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# **Like Subjects, Love Objects**

**Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference**

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ability to use the object and use the space, which begins to extend outward to experiences of communication and solitude, play and passion, beyond the couch. The analyst's recognition facilitates a developing confidence in the real feeling of freedom and aliveness that accompanies the "spontaneous gesture," the emergent "force of idiom" that Bollas (1989) describes. In this sense, Freud's notion that through the playground of the erotic transference the patient would come to be in charge of her own passion remains pertinent; what has changed and grown are the meanings of transference as "playground" and of owning one's passion: "that extra piece of mental freedom."

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## **6 / Sympathy for the Devil: Notes on Sexuality and Aggression, with Special Reference to Pornography**

The occasion for these remarks was a conference on pornography, which led me to speculate about the excitement associated with sadistic fantasies and images of sexual violation. Viewing a number of pornographic works, the participants in the conference were compelled to conclude that their awareness of sexual objectification and degradation, even their revulsion, did not exclude fascination and excitement. Indeed, any observers who can tolerate the conflict may note with dismay their own excited responses to fantasies or images of acts that they know would in reality be distasteful, perhaps frightening or even traumatic. The same sexual fantasy may at one moment seem to incarnate some exciting aspect of otherness, at another appear terrifying, at yet another appear only as degrading repetition. The conflict that pornography inspires actually pertains to the realm of sexual fantasy as a whole: Pornography is a particularly sharp form of the disjunction between fantasy and reality, be-

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tween symbolic representations and real interaction. My interest in this essay was therefore to reach some understanding, beyond the mundane, about this disjunction between sexual fantasy and reality. Such an exploration must necessarily try to illuminate the sadistic component of sexual fantasy and thus reveal something about how aggression becomes implicated in sexuality.

The fact that the sources of sexual excitement in fantasy diverge so widely from the sources in real interaction does not mean, as common wisdom has it, that fantasy is privileged to reveal the truth concealed by outer reality. Such a notion of truth vastly oversimplifies the complicated relationship of wish, fantasy, and reality. It implies that reality "is," that it has one truth, and that this truth can be known apart from the complex process of psychic representation. For example, some feminist opponents of pornography say that its contents expose the truth about "the male compulsion to dominate and destroy that is the source of sexual pleasure for men" (Dworkin 1980, p. 289). Not only does this stance imply the existence of an essential masculine nature, which the lifting of cultural repression would expose, it also equates the acts portrayed in pornography with what all men really wish for in their sexual life. It further implies that such wishes are simply what they appear to be: they do not represent any other motives or processes beyond themselves; they are what they are.

Of course, Dworkin's statement also implies that violence, transgression, abomination — all the heterogeneous elements (Bataille 1985) that the Angel in the House declares to be anathema — are alien to and absent from women. Women's participation in sexual domination, if not explained away as the result of coercion, would mean that women's nature is as pornography portrays it: submissive, violated. And this conclusion is indeed

problematic for feminists. If men inevitably are what they are, then how can women not be what they are?

The conventional association of femininity with submission is a "truth" to be confronted, and the most serious of the feminists against pornography, Catherine MacKinnon, has conceded this point. Although her analysis is rather simple, MacKinnon (1987) has courageously insisted that women do experience sexual pleasure under the current conditions of abuse and "dehumanization"; they are not simply abused against their will. She grants that for women "subordination is sexualized, the way that dominance is for the male, as pleasure as well as gender identity, as femininity." MacKinnon argues with those who would salvage sex by freeing it from the onus of violence: "Violence is sex when it is practiced as sex." Hence "if violation of the powerless is part of what is sexy about sex," we must take another look at sexuality (pp. 5–8).

But MacKinnon does not really take a look at sexuality. She relies on such simple notions as the premise that gender psychology works through "social defining" of men and women. She does not try to unlock the mystery of what makes violation and powerlessness exciting; of how the hierarchy of gender insinuates itself into or "discursively constructs" (Martin 1982; Butler 1990) sexual pleasure; of how violence can be experienced and practiced as sex. Instead she flattens the most difficult problem into the proposition that "violence is sex." Because men dominate, they are able to use sexuality as a means of perpetuating control. What sexuality "is," and why it can be instrumentalized, remain mysteries. MacKinnon's notion of how sex can be used seems to rest on the unspoken assumption that sexuality "is" a devil, a kind of irresistible temptation, an infinitely manipulable weakness — like hunger in time of famine, which can be exploited to get people to do anything one

wants, rather than like appetite, which is cultivated and formed by fantasy.

This assessment of sexuality actually slams the door on the provocative question as to how sex can be violence and violence can be sex. What exactly allows sexuality to carry or transmit relations of power, violence, and destruction? What is this "thing" called sex? The collaboration between sexuality and power might somehow be related to the fact that a violation that would be abominable in reality can be pleasurable in fantasy. The disjunction between fantasy and reality must be taken seriously if we are to begin to understand the complexity of sexuality and its inveterate association with violence and revulsion.

The violent character that sexuality assumes in fantasy is not simply the unconscious content coming to light, the opening of Pandora's box, as early psychoanalytic discussions seemed to imply. In what might be seen as the flip side of Dworkin's literal-mindedness, psychoanalysts formerly took literally the idea that the lifting of repression revealed an unconscious wish — for instance, that women's unconscious wish to be ravaged constituted the trauma of rape. This supposition reflected a simple inversion of the notion that people want what they consciously express, that reality lies on the surface of consciousness. It collapsed the distinction between the symbolic meaning expressed by such a wish and its literal enactment, between the symbolic and the concrete, between experiences that can be symbolized and those too painful and traumatic to be symbolically processed. Emphasizing this distinction, Simone de Beauvoir (1949) pointed out that even if the adolescent girl enjoys the fantasy of being raped, the reality of rape would be traumatic, horrible. The presence of an other who is outside one's control and can exert power on one's body is an entirely different experience from any fantasy form of the wish, however frightening. Despite the efforts of feminists to bring the trau-

matic meaning of real events to the foreground (see Herman 1992; Davies and Frawley 1993), psychoanalysis took an inordinate amount of time to begin to grasp the difference between trauma and fantasy. On the other hand, fantasy plays a role in representing and concealing real horror that a simple insistence on reality misses.

As most psychoanalysts have finally admitted, reported experiences of incestuous abuse often are not imagined but represent real trauma; the effects of real events are usually quite different from those of imagined interactions, even though the latter may constitute efforts to represent less explicit actions. The manifold consequences of abuse, especially dissociative states, and the complexity that these consequences generate in the analytic process, especially in the transference-countertransference (Davies and Frawley 1993), are finally receiving serious attention. In light of such efforts, it becomes apparent that what is presumably real is often the most difficult thing for the mind to take in and process symbolically — it is "hard to believe." The acknowledgment of reality does not mean that fantasy is now entirely reducible to reality, or even that fantasy does not play a role in the individual's representation of traumatic events, although often the ability to make good use of fantasy is impaired. It means that the "truth" resides not merely in the wish but also in the place of the wish in relation to real events and fantasized objects; that the subject takes a different position toward the one than toward the other; and that the inability to own reality (denial) is as serious a problem as the inability to own fantasy (repression).

The ability to distinguish fantasy from real events and to use symbolic representation to signify something other than its concrete referent cuts both ways. The antipornography movement operates with the same concreteness of thought, in reverse, as did the old psychoanalysts. By equating representations of fan-

tasy with reality, the movement suggests that images of violation are as traumatic as the reality of violent events — when, in fact, those images may be used to represent something different or farther flung. The same false oppositions frame polarized debates in other sexual arenas, so that political discussions of sexual harassment, date-rape, and recovered memory often manufacture impossible choices between paranoia and denial of real abuse.

It is necessary, therefore, to protect the distinction between the symbolic and the concrete on two fronts — to sustain simultaneously the respect for unconscious fantasy life and for outer reality, a tension that threatens to break down both in the psychoanalytic movement and in intellectual life as a whole. This tension corresponds to the two main difficulties in dealing with destructiveness: recognizing real danger “out there” and accepting the presence of internal destructiveness.

To begin with, then, pornographic representations express not the concrete content of desire but rather a relation between sexual excitement and the realm of fantasy. The character of pornographic representation, especially its sadistic content, charges us to formulate the distinction between reality and fantasy — between being affected by an outside other and being inside the enclosure of one’s own fantasy, between the concrete and the symbolic. The conflicting reactions that pornographic representations generate — arousal and resentment — point to this distinction. They also point beyond the individual to the collective or cultural dimension of such representation as a “shared imaginary” of sexuality. Thus pornography itself, as a kind of social institution or agency, has a liminal status. It contains a direct appeal to a private world of fantasy, and yet it is a source of outside stimulation, which can be felt to manipulate or do violence to the conscious self by stimulating against one’s will, by evoking the unconscious imagery and identifications one has to share with others. Pornography can therefore be felt

as a confrontation with some dangerous and exciting otherness, fictive or real, which has the power to create internal excitement, pleasurable and/or repellent. It may be that this otherness is all the more repellent at times because it corresponds to an other that lives within us, making us, as Kristeva (1991) put it, “strangers to ourselves.”

Understanding this confrontation depends, I have been suggesting, not only on how we think about sexuality but also on how we think about the relations between fantasy and reality, inside and outside, self and other. The decisive issue may not be the content of sadism — for we assume that sadistic elements are present in all sexual life — but rather the counterpoint between fantasy and recognition of otherness, especially the other’s subjectivity.

My point of departure is Bataille’s (1962) provocative question: How is eroticism related to death? Why do images of death and violence inspire sexual excitement? This question in turn will lead us to some speculation about the transformation of mental material into bodily, sexual excitement, about what it means that fantasies “go into the body.” Bataille’s reflections on eroticism are in much the same vein as Freud’s portrayal of the struggle between life and death. At the beginning of *Death and Sensuality* Bataille quotes Sade: “There is no better way to know death than to link it with some licentious image.” Freud’s (1931) opinion is quite close to this: the death instinct “escapes detection unless its presence is betrayed by its being alloyed with Eros.”

In Bataille’s thinking, death is a point of reference for the loss of differentiation between self and other: “Eroticism opens the way to death. Death opens the way to the denial of our individual lives. Without doing violence to our inner selves, are we able to bear a negation that carries us to the farthest bounds of

possibility?" (p. 24). By "death" Bataille means not literal death but "the fusion of separate objects" that ends their separate identities, a dissolution of the self. Bataille's picture is paradoxical: individual islands separated by a sea of death — representing the ultimate oneness — which the isolates must cross to meet one another. It is this crossing that creates sexual excitement: "But I cannot refer to this gulf which separates us without feeling that this is not the whole truth of the matter. It is a deep gulf, and I do not see how it can be done away with. Nonetheless, we can experience its dizziness *together*. It can hypnotize us. This gulf is death in one sense, and death is vertiginous, death is hypnotizing" (pp. 12–13).

When we experience together the gulf that separates us, we recognize our mutual condition. It is evident that the perspective from which Bataille develops his analysis of the relationship between eroticism and death includes the relationship between self and other. This perspective — implied by the question of whether we experience death together — is the intersubjective dimension. This dimension may turn out to be as important for understanding erotic life as is the fantasmic labyrinth of the unconscious that intrapsychic theory opens up to us.

The recognition by separate beings of commonality is the central phenomenon referred to in the intersubjective dimension. In my view that term best describes the level of conceptualizing interaction that is backgrounded by intrapsychic theory, the concern not with the vicissitudes of instincts or the content of unconscious fantasy but with the status of recognition between subjects. Because this level has often been implicit in intrapsychic theory, my intent is not to replace intrapsychic theory with an intersubjective theory but rather to make that level explicit. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the two theoretical perspectives are complementary though not always congruent; they can be used in tandem to view the same experience. In

regard to sexuality and fantasy, the issues Freud grasped in the metaphors of instinct theory have their counterpart in intersubjective theory. If we cannot always interpret simultaneously in both dimensions, we can translate between them. Specifically, the conflict between Eros and Thanatos — Freud's (1931) own metaphor here is the Devil, the principle of destructiveness — can be translated into the terms of the conflict between recognition and destruction of the other. But this translation will not afford a one-to-one relation between the terms.

As a psychological category, intersubjectivity refers to the capacity of the mind to directly register the responses of the other. It is affected by whether the other recognizes what we have done and is likewise charged with recognizing the other's acts. Above all intersubjectivity refers to our capacity to recognize the other as ~~an independent subject~~. In the mutual exchange (or denial) of recognition, each self is transformed; this transformation is a condition of each subject's expression (or denial) of her or his own capacities. Whatever breakdowns in recognition occur, as they inevitably do, the primary intersubjective condition of erotic life is that of "experiencing the dizziness *together*."

Is this reference to shared experience simply a statement of the obvious? Does it denature Bataille's radical embrace of transgression to note that psychoanalytic and philosophical writers from widely different perspectives might join in this sentiment? The core experience of intersubjectivity, as Daniel Stern (1985) has analyzed it in his work on the development of infant consciousness, is that separate minds can share common states, feelings, or experiences. In Winnicott's (1969b) thinking, which approaches the problem of recognition from a very different vantage point, the intersubjective moment is placed later, after an early state of undifferentiation, as a breaking out of omnipotence. In ~~that moment we are able to differentiate be-~~

tween the subjectively conceived object and the objective object, which is an entity in its own right. Thus the distinction is not merely between the infant hallucinating the breast and the arrival of the real, as in Freud's (1915a) concept of the reality principle; it is between perceiving the real breast as if it were simply an extension of one's wish and perceiving it as an outside entity that provides not-me substance (Winnicott 1969b; see Eigen 1981). Intersubjectively speaking, the same breast, or the same sexual fantasy, can thus be experienced in two different positions.

Recognition means that the other is mentally placed in the position of a different, outside entity but shares a similar feeling or state of mind. Separate minds and bodies can attune. In erotic union this attunement can be so intense that the separation between self and other feels momentarily suspended: self and other are fused. The sense of losing the self in the other and that of really being known for oneself can be reconciled. This sense of simultaneously losing the self and retaining wholeness is often called *oneness* and is often described as the ultimate point of erotic union. The desire for erotic union with another person who is endowed with the capacity to transform the self can be seen as the most intense version of the desire for recognition. When both individuals experience themselves as being transformed by the other, or by what they create in conjunction with the other, a choreography emerges that is not reducible to the idea of reacting to the outside. The experience is one not only of sensual pleasure, which can be felt in a state of aloneness or indifference to the other's existence, but of co-creation and mutual recognition. In erotic union the point is to contact and be contacted by the other — *apprehended as such*.

The risk of such declarative statements about the erotic is that one seems to set up an ideal or essence against which everything else is measured as alienated or epiphenomenal. So I

hasten to add that erotic recognition does not ever occur in some independent realm, purified of the unconscious fantasy stuff that dreams are made of. Recognition is the act of the same subject whose mental life is full of such stuff. The significance of recognition or its absence can be thought of as something like that of a metacomment: a statement about the position of the erotic partners in assuming the togetherness of their fantasies. Is a common fantasy and its accompanying mood — for example, “No matter how wild you become, I will always feel safe with you; no matter how insatiable I feel, you will always be able to satisfy me, and this is what makes it so wonderful to be with you” — shared by both partners (see Hollibaugh and Moraga 1983)? Does the disruption of this fantasy feel intolerable, or the perpetuation of it coercive? Does fantasy remain a fluid medium, to be reinvented and transformed, or is it hardened into objective forms of interaction that cease to convey any sense of reaching or being transformed by the other? The presence or absence of power fantasies is not the issue; it is their intersubjective context that is decisive.

The relevance of this intersubjective dimension becomes evident as we examine the fate of Bataille's flirtation with death through transgression. Significantly, Bataille draws back from the joint contemplation of the abyss in his text and goes on to present instead the familiar form of dissolution, the dual unity of violator and violated — male and female, of course. In my analysis of erotic domination as exemplified by *Story of O* (Benjamin 1988), I argued that this breakdown into complementarity of doer and done to — so taken for granted by Bataille — reflects the inability to sustain the necessary contradiction of differentiation, in which we both recognize the other and continue to assert the self. In this breakdown these two elements of differentiation are split: one self asserts power, the other recognizes that power through submission. The two moments are

represented as opposite and distinct tendencies, so that they are available to the subject only as alternatives: each can play only one side at a time, projecting the opposite side onto the other (and, of course, these alternatives are organized by gender, in the form of the oedipal complementarity). In the split unity, each partner represents the other's opposite rather than struggling fully with the other for recognition.

It is the rigidity of this complementarity that ultimately leads to narrative exhaustion, the moribund outcome of objectification. The shared confrontation with de-differentiation — that is, the dizzying loss of self in erotic experience — is what counteracts the element of one person's reducing the other to his (undifferentiated) thing. As the splitting of positions into violator and violated gradually vitiates the shared sensibility, vertigo is replaced by control. The sexual tension diminishes as the master overpowers the other's subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> Loss of tension is the common dynamic of erotic domination and objectification. Thus the split unity of violator and violated eventually reproduces the same deadness and lack of sexual tension that the vertiginous confrontation with death was meant to overcome. The sea of death can be crossed only by reaching the other — as a being outside omnipotent control.

In the analysis of sexual transgression from the intrapsychic viewpoint, the effort to reduce the other also appears as a reaction to the threat of engulfment and the concern with differentiation. The work of the psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel has focused on the intrapsychic meanings of perversion and explored the content of sadistic fantasies. Chasseguet-Smirgel (1984) has interpreted Sade's fantasies as anal sadism:

1. As Bataille (1976) recognized, "the slave by accepting defeat . . . has lost the quality without which he is unable to *recognize* the conqueror so as to satisfy him. The slave is unable to give the master the *satisfaction* without which the master can no longer rest" (p. 12).

she proposes that Sade's core fantasy is the reduction of the maternal body to shit, the reduction of all nature through the digestive tract into an undifferentiated mass. The key argument here is that sadism reflects an anal striving toward de-differentiation, a breaking of the paternal-genital law of separation. This view of de-differentiation builds on Freud's notion of aggression as the turning outward of the death instinct, which strives to reduce everything to its original, undifferentiated state.

What is the relationship between the intrapsychic and the intersubjective understandings of sadism? As I have said, the two positions are not necessarily in conflict or mutually exclusive. The intrapsychic formulation insists on the visceral body of fantasy, specifically, on the importance of anality. But what does anality, with its well-known association with sadism, actually mean? In fact, as I shall suggest, the turning of passive into active, inner into outer, must play a vital role in this association. Chasseguet-Smirgel's interpretation of sadism as the de-differentiation of the object by alimentary reduction does not fully elaborate the function of anal sadism for the self in relation to other. Her analysis emphasizes only one side of the sadistic act. The act aims not only at de-differentiating the other, as she points out, but also at differentiating the self: the self imagines that in reducing the other it is establishing its own identity. Because it imagines that in digesting the other it is nourishing its own identity, its effort to gain control over the other actually represents an effort to separate, to achieve its own autonomy. The paradigmatic other who is being reduced is the mother, from whom the sadist feels unable to separate.

As Stoller (1975) argued, in his discussion of perversion, sadism tries to both "do and undo differentiation." It not only breaks the paternal law of separation but desperately tries at the same time to reinforce it (and this, incidentally, may cast some



doubt upon the paternal law itself). The sadistic erotic fantasies, which may then attract adult men to pornographic sadism, usually represent a retaliatory reversal of the omnipotent control suffered at the mother's hands. The impotent rage that the child has split off, unable to express or encompass, reappears in the sexualized fantasy — fueled not by eros but by aggression. (For that matter, women may identify with these fantasies for similar reasons; and men as well as women may play the part of the mother who suffers the child's attack.) The child's wishes for differentiation are transformed but recognizable in the sadistic fantasy: the wish to finally reach the mother as well as to punish her, to separate from her as well as to control her, to be recognized by her as well as to obliterate her.

Whereas the intersubjective understanding of transgression emphasizes the effort to differentiate self and other and simultaneously to absorb the other, the intrapsychic view emphasizes the vicissitudes of aggression and sexuality. In the intrapsychic view, sadism is a reaction to a primary condition of the instinct, a way of discharging the impulse toward reduction and de-differentiation (the death instinct); in the intersubjective view the primary condition is the predicament of simultaneously recognizing self and other (object), and sadism is a reaction to difficulties that may result from the vicissitudes of that predicament. Is there a place where these two vectors of understanding can intersect, creating a multidimensional picture?

The paradoxical doing and undoing of differentiation can be seen as a reaction to the primary condition of intersubjectivity, the predicament of needing an other who is outside our control — to the imaginary threat of assimilating or being assimilated by the other. We must consider the ways in which different perspectives define this need for the other and the threat it poses.

The metaphor of the death instinct, recast in light of self-other differentiation, helps to link the idea of loss of tension to the trajectories of sexuality and aggression. The advantage of Freud's theory of the death instinct is that these links are clearly established, even though in the final analysis "instinct" may best be understood not literally, biologically, but rather as a metaphor for somatic and affective states. Freud's discussions of sadism and the death instinct were an attempt to understand the repetition compulsion — the endlessly frustrating replay of destructiveness. He concluded, with some reluctance (1920), that an explanation of the repetition compulsion required postulation of a death drive that impels us toward complete absence of tension. Projecting the death drive outward in the form of aggression or mastery was the only protection against succumbing to it. As I have said elsewhere (Benjamin 1988), this understanding of aggression can be seen as Freud's effort to explain domination, and in this sense as a parallel story to the master-slave paradox. The absence of intersubjective tension or dissolution of otherness that accompanies domination corresponds, of course, to Freud's repetition compulsion. Domination of the other is the result of the conversion of the death drive into mastery or aggression.

Freud (1931) brings together the idea of destructiveness, the primary drive toward utter nothingness, and the incarnation of evil. He points out in a footnote to *Civilization and Its Discontents*, "In Goethe's Mephistopheles we have a quite exceptionally convincing identification of the principle of evil with the destructive instinct." He quotes the devil: "Everything that comes to be, deserves to be destroyed (Denn alles, was entsteht, Ist wert, dass es zu Grund geht). . . . Destruction, aught with Evil blent, That is my proper element (So ist dann alles, was Ihr Sunde nennt, Zerstörung, kurz das Böse nennt, Mein eigentliches Element)." And further, he tells us, "The Devil himself

names as his adversary, not what is holy and good, but Nature's power to create, to multiply life — that is Eros" (pp. 120–121).<sup>2</sup> Freud misses the implication of this association to Nature: that the power to create life, Eros, might be identified as a maternal principle, envied and attacked by those who do not possess it. He does announce that civilization presents "the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction" (p. 122).

Aggression has to contend with its "immortal adversary," Eros, which may fuse with and defuse it. Eros in general, and sexuality in particular, neutralize aggression. Freud writes that the life and death instincts almost never appear in isolation, but "are alloyed with each other . . . and so become unrecognizable. In sadism . . . we should have before us a particularly strong alloy of this kind between trends of love and the destructive instinct; while its counterpart, masochism, would be a union between destructiveness directed inwards and sexuality" (p. 119).

The best place to observe and analyze destructiveness is in erotic life, perhaps the only place to grasp the otherwise elusive death instinct:

It is in sadism, where the death instinct twists the erotic aim in its own sense, and yet at the same time fully satisfies the erotic urge, that we succeed in obtaining the clearest insight into its nature, and its relation to Eros. But even where it emerges without any sexual purpose, in the blindest fury of destructiveness, we cannot fail to recognize that the satisfaction of the instinct is accompanied by an extraordinarily high degree of narcissistic enjoyment, owing to its presenting the ego with a fulfillment of the latter's old wishes for omnipotence (p. 121).

2. Freud further complicates the picture by suggesting that splitting is at work. He adds that in view of his own unwillingness to admit the necessity of destructiveness, he understands that the Devil is "the best way out as an excuse for God . . . playing the same part as an agent of economic discharge as the Jew does in the world of the Aryan ideal."

Immediately before this statement Freud interjects a short explanation of how he moved from the instinctual dualism of ego instinct versus object instincts (libido) to the dualism of death instinct versus libido. So it is a fair reading that death (aggression) now holds the place of narcissism (omnipotence) in the theory, a transposition that has become increasingly significant to our current understanding of narcissism. By the end of this discussion, it appears that destruction "satisfies" the ego instinct, the narcissistic wish for omnipotence. What are we entitled to make of this imbrication of the destructive instinct and narcissism? Doesn't it raise the possibility that destructiveness is routed directly through the ego's wish for omnipotence — an idea that places aggression only a split hair away from insistence on absolute selfhood? Omnipotence — that is, the loss/obliteration of the outside other — might be seen as the intersubjective correlate of what Freud calls the death instinct.

Let us say, then, that mental omnipotence is the fantasy counterpart to death — metaphorically, it is the loss of tension between inside and outside, the absolute return of the self to itself. Omnipotence (whether it refers to the pole of merging or the pole of withdrawal, to union with or aggression against the other, to oneness or all-aloneness) means the complete assimilation of the other into the self. It signifies a flat line on the graph, the complete reduction of tension between self and other in mental representation. Mastery, as Freud thinks about it, is both an expression of death/omnipotence and an effort to escape it: to create tension, to break up this assimilation of or by the other, which will allow nothing to exist outside. Yet in the equation death = aggression, the death instinct is final, it has the last word, at least as long as the monadic self is encapsulated in a closed system, the omnipotent mind, and cannot reach something outside. The destructive energy is always "conserved" within the system, always comes back to haunt the self.

Perhaps we must return to this feature of the instinct, its conservatism, its conservation within the encapsulated self. If we postulate that the self's relation to its own tension is dependent upon its tension with the other, we are calling into question the inevitability of the self's encapsulation, and hence the conservation of destructive energy that Freud proposes. Freud's notion of instinct, specifically of the conversion of the death instinct into aggression, and from aggression into outward mastery, includes the equally important idea of expression or discharge. The object or outside must, in fact, receive the energy that the subject is directing toward it. It is this exchange between inside and outside, self and other, that, as Brennan (1992) emphasizes, constitutes the intersubjective element in Freud's theory. The other must receive or contain what the subject puts out. Her reading of Freud's theory makes room within it for the possibility of an intersubjective "way out" of omnipotence and the consequent conservation of the death instinct.

Perhaps, then, rather than to express death as simply a metaphor for loss of self-other tension, we ought to consider the way that tension moves from inside to outside. To translate the notion of a drive toward death (zero tension) into omnipotence (loss of tension between self and other) does not fully confront the question of how the two terms, inside and outside, are actually connected. Eigen (1993), embracing both intrapsychic and intersubjective theory, offers some insight into this matter with an interpretation of sadism related to the primal experience of "stimulus rape." The early flooding of sensations that the infant must passively experience can be conceptualized as a primary masochism, the source of "the death wish" (a notion Freud considered in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). This primary need to reduce tension may be seen as the origin of the inversion that Freud described, whereby "the death wish" is turned outward as aggression. Aggression and its derivative, mastery, represent

the effort to turn outward the invading stimuli, the unbearable tension. In the face of an original intolerable helplessness, the ego defends itself through the well-known switch from passive to active (Christiansen 1993).

But something is missing from our formulation. Without the outside other, there is no one, no thing, to help the originally helpless subject to absorb, process, and tolerate states of internal tension. Freud's energetic, economic view can be understood as a metaphor for experiences of the monadic self—that is, for internal regulation of tension. This formulation of the death instinct as the drive to reduce tension should perhaps be linked to the intersubjective need for a sustaining tension between self and other that makes internal tension bearable. Here is the first other as "transformational object" (Bollas 1987) or regulator of states (Beebe and Lachmann 1994).

Only retroactively—at what point of differentiation we are not sure—does a person become able to represent the other as outside and the other's help in relieving tension as not-self. And, to further obscure the matter, by the time a child is able to differentiate, she or he has learned to regulate a good deal of her or his own tension. Still, this representation of distinct self and other does exist. So we must ask: Under what conditions does a process between subjects appear as part of the mental life of the single subject, as purely internal, as the inner compulsion that the subject wants to fulfill or escape? In intersubjective terms, the self that has to escape an overwhelming tension caused by stimulus outside its control is never an isolated self: if no other is there to help contain that tension, it is still registered (although perhaps not able to be represented) as the absent other, who could have or should have been there (Green 1986). If absence becomes traumatic, the self cannot represent it, yet is still haunted by the one who wasn't there. For the isolated self, too overwhelmed and alone to represent the other, what ap-

pears is not the other's absence but rather death, or the wish for death. Such traumatic, unrepresented loss can become the basis for sexual fantasies of submission and domination, as Khan (1979) showed.

More generally, to be able to represent the absence of the other means to experience the absence of someone felt to exist outside mental omnipotence, someone who can contain the tension that we cannot bear alone, who can receive what it is necessary to give. As Winnicott (1969b) emphasized, the baby who has made the transition into "using the object" is able to represent the other as an outside being who relieves tension; the baby experiences an "outside breast" rather than an extension of self. The usable object emerges only through surviving destruction: the effort to break out of omnipotence by placing the other outside one's fantasy, to apprehend her or him as external reality. In his view the subject begins in the state of omnipotence, and yet the other (mother) is always already there, giving omnipotence the lie, receiving, containing, and regulating excitement that would otherwise be unbearable.<sup>3</sup> The question is how this function of the other can begin to be felt as outside rather than as an extension of self. The answer is that the assertion of omnipotence in the form of aggression or negation of

3. As I have already indicated, there are certain problems with the assumption that the child begins in the state of omnipotence. I am not sure that understanding omnipotence as a sequential category — a starting point — is necessary to Winnicott's theory, and it may lead to certain misunderstandings. The contradiction between the felt connection to the other and the "omnipotence of thoughts," the child's view that reality is inside her or his control, may mean that omnipotence and outsideness have to be constituted simultaneously. Both would then begin when the child starts to realize meaningfully that reality is in fact outside control. Before that, the child is relating sometimes to the outside other, sometimes to fantasy, without differentiating but also without a notion of control. It may be that Winnicott's category of creative illusion is more useful for the state of undifferentiation, that of omnipotence for the state when the contradiction becomes apparent and the other's response or susceptibility to control becomes represented.

the other collides with the barrier of the (m)other's continuing existence. Whereas the (m)other's survival permits the shattering of mental omnipotence, her failure to survive leaves the subject with unprocessed, indigestible rage that cannot be further broken down and metabolized. This overwhelming, unmanageable internal tension, which is not contained by the other's holding or communication, remains as aggression. Alongside it is the unrepresentable absence of the other who has not survived. These experiences of loss and aggression can be split off and become the basis for the perverse and sadistic elements of sexual fantasy that we associate with pornography and compulsive sexual activity.

If no outside is recognized, there is no relational space in which to put one's own excitement and aggression, no one else to recognize and process it. This insight was decisively formulated and elaborated by Bion (1962a, b) in his discussions of the container mother and the need for mental digestion; thus it is central to post-Kleinian thought. As Winnicott succinctly put it in relation to the analyst, if the other is not outside and is only "a subjective phenomenon, what about waste disposal?" (p. 107). Likewise, unless mother's external subjectivity is registered, there is no reassurance against fantasies (her own or the child's) of her omnipotence, her seduction, or her control: the fantasies of the mother's body as overwhelming or invasive are not countered by an experience of mutual recognition.<sup>4</sup> There is no experience that can contribute to a symbolic representation of the mother's body as both permeable to one's own feel-

4. Again, I want to stress that mutual recognition does not imply perfect knowledge or attunement; nor, as Aron has emphasized, does it require complete symmetry. Nonetheless, the reciprocity of giving and taking, acting and having an impact, communicating and negotiating difference creates space. This space is not only permeable, it also works as a boundary against invasion, a condition of freedom that makes it possible to give and receive something uncoerced (Zoltan Szankay, personal communication; see also Szankay, 1994).

ings and unattacking. When we refer to recognition of the mother as an independent subject we are including this notion of a mother who is both (partially, imperfectly) knowable and knowing, who can be affected without being annihilated, who can encompass what is inside us without imposing terrifying fantasies from within her. She is neither overwhelmingly weak/ needy nor invincible/perfect — as in the fantasies of the mother as a controlling, coercive figure that invariably underlie sadistic fantasy.

In a sense, sadistic fantasies are the quintessential expression of inability to recognize the mother as the imperfect but external subject, the inability to tolerate outsideness or otherness that arises from failed destruction. Sadistic fantasies reflect the absence of an external object that sets a limit to the subject's mind, that survives. As Eigen (1993) has analyzed it, Sade's fantasies are a protest against any outside reality, any limitation set by nature: Sade deliberately excludes the vagina and makes "woman's asshole the primary sexual object . . . emphasizing the import of his *choice*" (p. 100; emphasis Eigen's). Insisting on his absolute freedom to define sexuality, Sade rejects the bodily givens of homosexuality (man's mouth and anus) as well as heterosexuality, "carrying his protest to infinity." In other words, absolutely everything is his to decide; his is a refusal not merely of differentiation but of the outside world, a "transcendental reversal" (p. 101).

As I have discussed in relation to Winnicott's theory (see Chapters 1 and 3; Benjamin 1988), the freedom to fantasize may contribute positively to the metabolizing of aggression; the exercise of that freedom may help to dissipate the sense of unreality that disappointment and rage have engendered. The inner tension of aggression may be modified through a shift in the outer relationship back to mutual understanding, which includes communication of fantasy contents. Rather than bounc-

ing back in retaliation (as in the child's rejoinder to name-calling, "I'm rubber, you're glue; everything you say bounces off me and sticks to you"), the other's persistence in receiving communication gives meaning to the expressive act and so transforms the self's inner state. The transformation is in the direction that permits the self once again to tolerate the outside, the different. The shift back to mutual understanding, or out of the fantasy of destruction into the reality of survival, reestablishes the tension between two individuals even as it dissipates the tension of aggression within the individual. But when this shift back to intersubjective reality fails, internalization remains the only way to deal with aggression; the turning inward of aggression forms the basis of the fantasy of doer and done to, an inner world of persecutors and victims.

The apparent busyness of this inner world does not alter the essential emptiness that is felt when the self assimilates to other or other is assimilated to the self. Deadness and repetition reflect the inability to contact anything outside. In this case internal fantasy replaces rather than complements interaction or exchange with the outside.

This turning inward of aggression when the other fails to survive may be a key to understanding certain forms of sexual fantasy. In my analysis of erotic domination (1980) I suggest a parallel between Winnicott's thinking about the destruction of the object and Freud's (1915a) discussion of sadomasochism in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes." In Freud's thinking at that time (the period in which he defined the instincts as self-preservation and libido, before the formulation of the death instinct), the infant's initial posture is that of a primary sadism.<sup>5</sup> This

5. Again, though, I find Eigen's argument convincing that beneath this primary sadism we can postulate an even more primary experience of "stimulus rape," producing the inner tension that leads to the initial aggression. However, in this logic aggression is absolutely ineluctable, since there is always more tension than can be

sadism is indifferent to the outcome, to whether or not the other is being hurt. Perhaps it is simply a discharge of aggression, before consequences are perceived. The intervening step that leads to the formation of true sadism is that the child internalizes and turns this sadism against him- or herself, in the form of a primary masochism. Finally, once the identification with suffering is in place, the infliction of pain on the other — sadism proper — emerges. In other words, it is only the step of internalization that converts the primary destructive impulse into a wish to harm.

Laplanche (1976) elaborates this movement from primary sadism to masochism to sadism proper in a suggestive way. He proposes that we call the first step aggression rather than sadism, for initially it is not alloyed with sexuality at all. It becomes alloyed with sexuality only in the second step, at the point where it is internalized as masochism. Thus, only with the second step — masochism — do we have the first sexual position. This turning around on the subject, the move toward reflexivity, is actually what creates sexuality (pp. 92–102). Independently of whether the fantasy itself is of being active or passive, it is central to both sadism and masochism. In both the dominant and the submissive role, the action is internalized and enters the self as fantasy. The process of turning around occurs through the transmutation of aggression into “the sexual” — what Laplanche calls fantasmatization — regardless of the fantasy content. In this reflexive process, Laplanche states, “the fantasy, the unconscious, and sexuality” emerge “in a single movement.” This sexuality, he argues, is actually a kind of “frenetic anti-life,” opposed to Eros (pp. 123–126).

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somatically and mentally processed, except in death. In keeping with Freud's later argument in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, escaping tension is the logic behind the death wish, turning the tension outward in aggression the preferred means of escape.

Although I may be taking liberties with Laplanche's intentions, I believe that in his theory of the creation of sexuality as a process of fantasmatization he is describing something similar to Winnicott's theory of destruction and survival. Of course, he is working with the language of instinctual tension as the property of the monad, and so we are once again required to translate. But his novel reading of the meaning of sadism suggests an important point of intersection with the idea of the destruction of the object, one that leads to a new understanding of sexuality. We might refer to what Laplanche calls sexuality as “the sexual” — a sexuality that is not Eros but seems closer to what Bataille usually means by eroticism.<sup>6</sup> We might suppose that fantasmatization means a process of symbolically re-turning aggression into one's body, where it is converted into a source of pleasure — a reprocessing of bodily tension in the imaginary body. This conversion of aggression is the essential mechanism for the creation of the realm of sexual fantasy. This realm of fantasy then relates to the “subjectively conceived object,” as opposed to the independent object who has survived destruction and can be loved — even if both objects are the same person.

Eros, as Laplanche, following Freud, implies, is about something other than the sexual; it is about life as opposed to death, about contacting the other. Again, this does not mean that Eros designates some purified relationship to the other that is free of aggression or hate. Quite the contrary, Eros, like “the sexual,” has its own way of taking up aggression and sexuality — of balancing recognition and destruction. But the erotic moment is that in which the other survives destruction, is not wholly assimilable to one's mental product. It is about the en-

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6. For Bataille (1962), the juxtaposition is between sexuality as something purely animal and eroticism as that which involves our encounter with death. See *Les Larmes d'Eros*.

counter of two subjects that moves through omnipotence to recreate tension, that includes mutual recognition or the sharing of mental states. But such definitions do not mean that “the sexual” and the erotic can be teased apart, for they generally occur simultaneously.

I would like to consider the idea that the sadomasochistic themes so common in fantasy and in cultural representations of gender, especially pornography, are the logical culmination of the turning inward of action and the creation of fantasmic sexuality, “the sexual.” Ultimately, they are a means of dealing with encapsulation in omnipotence in the absence of intersubjective containment of: aggression, loss, or trauma leading to unrepresentable psychic pain. This absence has resulted in a disproportionate disappearance of the outside other. In its place appears the objectified “subjectively conceived” object, a fantasmic being that does not solve the problem of “waste disposal.” We might say, then, that the pornographic use of sadomasochistic fantasy reflects an attempt to turn outward a sexuality that is already turned in on itself. Like the third step in Freud’s discussion of sadomasochism, it follows upon a turning inward. It is a reaction to the unpleasant inner tension associated with the absence of outer tension — a state we call boredom — or to the unmanageable surfeit of tension we call rage, which perhaps marks the place of the unrepresentable pain and loss that must be enacted through the imagery of bodily pain. In particular, directing aggression toward and inflicting pain on the female body serves a double purpose: substituting for the intersubjective container of communication and representation, and revenge against the mother for failing to respond.

Sexual boredom is frequently the reason given for an interest in pornography. But the dilemma then becomes how to turn back outward when there is no outside, when both subject and

object exist only within the capsule of omnipotence, of fantasy. This is where transgression comes in, the attempt to create a substitute form of outsideness by exposing the inner, private, autoerotic components to a fantasied public, to an observer that is neither subject nor object of the fantasy. The spectator creates the sense of outsideness, the consumer is the outside other to his own fantasy, which is enacted on the screen or the page before him.

This transgressive breakthrough between inside and outside can become simply another loop in the circuit of doomed efforts to reach some live connection, some externality. The point of such contact is, of course, discharge — discharge of aggression, evacuation of toxic elements, and embodiment of the pain or degradation that cannot be encompassed by the self. Discharge into an outside that does not exist in mental representation is impossible; some tension with the outside is required to produce physical discharge. Lacking the opportunity to rid the self of aggression, the subject transmutes it into sexual discharge; autoeroticism affords a substitute behavior that seemingly does not require an outside other. Whereas in infancy the regulation of internal tension states has to occur through the direct transformational action of self or other, the pornographic subject can partially use the symbolic level for transformation and can identify with representations of bodily activity. In another sense, however, his or her use of images bears comparison with infantile self-regulation through autoerotic self-stimulation. The use of symbolism in pornography is incomplete; it does not serve to release tension without physical stimulation and discharge (as, for instance, the close of a narrative may produce emotional discharge, catharsis, through identification). Indeed, the purpose of pornography is to use but attenuate symbolic expression, to evoke excitement that can be released through physical self-stimulation. What this suggests

is a kind of interruption in the symbolic processing — again, not primarily of sexuality but of aggression. We may ask whether, as Laplanche implies, this interruption is a derivative of joining excitement to the fantasmatic (see Stoller 1975).

Let us consider the matter of symbolization for a moment. Difficulties in symbolization (see Freedman 1980) refer us to the thing that is missed when two subjects are not able to realize or negotiate difference: along with the representation of an other, the potential space of symbolization (Green 1986; Ogden 1986) also dissolves. If the intersubjective space of symbolic play transforms omnipotence, allowing the subject to return to a world of mutual understanding, it also preserves-by-transforming omnipotence fantasies by transposing them into another form through sublimation. When the other survives confrontations over assertion and difference, when aggression is “caught” by the other, then there is a space of symbolic communication between subjects in which disappointment or excitement can be contained. With the emergence of this space between the person and the action, between action and reaction, it becomes possible to symbolize feeling in fantasy and words.

To complete the move from physical discharge (e.g., of aggression) to symbolic elaboration presumes the intersubjective space of communication. The space between self and other also makes possible a space between symbol and object (Ogden 1986). The object is not equated with symbolic properties attributed to it, as in “She is that thing I fear,” but rather is seen as distinct from those properties (see Chapter 3). The ability to recognize the symbolic properties of the object as one’s own attributions reflects the differentiation between self and other. Thus the development of the self-other relationship allows the development of symbolic capacities out of the symbolic equation (Segal 1957) into true symbolization, in which fantasy and reality are no longer interchangeable (Freedman 1980).

“Things” are not what they are, or even what they are felt to be; they are not made equivalent by the verb “to be,” as in the statement “Violence *is* sex when it is practiced as sex.”

In the absence of intersubjective space, symbolic capacities collapse: actions become things, and images of actions become things. If the consumer of pornography takes the image as an occasion for physical discharge, so the opponents of pornography likewise collapse representation and action. Antipornographers say, in effect, “These images *make* me feel bad,” rather than “I feel bad when I see this because I identify with the image of myself as a degraded object.” Or even, “Because of my identification, because I am moved by such things and they do not leave me cold, I should at least be free to avoid having to see them on public display.” Instead, the argument has been posed in terms of “real” effects. The antipornography campaign has said, “I cannot take this to be symbolic; it is the same to me as if the act were actually being performed upon me.” Indeed, for those people who have suffered abusive and traumatizing violence, it is not surprising that the space of symbolization has been destroyed as well, that the image conveys the threat of actuality, as Dworkin’s autobiographical confession has made clear. Both pornography and antipornographers operate on the basis of the symbolic equation, in which what is represented in the image is not symbolic but real: the controversy is only about whether the “thing” is sex or violence. The symbol is the thing symbolized; the representation itself *is* violence. The self feels coerced by the thing, deprived of subjectivity by the objectifying image. As a result of the foreclosure of the symbolic space, representations of violence undertaken with the artistic intent of evoking meaningful reflection cannot be discriminated from violence meant to excite coercively.

But if the same underlying structure — the symbolic equation — underlies both real acts of symbolic violence and the



pornographic representation, this does not make action and representation exactly the same (Stoller 1985). Violence is violence when it is practiced as violence, to paraphrase MacKinnon. Real violence cannot be limited to and contained by the specular relationship to sexual excitement; it exceeds representation. Pornography — with some exceptions — limits one to the image, the performance, the simulated deed. Pornographic excitement may be an attenuated use not only of symbolization but also of the transitional space. It forecloses the space between symbol and object and makes the represented object appear to be the “thing” that evokes excitement, but the thing is precisely not real. In pornographic sex, fantasies are not contained as symbolic representations in the subject’s mind, they are routed via symbolic equation from the object directly to physical discharge. But the sexual act that brings about the discharge (most commonly, masturbation) is seldom a replica of the image that generates the excitement.

Speaking more generally, what does this analysis of attenuated symbolization say about the sadistic content of pornography and the proximity of aggression and sexuality? As I concluded in my discussion of omnipotence in Chapter 3, the point cannot be to “get rid of” dangerous fantasies; rather, it must be to contain and transform them through symbolization in the intersubjective space. By the same logic, my aim here is not to analyze sadism as if it were primarily or exclusively the property of pornographic fantasy — for we have already seen that aggression and fantasmization are constitutive of sexual life. Rather, the point might be to distinguish between pornographic representation, which operates on the level of the symbolic equation, and forms of expression that provide fuller symbolic representation. In effect, while symbolization promotes the movement outward — the vector toward exchange with the outside (whether interpersonal communication or ar-

tistic sublimation) — the symbolic equation maintains the inward movement of fantasmization, in which only discharge allows release.

We may now return to the question raised by the shared confrontation with the abyss, the gulf that separates one subject from another. In effect, it is the acceptance of this separation that makes shared contemplation possible, and it is with this acceptance that the erotic, the outward vector, is associated. Still, having seen the role of sexual fantasmization in pornography, we might wish to know how “the sexual” and the erotic come together. Once we accept Laplanche’s idea of the simultaneous formation of “the sexual,” fantasy, and the unconscious, we cannot assume that there is any sexuality, any erotic relation, free of them. Rather (and this is the essence of what Freud discovered), sexuality — as a major dimension of the psyche — is necessarily imbued with and constituted by the fantasmic elements of “the sexual.”

This understanding allows us to see that it is not simply the particular content of fantasy that makes some sexuality erotic and other sexuality pornographic. Certainly, the content of sexual fantasy is symptomatic of the way the problem of destruction has been shaped for the individual, of the vicissitudes of his self-other relations. But it is the relationship between the person and the fantasy, the fantasy and its form of expression, that makes the difference. Speaking more generally, what distinguishes the erotic — in interaction or representation — is the existence of an intersubjective space that both allows identification with the other and recognizes the non-identity between the person, the feeling, and the “thing” (action) representing it. We cannot say that sadomasochistic fantasy is inimical to or outside the erotic, for where do we find sexuality that is free of the fantasy of power and surrender? Would sexuality exist without such fantasy? There is no erotic interaction without the sense of self and other

exerting power, affecting each other, and such affecting is immediately elaborated in the unconscious in the more violent terms of infantile sexuality. (E.g., a woman's fantasy of devouring her lover emerges in a dream, in which the visual image of a fox chasing a rabbit is followed by an auditory expression, the words said almost lovingly: "I'd like to drink your blood.") But what makes sexuality erotic is the survival of the other throughout the exercise of power, which in turn makes the expression of power part of symbolic play.

Eros can play with, rather than be extinguished by, the destruction wrought by fantasy: when the experience of union (fantasized, perhaps, as devouring or being consumed) can be contained symbolically and does not destroy the self; when sharing and attunement are not destroyed ("ruined" or "spoiled") by the other's outsideness and difference; when separate minds can share similar feelings. Eros unites us and in this sense overcomes the sense of otherness that afflicts the self in relation to the world and its own body. But this transcendence is possible only when one simultaneously recognizes the separateness of some outside body in all its particular sensuality, with all its particular difference.

Perhaps the origins of the erotic can be located before or beyond fantasy in the the simple corporeal sensuality and attunement central to the presymbolic world of the infant, the world illuminated first by intersubjective theory. The earliest mutual attunement of infant facial and kinetic play already creates an in-between space where two dance to the music of one, a precursor of the symbolic space of communicative play. The erotic pleasures of infancy predate the symbolic ability to equate one thing with another, to displace endlessly, which after all is the premise of the fantasmaticizing of "the sexual." But the presymbolic life necessarily gives way to the symbolic world in which we are able to identify with actions and figures far beyond

the concrete by making links between distant and distinct entities, to connect ~~far-reaching effects~~. This expansion of the world's impact on the mind is safe and enriching only when the external is sufficiently differentiated from the internal, when there is a usable outside other: nonretaliatory but able to be affected, even hurt. Otherwise, the symbolic capacity produces a threatening world of uncontrollable impingement by far-flung causes, coercive "things," impervious objects, all indistinguishable embodiments of inexpressible, unprocessed material.

If real others actually engage in violent, traumatizing acts, then the symbolic capacity becomes our worst nightmare. Only when real others survive without retaliating, let alone attacking, is there safety in the potential space of symbolization. Only then is there sufficient separation between the object and our reaction to it, and only then does symbolization free us from the concrete. Otherwise the widening of our identifications stops short of full symbolism and remains in the stage of symbolic equations, in which the symbol is the thing symbolized. This leads not to freedom but to the danger that images come alive, symbolic "things," ~~will make us feel without~~ even touching us. In such a world of demonic objects, sexuality can appear to be a devil; it becomes a terrifying force through which, as MacKinnon implies, we can be made to do anything—compelled to submit to destruction or to destroy in order to be rid of dangerous impulses that find no symbolic space for expression.

Not the violence of the images themselves but the closing of the space between the object and its representation in order to compel a reaction makes the pornographic different from full symbolizing.<sup>7</sup> The whole point of pornography is to *make* you

7. What I mean by "full symbolizing" would not, I think, correspond to Lacan's symbolic order alone, but to an integration of the Imaginary with the Symbolic, which recognizes the origins of the latter in the former and allows the transition from one to the other to be a "useful" space.

feel excited (“the devil made me do it”). The reduction of the symbolic to “things” that are identical with the symbols — “sex is violence” — captures both the pornographers and their opponents in the world of frightening objects. Ironically, then, pornographers appeal to a right of free expression that they cannot exercise; their form of revolt against inhibition reaffirms the very lack of freedom for symbolic, erotic play. However, to the extent that the antipornographers deny the distinction between pornography and symbolic play in artistic representation — a distinction that lies not in content but in form — they share the view of a psychic world of coercive forces, in which objects incarnate rather than symbolize power.

The fantasmic turning inward that makes aggression into its counterpart, “the sexual,” can be experienced as benign only in the space of intersubjectivity, whether with a real or an imagined other. But as Segal (1957) herself points out, the line between symbolic equations and symbolization is a continuum, not a boundary. The distinction between fantasmic sexuality and symbolic play of eros is only a conceptual one. For in “real” sexual life, the distinction between the sexual and the erotic is not so easily upheld. In the abstract, we can agree with Freud that Eros is directed outward, toward the other; this places Eros in opposition to the turning inward of the sexual. For the sexual is the turning away from the world and even from one’s own body sensuality, both of which become absorbed in the process of fantasmization. Ever ambiguous, sexuality at once expresses this process and forms the most powerful conduit of erotic desire, desire for the other.

We could consider the distinction between the sexual and Eros as coincident with two hypothetical poles of sexuality, the one aligned with omnipotence, death, and fantasy, the other with recognition, life, and reality. Yet to this we would have to

object that, as Freud says, Eros and death seldom appear separately. Thus, the converse of his conclusion is also true: that what we know about Eros is often what presents itself to us alloyed with its opposite — death, the destructive impulse.

For the idea of an object that can survive destruction also provides that destruction must have its say, that fantasy must endeavor to devour reality in order for the subject to taste the difference between them. And reality must survive the devouring of the unconscious in order to be more than mere repression, and thus to truly include the discovery of an other. Furthermore, the idea of the destruction of the object suggests the indispensable role of aggression or negation in the subject’s effort to reach another. The underlying argument about pornography and violence among feminists is as much about the necessity, the place, of aggression as it is about sexuality. The antipornographers are in combat with aggression, they disavow it, they wish it to belong to men. They are not aware that disowning aggression means never tasting the difference, never giving up omnipotence, remaining in the internal world of “subjective conceived” fantasy objects. Of course, the conscious and unconscious effort is to stay connected to the idealized good object, the good mother, nature. But only a good that survives hate can be experienced as an unthreatened, unprecarious good, and thus not requiring constant defense. For without successful destruction there can be no escape from the realm of idealization and fantasy, and hence no sexuality that is not literal and concrete, in its own way captive to the symbolic equation as much as pornography; no sexuality that includes recognition, and so no confrontation with difference and outsideness that is not violent and traumatic.

In intersubjective terms, aggression can be seen as an affect that becomes linked to one manifestation of a primary direction of the self. Aggression, like sexuality (before it becomes “the sex-

ual”), is a given (and in that sense a *Trieb*), a blind motoric impulse.<sup>8</sup> The two become intertwined in the sexual. But aggression also, perhaps first, participates in destruction or negation: the moment of self-assertion, directed toward the other, the counterpart to recognition. Any act of the subject toward the other that has an impact “negates” the other, breaks into the other’s absolute identity with her- or himself in such a way that the other is no longer exactly what she or he was a moment before. This change in the other constitutes the recognition the subject seeks — it can be sufficient to satisfy the aggressive tension.

This process of negation, acting on the other, and being recognized — Winnicott’s destruction with survival — is initially the opposite of the turning in on the self. Negation, I have argued, is usually directed first toward the other and becomes internalized only when the other cannot receive or transmute or contain, above all recognize, the subject’s act. In erotic exchange, the other *does* receive and recognize the impact of the subject. If “the sexual” arises as the negative of Eros, it is because Eros — the striving toward the other, the process of recognition — cannot succeed alone in containing all aggression; some must turn inward to evolve within the sphere of omnipotence.

Aggression, like sexuality, is thus not necessarily associated

8. This is actually a far more complicated problem because aggression almost never appears as simply peremptory (S. Mitchell 1993) but as reactive or intertwined with complex fantasies. What I mean here is that the common confusion about motoric discharge and aggression is not accidental: there appears to be some tension that has to find discharge through affecting the other, and thus is always aimed at an object. Is it the aim, or the impediment to the aim, that entitles us to call it aggression? In Winnicott’s (1989) reflections on destruction he comments that the “destructive” (fire-air or other) aliveness of the individual is simply a symptom of being alive. He compares aggression to fire, a force like out-breathing, quoting Pliny: “Who can say whether in essence fire is constructive or destructive?” Through Winnicott might we arrive at a more liberal reading of Freud, in which we call this tension aggression but differentiate creative and destructive aims, aims that reach their intersubjective target and aims that do not?

with death or even with “the sexual” but can serve more than one master. As the inextricable counterpoint to recognition, destruction is not the negation of Eros but its complement. Thus Eros cannot, need not, evade aggression, which so often fuels destructiveness. Rather, we might rethink Freud’s remark at the close of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, that “now it is to be expected that the other of the two ‘Heavenly Powers,’ eternal Eros, will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his equally immortal adversary” (p. 145). Because there can be no useful experience of destruction and survival without aggression, the question is *really* how its *immortal* adversary, Eros, can inspire aggression to assume its most creative form, destruction survived. In light of Freud and Bataille, we might say that when it is allied with Eros, destruction helps us to cross the sea of death that separates us. The task of Eros may be, then, to summon back to the “Heavenly Powers” its cast off foe, “the spirit that negates (Der Geist der stets verneint),” who is, as Goethe’s Mephistopheles tells us, “Part of that force which would / Do evil evermore, and yet creates the good (Ein Teil von jener Kraft, / Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute Schafft).”

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