had been unable to tell me things because she despaired of my affirming them: her anxious hyper-awareness of her effect on me then led her to try to frantically control them, until they became twisted and spoiled.

As we went on unveiling lies and groping for emotional truth (Bion, 1965), we reconstructed how, when she was small, it might have frightened her unbearably to see the truth about her mother's feelings toward her, and how bereft and lonely she

would have felt had she allowed herself to see it. The threat of emptiness and abandonment that would have followed made it preferable for her to live in a perverse couple with her mother, rather than be alone, in a gray world.

Many stages were needed for Alice to grasp that her life was just *her* life and nobody else's, and, if she will not fight, nobody will fight for her. Following this understanding and partial dismantling of her symbiotic alliances, vengeful fantasies came up toward Dan, family and colleagues.

### Sexuality

During this period, we did a lot of work on her rage, humiliation and insult-proneness with the help of reconstructions of the past, self-experiential understandings, and our transference-countertransference explorations. Something in her became stronger, she could trust herself more. She felt a surging interest in her femininity. She paid increased attention to her looks, her hair, her skin.

At this advanced stage in her analysis, Alice's initiatives with a man she was interested in were almost without ruse or pressure, and she could afford to feel the sadness, even hurt, at his not wanting her, and not impose herself on him, despite painful feelings of humiliation and shame. She was able to internalize the notion of the other's will without feeling destroyed. At the same time she realized that there was (often) a direct relationship between what she was doing and what she was getting for herself and that in reality she needed to work to make money.

Alice noticed with puzzlement that it had been quite a while since I got annoyed at her. On leaving a session, she saw I was smiling at her and she did not know how to relate to it. 'Interestingly, the last thing that came up as a possibility—it just occurs to me at this moment—is that perhaps it signifies a positive relation you have toward me.' She was thoughtful about her inability to mentalize my new positive feelings about her.

### The need for mindfulness, the longing for the 'normal'

Alice began to focus on her 'unnatural relation to those who bear children, who are normal, a couple who love each other, marry, have a family, raise children, and make a living'. It all seemed to her like a miracle. 'A whole series of requirements: two people who desire each other, and who succeed in becoming physically exposed to each other, who are fertile, and who can support a family. There is a home that has everything needed and that one is not ashamed of showing.' She mourned her lost youth, the many years in which her mother was the whole world for her, saying she now felt 'what a woman must feel when they have taken out her uterus'.

### Inside and outside

Alice became aware of her assumption, her *feeling that everything*—good or bad—*comes from the outside*. The reclaiming of her self ran counter to her centrifugal and self-fragmenting tendencies. She painstakingly recentered by drawing in and recollecting her *pseudopodia*, the flailing extensions of herself that she had sent out in all directions, before she could own her experience as her own.

Having woven some womb-tissue of her own, Alice's envy of me, her pain about my fertility, my sexuality and my work, could now be held in view, worked through and mourned. As with her hatred of her mother, her envy of me changed with time. Whereas earlier in the analysis, she envied my productivity in terms of work and children, as well as my sexuality, at later stages she felt envy of me for not being afraid to be straight and serious, for, as she perceived me, persistently prodding through a thought, not being ashamed of not understanding, and not too anxious about not coming across as witty or 'coolly' ironic. Alice's shifting forms of envy mirrored the significant changes in herself. She continued with her ingenuous efforts to tap my vulnerabilities, my loneliness, all the pains I must have undergone in my life, but, whereas she used them in the past as weapons against me, now she put them together imaginatively and intelligently, in an attempt to open me up to her so she could cast a voyeuristic, but also a compassionate, identificatory look at me.

### Two invalids invalidating the world

A significant theme in this analysis (as in other analyses) is the point where the experiences of analyst and patient come to partially mirror each other. Judging from what Alice said at the end, namely, that *had I been 'tougher', the analysis, rather than herself, would have broken down*, she must have had quite a good estimate of her durability. But, then again, she might be talking about her fragility, and about my strength at being (paradoxically) able not to be too 'strong'.

The analyst's quasi-psychotic susceptibility to the patient's experience has to eventually be curbed, 'renormalized' and exited after it has provided emotional identification and understanding of what is involved in a particular analytic relationship with a person who resorts to perverse solutions. There is no way around the need to be duped by the effects and the impacts of the patient (Ogden, 1997) if the analyst is to understand emotionally (Gendlin, 1997), and to articulate that understanding (Stein, 1998c).

The perverse solution, I have realized when reflecting on this analysis, lies in \*striking a pact in which two invalids invalidate the outside world, creating their own rules, in order to validate and vindicate their mutual weakness and indulgence\*. So, the unsavory secret of working effectively with perversion is that the analyst is deeply and perversely implicated in this game. It was not only a sense of dread that I experienced with Alice, I also had the feeling of being prey to a cunning predator, a sense of exquisite vulnerability to her, feelings of excitement and the disturbing realization of how compelling I found her. My feeling of danger in this analysis was a blend of many fears: fear of not being able to pull her out of the waters into which she was increasingly sinking, fear of the collapse of my mind, fear of being electrified by her, and, retrospectively seen, a fear of my own sadism toward her. Looking back, I believe *Alice could not fully know the extent of my vulnerability to her*. It seems probable that, feeling unsafe and threatened, she was shooting her bullets all over me, not knowing which hit hardest—or softest and deepest—into me.



I felt the pressure was enormous, yet with all my excited lameness, which I understand as *an introjective identification of her own experience projected on me*,<sup>12</sup> I tried not to lose my hold on the truth, which involved the work to be done by me, that is, holding her, arbitrating reality for her in a more or less ‘objective’ way, and interpreting her conflicts.

In my experience, perverse patients subtly and forcefully attempt to establish their perverse pacts with us, but often we tend not to see it, because we are (too) normal, so that we are either scandalized at the outrageous agenda of corruption or we slip into the temptation of being seduced for a longer time than is needed. When we do not see the hidden agenda, but mistake the bait for a genuine bid, we unwittingly sign the pact, and stay there with no hope of redemption for our patients or ourselves until the moment when we realize what is actually happening between us. On the other hand, it is a question of constant work at balancing mutual survival until we can begin to work in a more straightforward manner.

### Postscript

At the end of her analysis, Alice said that I had given her life, I had given her *her* life—‘as if you gave birth to me, no—you helped me to give birth to myself’. Now she felt she could live her life and experience it as her own. Gone was the nightmarish experience in which she had been helplessly immersed, where time would only bring bad tides, which then had to be desperately fended off. Gone was the experience of the other as a god, as she put it, to whom she could only ingratiate and sacrifice herself. Alice said she had me inside her; she spoke with me; she heard my voice, my words, their intonations. She felt she knew what I was going to say about everything, and in what turns of phrase I was going to say it. I wondered to myself whether she had internalized me or swallowed me whole. Winnicott said that we hate to live inside our patients as idealized, advertised objects; in his words: ‘What do we want? We want to be eaten, not magically introjected’ (1949, p. 276).

We worked some more. Not able to write, Alice became a most gifted and sought-after teacher and lecturer. Talking about topics that touch people’s core, she won great recognition and fame. While away from me she had her first loving/affectionate sexual encounter with a man, a well-known colleague of hers, who did not stay with her. This did not prevent her from cherishing the short period of intimacy she had with him.

### The perverse pact again

I suggest that \*perversion is a specific relational matrix, a sexualized, paranoid, symbiotic, grandiose pact, an implicit contract signed against reality\*. A pact is established in a perverse mode of seduction, titillation, sexualized pleasure and an intoxicating sense of power. The pact is aimed at a constant mutual reassurance

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<sup>12</sup>The ‘perverse pact’ may involve mechanisms and processes that are somewhat different from ‘just’ projective (and introjective) identification, so complex in themselves. It may be the case that such a pact involves in addition a unified front against ‘the world’ and a mutual-charity institution set up to help the other partner in need by putting oneself out for him/her.

and the professing of a love that is false, where the co-plotters promise to uphold each other's superiority, to rephrase and transform hatred and distrust into sexual excitement and capitalize on the validating illusion sexuality sustains. Deeper still lodge massive anxieties of a paranoid kind, not only against the world, but against each of the pact's partners as well.

Sooner or later in the analysis, the perverse patient will attempt to establish such a pact with us. This endeavor is often not seen for what it is. The analyst, caught in a spider's web of excitement and revulsion, animosity and helplessness, will, in the furnace of emotions which convince by their excess, find it difficult to see its end(s). In this vein, Alice would occasionally ask me *what I thought of her*, or whether I liked her. I took it at first as curiosity and a need for narcissistic support; only late in the analysis did I decode Alice's repeated question as *her bid for my acceptance of a pact between us*,<sup>13</sup> as if asking, 'Do you like me?', 'Are you impressed with me?' or 'Don't you actually like the way I treat you?' This made further sense when I later understood her frequent complaint that *she did not satisfy me*. She used to make the same complaint to her mother as a matter of ritual; mother would then invariably respond by hugging and kissing her and tell her—as did Dan—that Alice was her precious treasure, the most wonderful girl on earth. I, in contrast, 'remained unsatisfied', as she put it. In an earlier paper (Stein, 1999), I spoke about the talent of the perverse person to give her object, the chosen other, an exquisite feeling of entitlement, through keenly sensing the other's wishes and desires and exquisitely fulfilling them, thereby ensuring the other's bondage. Lacanians call it 'being the mother's phallus' (Lacan, 1956–7).

In the contract Alice endeavored to set up with me, she was pressuring me to protect her against life, to make her decisions for her, *live her life for her* so that she would be able to lie back in the same way she lay in her mother's house, in her mother's lap, that is, in her mother's womb, and excite me with her riveting stories. Although she dreamed of herself as a speck of grease on her wet kitchen-cloth-mother, a tiny bit of abject dirt to be cleansed and dissolved in water, Alice also dreamed of being the jewel in my crown, and I in hers. She occasionally said she knew she was special to me and, once or twice, she hinted she knew I needed her and would never leave her.

### Pathology and treatment

I have adduced relatively 'raw' material, verbatim quotations, resting points and mini-evolutions from an extended analysis in order to illustrate qualities of perverse relatedness and perverse experience. I described Alice's tremendous excitement and anxiety, her dread and carefully concealed mistrust as they gave way to her deep-rooted shame, her self-loathing and her fierce repudiation of her gender and femininity. I have portrayed Alice's fear of being contacted, which she kept at bay with her long-honed skills in forcefully touching the other by exciting him/her and leading him/her on with a sense of a promised yet never attainable consummation and resolution.

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<sup>13</sup>Toward the end of the analysis, this same question, 'What do you think of me?' received another meaning: are your intentions basically benevolent, and are you touched (rather than impacted) by me? If so, we can go on and have a relationship, or mend it.

The sado-masochistic game between Alice and Dan—as well as between Alice and her mother earlier—was that, when one of them acted ‘normal’, that is, was calm, poised, friendly, more or less unperturbed, the other had to destroy this equanimity and to drive him/her out of their mind and into the other’s mind. This pact-restoring operation made *hatred* a necessary tool for acting. Indeed, one of Alice’s major discoveries in the analysis were those of her hatred of her mother, her mother’s hatred of her, her hatred of Dan and his hatred of her (more or less in this order)—as well as phases of hatred between us. She also discovered how each of them needed closeness with the other in order to actualize and enact an ‘erotic form of hatred’ (Stoller, 1975, 1985).

Obviously, such malignant processes are different from, and, indeed, contrast with, individual playful bendings and erotic modularities. In this sense, perversion proper (Kernberg (1991, 1995) calls it ‘perversity’) differs in principle from what we would do better to call ‘polymorphousness’ or ‘polymorphism’. Donald Meltzer (1973) has given us these useful terms for the distinction I introduced and interrogated at the beginning of my paper, the differentiation between colorful, challenging, subversive polymorphous sex, the essence of eroticism, and perversion or perversity proper.

The efforts required of the analyst to manage these cases are strenuous, heterogeneous and extend over a long time. Yet there is no work, no understanding and no therapeutic action on perversion outside of the transference and countertransference in their many stages and forms. In this view, the relational quality of perversion is more obvious in character perversions than in solitary or anonymous perverse sexual practices. Put another way, as long as the anxieties, wishes and fantasies grounding perverse relations—or practices—are not allowed to unfold in and between analyst and patient, they will remain compulsory, alienating, exhilarating and self-destructive. And they will continue to cover over a catastrophic event of having been dropped and drowned, a primordial violence that has muted one’s scream into a counterphobic denial and a pseudo-vivacity.

### Translations of summary

**Warum Perversion? „Falsche Liebe“ und der perverse Pakt.** Dieser Beitrag geht davon aus, dass Perversion ein sozial, historisch und theologisch aufgeladener Begriff ist und gleichzeitig womöglich das letzte Bollwerk der Psychoanalyse darstellt, das klinisch und im Verhältnis zur zeitgenössischen Kunst und Kultur das Perverse betont. Der Beitrag verwahrt sich gegen Tendenzen, die Existenz einer Kategorie der „Perversion“ zu verleugnen oder sie – umgekehrt – missbräuchlich in den Dienst der Macht zu stellen, die sich aus dem Akt der Diagnose herleitet, und verweist auch auf weitere Tendenzen in der Geschichte des Umgangs mit diesem Begriff, etwa die Beschränkung der Perversion auf den ausschließlich sexuellen Bereich oder aber seine übertriebene Erweiterung auf die polymorphen erotischen Praktiken, die die sexuelle Erregung steigern. Die Paradoxien der Perversion und die Schwierigkeiten, das Perverse vom Nicht-Pervernen zu unterscheiden, werden thematisiert. Die Autorin vertritt die These, dass man die Perversion, um sie verstehen zu können, aus dem engen Konzept der sexuellen Praktiken herauslösen und untersuchen muss, was auf einer tieferen Ebene geschieht. Ein entsprechender Anfang wurde gemacht, als die Psychoanalyse die Perversion als Abwehr psychotischer Ängste zu untersuchen und ihren zwangsläufigen Stellenwert in der Übertragung-Gegenübertragung zu berücksichtigen begann. Zwei Merkmale, die sexuellen und nicht-sexuellen perversen Beziehungen zu eigen sind, sind die Verführungs- und die Bestechungsaspekte der Perversion sowie die Umkehrung von Mittel und Zweck. Die Perversion ist ein Hafen für die Tarnung von Hass und Misstrauen als Erregung und „falsche Liebe“. Das Kind in der Verschiebung und der schlagende Vater, das Kind mit berechtigten Ansprüchen und die verführerische

Mutter sind Prototypen der psychoanalytischen Reflexion über Eltern, die ihre Kinder erregen, betrügen und korrumpieren und perverse Pakte mit ihnen schließen. Das Konzept des *perversen Pakts* rückt in Alice' (illustrativer) Analyse in den Vordergrund, in der er wiederauflebte und dank verschiedener analytischer Maßnahmen demontiert werden konnte.

**¿Por qué la perversión? “Falso amor” y pacto perverso.** El planteamiento de este artículo se asienta en la plena conciencia de que la perversión es un término social, histórica y teleológicamente saturado, al mismo tiempo que puede representar la frontera más reciente del psicoanálisis, tanto en la clínica como en el arte y la cultura contemporáneos donde se enfatiza lo perverso. El artículo cuestiona la tendencia a negar la existencia de la categoría ‘perversión’ o inversamente, a abusar de ella por el poder resultante del acto de diagnosticar. También señala determinados inconvenientes en la historia del uso de este término, así como su reducción al campo sexual exclusivamente, o, por el contrario, a su extensión a las prácticas eróticas polimorfas que intensifican la excitación sexual. Se abordan las paradojas de la perversión y las dificultades para distinguir lo perverso de lo no perverso. Se sostiene que a fin de comprender la perversión se debe desligar de la estrecha noción de práctica sexual para acceder a sus implicaciones más profundas (lo cual comenzó cuando el psicoanálisis consideró la perversión como defensa contra angustias psicóticas, y la concedió un lugar necesario en la interacción transferencia-contratransferencia). Las relaciones perversas, sexuales o no, comparten dos rasgos: los aspectos *seductores* y *corruptores*, y la inversión de medios y fines. La perversión es un refugio para disfrazar el odio y la suspicacia como excitación y “falso amor”. El niño abandonado y el padre que pega, el niño que se cree con derecho a todo y la madre seductora, son prototipos de la reflexión psicoanalítica sobre padres que excitan, engañan y corrompen a sus hijos y establecen *pactos perversos* con ellos. La noción de *pacto perverso* es relevante en el análisis (ilustrativo) de Alicia, en el que su resurrección y desarme fueron llevados a cabo a través de diferentes medios analíticos.

**Pourquoi la perversion ? Le « faux amour » et le pacte pervers.** Cet article est écrit avec la conscience que la perversion est un terme lourd de significations sur le plan social, historique et théologique, en même temps qu’il constitue sans doute la dernière frontière en psychanalyse, à la fois au plan clinique et en relation avec l’art et la culture contemporaines, lesquelles mettent l’accent sur l’élément pervers. Se situant contre les tendances à dénier l’existence d’une catégorie de « perversion », ou inversement à en abuser pour accroître le pouvoir que donne l’acte de porter un diagnostic, cet article pointe également certaines autres conséquences de l’histoire de l’utilisation de ce terme, comme sa réduction exclusive dans le domaine sexuel ou, symétriquement, son extension excessive au polymorphisme des pratiques qui enrichissent l’excitation sexuelle. Les paradoxes de la perversion et la difficulté à distinguer le pervers du non pervers sont signalés. L’auteur soutient que, pour comprendre la perversion, il est nécessaire de s’éloigner de la notion restreinte de la pratique sexuelle et de considérer ce qui est impliqué à un niveau plus profond – ce que la psychanalyse a inauguré en transformant la perversion en une défense contre des angoisses psychotiques et en se mettant à examiner la place nécessaire de la perversion dans la relation transférentielle et contre-transférentielle. Deux traits communs aux relations sexuelles et non sexuelles perverses sont, d’une part les aspects de *séduction* et de *corruption* de la perversion, d’autre part son *inversion des moyens et des buts*. La perversion est le domaine par excellence où la haine et la suspicion se déguisent en excitation et « faux amour ». L’enfant déplacé et le père violent, l’enfant autorisé et la mère séductrice sont les prototypes d’une réflexion psychanalytique sur les parents qui excitent, déçoivent et corrompent leurs enfants en établissant des *pactes pervers* avec eux. La notion de *pacte pervers* est au premier plan de l’analyse d’Alice, qui illustre le propos de l’article ; de nombreux moyens analytiques ont été nécessaires pour le mettre en évidence, puis le démanteler.

**Perversione perché? ‘Il falso amore’ e il patto perverso.** Questo articolo si basa sulla consapevolezza che la perversione sia un termine carico di significati sociali, storici e teologici, e al tempo stesso potrebbe rappresentare l’ultima frontiera della psicoanalisi, sia clinicamente sia in rapporto con l’arte e la cultura contemporanee, che enfatizzano la perversione. Contrapponendosi alle tendenze a negare l’esistenza della categoria di ‘perversione’ o, al contrario, ad abusarne per il potere che deriva dall’atto del diagnosticare, l’articolo indica altri inconvenienti nella storia dell’uso di questo termine, come la riduzione esclusiva della perversione al campo sessuale o, viceversa, il suo allargamento alle pratiche erotiche polimorfe che accrescono l’eccitazione sessuale. Si parla dei paradossi della perversione e delle difficoltà a distinguere ciò che è perverso da ciò che non lo è. Si sostiene che, per capire la perversione, ci si deve staccare dall’accezione ristretta di pratica sessuale per vedere ciò che vi è implicato a livello più profondo – il che ha avuto inizio quando la psicoanalisi ha visto nella perversione una difesa contro

le angosce psicotiche, e ha incominciato a considerare che la perversione abbia un suo posto necessario nel transfert-controtransfert. Due caratteristiche comuni ai rapporti perversi sia sessuali sia d'altro tipo sono gli aspetti *seduttivi* e *corruttori* della perversione, e il suo *rovesciamento* del rapporto *mezzo-fine*. La perversione è un rifugio per camuffare odio e sospetto come eccitazione e “falso amore”. Il bambino abbandonato e il padre che picchia, il bambino privilegiato e la madre seduttrice sono prototipi della riflessione psicoanalitica sui genitori che eccitano, ingannano, corrompono i loro figli stabilendo con loro *patti perversi*. Il concetto di *patto perverso* è in posizione preminente nell'analisi (illustrativa) di Alice, dove per la sua messa in evidenza ed il suo essere smantellata furono necessari numerosi strumenti psicoanalitici.

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