

# FLESH COLORS

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What I am going to try and talk about today, often in the form of questions, stands at the meeting point of the properties of *physical matter* and an elaboration of *sexualized subjective identity* that has still to be thought through and put into practice.

I shall be asking questions with the help of the structure of psychoanalysis. It is definitely in the psychoanalytic context that such issues can best be understood today, given that they do not quite find a home in loving relationships. Often these issues are repressed by problems of social identity, which ignore the fact that the *couple* is the basic social unit. A social thinking that gives no thought to the couple is abstract, cut off from the matter that nourishes it, and perverted by its *abstractness* from addressing the passage from the individual to the race. This passage is eliminated by and within the undifferentiated familial unit that reduces sexual difference to individual and collective reproduction.

So how is a sexualized subjective identity to be constituted, particularly within psychoanalysis?

1. The speed of sound and of light are not at all the same. It appears that psychoanalysis is challenging itself to subordinate the faster of the two to the slower. Light is made to serve sound: everything has to be said, everything has to be passed by sound articulation. Yet Freud insisted that the royal road to the unconscious is the dream, the building of image in which word and text are exceptions.

Since everything has to pass through sound, psychoanalytic practice becomes an exercise in *patience*. If accepted by the patient, the practice is calming, sedative, even soporific, because it is based on the sense of *hearing*. The fantasies, the dreams that are produced in analysis can be partially interpreted as effects of the differences between the speed of light and that of sounds.

These fantasies or dreams are therefore undergone passively, suffered or at least half-suffered. I offer you the hypothesis that they are

produced by the energy of a subject who is trying to regain his balance, at least as far as he can. Then the subject risks sinking down and seeing everything go *gray*. Finally he loses all the detail of his perceptions and the sensory contrasts blur. In place of a vivid sensual universe, where the subject can possibly come into existence in his present and his history, there is a demented language without an I (since the I comes out of the perceptions), a system of arbitrary forms whose content is highly problematic. This state of virtual dementia can be induced by depriving the subject of objective sensation or it may occur when the psychoanalytic code and the analyst substitute for sensation a set of pseudoperceptions that have no objective or subjective boundaries.

This implies not an entry into meaning but an entry into *noise*. Seen this way, analysis is threatened by the subject's loss of sense perceptions, and therefore by delirium, paranoia, weakness. . . . In my view, if the patient runs the risk of turning into an idiot through psychoanalysis, it is as a result of sense deprivation and the spiritual dearth that results from the word's inadequacy vis-à-vis sensation and perception.

There is another point to consider: *hearing is also necessary for balance*. When patients are lying down, they feel no occasion to worry about this: hence they are in some danger of losing the bearings they need for balance. This can lead a patient to take off from reality, to construct an artificial reality, to relapse into theoretical delusions, etc. Such delusion is often—or necessarily?—a persecution mania caused by *sense* deprivation. The patient is induced to lose his roots, his balance, and something of his hearing. Such a loss is reminiscent of the most primeval form of regression and persecution. (In this context, it is quite remarkable the way that Schreber confuses the meaning of certain noises and the sound of certain voices with the moment when he separates from his wife and is fascinated by the discourse of medical specialists.)

Thus, psychoanalysis presents a problem of perceptual modification of a very special kind. In my opinion we also need to see that transference is also the result of temporary perceptual disequilibrium given: 1) that the word, the voice, the sense of hearing, are the vehicles chosen for the analyst-analysand relationship; 2) that the patient is lying down.

If we disregard this perceptual imbalance we risk uprooting the

patient from his or her body and history. This is equivalent to placing the patient in some abstract, mechanical, neutral energy, turning him or her into a robot with a fabricated history. This energy is created in the way psychoanalysis is set up. If the energy is sustained in the transference as (an artificial) relationship between analyst and analysand, then transference can never be resolved. The only economic outcome is either the destruction of one or both of the robots—with one living off the other, perhaps?—or the quest by certain patients for limits: in illness, death, the passage to action, lateral transferences, etc.

2. What positive action can be taken in analysis to cope with the difference in speed of transmission and perception between sounds and light? The answer I offer you today is: *to paint*. In fact we do this unconsciously and preconsciously *as well*, despite Freud, or the analyst.

The point about painting is to *spatialize perception* and *make time simultaneous*, to quote Klee. This is also the point about dreaming. The analyst should direct his or her attention not only to the repetition of former images and their possible interpretation, but also to the subject's ability to paint, to make time simultaneous, to build bridges, establish perspectives between present-past-future. In psychoanalytic therapy it is in my opinion necessarily a question of painting, in this sense. Dreams hint at this and hide it. Which is why dreams are interesting. But the painting must also occur during the session, in the course of every session. In this case, *interpretation* can be defined as the ability to compose along with the patient and to help the patient to paint: to represent his or her perceptions and form them into a perspective in space-time.

If psychoanalytic work and the screening of the unconscious are seen in this way, the analyst must have no abstract and predetermined interpretative paradigm as this may *cut* into the patient's subjectivity. The analyst must help the patient to set up a plan, a framework of simultaneity, a perspective, a depth of field, etc. This also means that the analyst must not *focus* on something too much, unless he or she is sure of doing so in order to create some temporal space. This paradoxical expression highlights a major problem in psychoanalysis. And perhaps in painting too?

Currently, there is considerable emphasis, both in theory and in practice, on the importance of *rhythm*, especially in psychoanalytic

interpretation.<sup>1</sup> Rhythm is important. The rhythm of nature that is often referred to is silent or melodic. Other rhythms are often *noisy*. Consequently they risk destroying or effacing the color properties of matter, of perception, of the dream, of the painting. They also threaten to make light and looking submit to sound and listening, both inside and outside. Perhaps this solution expresses a secret nostalgia for the sounds in the womb. Before our birth, we hear many things, particularly our mother's heartbeat. But when we are born we are born to light and to . . . silence.

If a rhythm is imposed from the outside, if we are forced to attend to sounds from the outside, the colors of matter can be erased. So we need to find a balance between hearing, sight, and touch, between sound and light. This can be done with colors. These are also linked to our genetic heritage, and especially our sexual heritage (chromosoma, color-body).

The fact that color is always fading seems to me one of the sources of repression. Repression comes into effect as a result of breaks in rhythm, distinguishing marks, letters, abstract forms, order and laws that are alien to natural growth.

Obviously, it is not possible to suppress rhythm. The important thing is still the harmony and the melody that rhythm allows us to create. Rhythm must facilitate harmony not destroy it.

So the analyst should help the patient to make time simultaneous and then to come to terms with that projection of tenses into the present. Having advocated projection, the analyst must help to get things into perspective and thereby address the patient's symptoms, including those produced by the therapy. A successful analysis would be the one that successfully restores the balance and the harmony of the perceptual economy. Pathology can often be explained by the fact that certain past events and affects are crystallized in the present of the subject, and their energy is no longer available. These residues must be brought to the patient's perception, they must be made fluid again, put in perspective so that creativity can again work freely. This means, for example, that we need to give back to each sense the objective and subjective speeds of its current perceptions and facilitate harmony between these and the past, present, and future history of the subject.

1. See, for example, Nicolas Abraham's book *Rythmes: de l'oeuvre, de la traduction, et de la psychanalyse*, Paris: Flammarion, 1985.

Analysis can work to free the patient's energy through the creation of language, not only by playing on words or meanings but also building new linguistic structures—by poetry in the etymological sense of that word. The pun is often an expenditure; it is rarely a structure built to stay. The pun can achieve some permanence when it gives form to culturally free energy, when it seeks an etymology that keeps hold of some unrealized potential, when it discovers a new rhythm.

Building, *poiesis*, is a way of changing forms and rhythm and also, more or less explicitly, colors. An important problem in life is when colors are lost in formal abstractness.

3. Now two things are often forgotten in psychoanalytic theory: the voice, with its different qualities (timbre, intensity, pitch) and colors. These two components of human identity differ according to sex. Certain ideologies say this explicitly and relate these criteria of sexual membership to the properties of the universe. In our patriarchal traditions that favor nonfigurative writing these dimensions are often neglected, and theoreticians have virtually forgotten about them although they remain present in art, at least in certain periods. Thus men and women are not dressed in the same colors. The designation of sex by color is always used to identify divine persons, and this surely tells us that gender or sex is an essential element in the definition of the divine. Colors are also used to separate boy babies and girl babies, though the color code changes oddly from culture to culture. While keeping faith with their color and sound properties the sexes nonetheless escape dichotomic oppositions. Voices and colors cannot be reduced to bipolar couples. Obviously there is a potential bipolarity: blue/red, high/deep. . . . But there are many nuances, variants, and scales of values that move uninterruptedly from one extreme to the other. There are even three or four, not two, so-called primary colors: blue, red, yellow, and green. Thus, these colors do not simply obey binary opposition or one of the principles of noncontradiction that control every truth according to our logical systems. Colors do not obey these rules in their expression of the sexual. They explore all the possible passages and returns from one sex to another, and all the mediations between them. This question of the relation to color is made even more subtle by the fact that we inherit the chromosomes of both sexes and that there is a possible conflict between one's sexualized morphology and one's hormones. This is not to be interpreted as any old bisexuality: each sex inherits

an identity exclusive to itself resulting from its genes, chromosomes, and hormones.

As for sounds, the transitions between high and low are even more obvious. These transitions occur almost imperceptibly. At times there is a switch in the vocal traits associated with each of the sexes. The example of teenage boys comes readily to mind. The switch from high to low is quite sudden and indicates an alternation rather than a simultaneity of possible voice pitches. This is far from a unique case. Each sex retains a whole range of sounds whose chords, mediant, and harmonics must constantly be discovered or recovered as a personal balance or as a relation to the other.

4. In analysis as in other fields it is important to find the economy of the correspondances between sounds and colors, colors and light. In this regard, we need to keep in mind the relation of phonemes to color. The articulations of the letters, as they are pronounced and received, do not correspond to the same colors. There is the pitch of the sounds, their volume, but there is also the shape of the letters. Thus, the labials are dark; the darkest of all is the *m*. The dentals are light. Of the vowels, *a* is chromatically the richest and is called the origin of all colors.<sup>2</sup>

This question of the color of phonemes has been raised by certain poets in regard to vowels. As far as consonants are concerned, I know of no poets who have established letter-color correspondences, but some phoneticians and phonologists have done this for all letters, and there are also philosophers who have taken an interest in the question. It seems that this is a matter of cultural and religious choice.

In any case, the vowels are related to the voice, to sound as song, to color, whereas the consonants are related to articulation and writing. Is color then pronounced but not written? On the other hand, color is painted, it can be seen and contemplated. Color is linked to the voice and to the eye, not to writing as code. Cultures that have nonfigurative writing become cultures without painting in the sense of the artistic expression of sense immediacy. These writing cultures are cultures that lack color as fleshly matter.

How does this happen? Because the body is repressed? Because there is no fleshly spirituality? Because forms—including forms of

law—have been imposed upon sense phenomena? The question of flesh seems to be connected to the question of color. Ultimately, perhaps, flesh is diaphanous, as Aristotle tells us, but it is always taking on and giving colors.

Christianity is one of the cultures of painting, especially when it does not deny its common roots with India, Tibet, Persia. All these are cultures where the gods take flesh and where men-gods are mysteriously born of women known as virgins: Christ is one example, Buddha another.

Their art emphasized color, melodious singing, gestures, figurative symbols. Here color is not subordinate to line. In the end, the incarnation of the divine, of man, of woman, *cannot be imaged without color*. Whereas the signs of writing seek to contain and repress blood, painting and colors try to express blood. The shapes taken by meaning have become arbitrary in our cultures. This arbitrariness splits the subject from his or her body. Meaning ought to express the body and the flesh, not cut itself off from them. The *spatial* representation of the body, of desire, of sensibility has a necessary relation to color. How can we set limits and a time frame to flesh? to color? Of course there are contrasts between colors and relationships that constantly move to find a new balance between their qualities by passing from colder to hotter, from higher to lower. These properties are also forever restoring balance and resolving tensions between the male and female genders. Yellow seems to be the point of mediation between colors and the flesh of the sexes: yellow, sometimes changing to gold, and perhaps green, depending on whether the oppositions and complementarities are divided up in triangles or squares.

Time can thus be made simultaneous by couples in tension, colored couples, sound couples, sexualized couples. Space can be framed in the same way.

As far as the sexual economy is concerned, the issues are very complex and interesting, because in the individual there is always the polarity of sex or gender and the polarity of generation. Tension and harmony between the extremes of colors and sounds exist in each sex to the extent that each person belongs to a gender and is engendered as well as an engenderer. These dimensions are not the same for all. The duality of the sexes allows modifications, transmutations, transpositions, so that a relationship can take place.

Thus in every individual there is:

2. See, in this context, Roman Jakobson's book *Child Language, Aphasia and Phonological Universals* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), which includes a very rich bibliography.

- genealogical sedimentation with his or her past, present, and future;
- gender or sex as generative seed;
- gender or sex as morphology and identity.

Thus two memories are in tension:

- genealogical memory, always bisexual;
- individual unisexual memory.

Gender as sex is always a transgression of genealogy and of its colors. Memory is always a memory of each individual history; it is also a genealogical memory.

Cultures have forced us to repress the female genealogies. This means that we have entered into a kind of historical mania made up of:

- forms that are balanced in an artificial game of contradictions (the two poles are contained within sameness);
- resemblances, abstracted from the body instead of expressive of it, that form a system of mimicries that allow me to say that I am like the other sex without in fact there being any correspondence with the same living forms, the same relations to sounds, to colors;
- relations that bear no relation to blood, which is loved-hated because it is not rated by its value: blood is repressed because it is associated with female-maternal genealogies. Blood gives rise to fantasies, to a ceaseless cry for wounds that open up the question of life and identity. In turn this leads to racist extravaganzas between peoples, rivalries between individuals, and of course, conflict between the sexes.

The repression that female genealogies have submitted to also seems to have favored codes, privileged writing and all arbitrary forms that seem capable of conveying meaning, doubling the voice, and exacting its submission. Clearly, in the question of writing as art, we are faced with something more than the arbitrariness of the signs. But this other thing is nonetheless linked to a system that reduces the possibility of expression. Writing has difficulty translating colors, sounds, bodily identity, the chromo-soma. . . . All the civilizations that give priority to nonfigurative writing, arbitrary forms, and formal codes, move away from color and from tonality as qualities of flesh, gender, genealogy. They express these as numbers. Mastery and abstraction of the living being?

5. In this context, we need to investigate psychoanalytic theory and practice as methods that assume that sensoriness, affectivity, sexuality, parental relations, individual and collective history can be translated into words. Psychoanalysis submits the flesh to forms alien to those of the body, to its colors, its sounds, its sense dimensions, and it claims in this way to cure the body. It assumes (or deems) it is possible to produce or reproduce everything in words, at best in the form of a narrative, of stories, histories, novels. Clearly, there are dreams and certain fantasies that are like narrative. But how do we dream together? And does dreaming facilitate sexual practice or evade it? Is dreaming a preparation or a substitution for relations between the sexes?

I believe that the style of expression of sex that is permitted by traditional analysis defers or unhinges sexual relations, particularly in their dimension as sexualized gender.

As a result, the sexual act comes to seem impossible and to conform necessarily with certain imperatives: "Have an orgasm," for example.

If color and sounds were manifest, it seems to me that the sexualized dimension of life would be organized in terms of progressively developing rhythms, open stages of space-time, and thus the command "Thou shalt have an orgasm" would not be needed. Such a command operates because of an absence, a repression, or a censorship in the mode of expression.

Psychoanalysts tend to think of memory as layer upon layer of catastrophes: images, words, movements. They rarely define memory as the place where identity is formed, where each person builds his or her own ground or territory. Their idea of memory is negative, in a way. But, as they proceed to intervene in events they class as pathogenic and secondary, psychoanalysts run the risk of undoing the whole fabric of identity. This danger is all the more real because the analytic method of interpretation uses arbitrary, colorless forms and thus catastrophically interrupts the flow of psychic energy.

6. To end or complete an analysis means, in my opinion, to give the other person back his or her power of imagination, that is to say the possibility of receiving—and giving you—the gift of time and space-time.

This cannot be done without imagination. To remain within the limits of the senses in one's suffering or one's jouissance—both of

them imaginary—is not the same as acceding to the creation of the imagination. The procedures are different. In the first instance, the senses and the imagination risk destroying one another. In the second, access to the imagination preserves sensitivity: the affect finds a haven within and by means of the imagination. To complete an analysis successfully, as in any other affective relationship, requires access to the art of both sides, access to something fully worked out in the imaginary as well as to something specific to the senses. This entails a specific spatio-temporality that creation alone can keep and develop. The imagination produces symptoms, it is one of the causes of the unconscious, or else it creates a body of work and an identity: either one or the other. The imagination forms a seed around which the past—or its past—crystallizes, or else it opens up a future. All this requires there be a present. This present, in my view, is bound up with perception, or perhaps perceptions, and with the act of creating.

Perception is attention to the present as well as the potential for a future. If I can no longer perceive, I am hallucinating or dead. Sometimes I can survive thanks to the economy of the symbol, particularly the monetary symbol, but I am without the matter and the energy of my body, my senses, my sex. This state of deprivation is what we risk in contemporary society, and in psychoanalysis as part of that society.

7. If Freud considered the psychoanalytic cure to be interminable, it is because he thinks and interprets in terms of *analysis*, not discovery or creation. Defined in this way, analytic work, as I see it, seems to occur *outside of time* and to expose the subject to destruction by producing an artificial time frame subordinate to the spoken word and to transference. An exclusively analytic frame of reference stands in the way of psychic discovery, synthesis, and integration. The work of analysis destroys, deconstructs, and allows no room for resynthesis. Synthesis can come only out of the *imagination*, not the faculty of analysing. If the imagination is cathected solely in an effort of analysis, the subject's space-time is destroyed, annihilated, or perverted. It is forced to undergo infinite sections and divisions, sometimes it is sidetracked, but it can no longer live in itself because it lacks a subjective synthetic function. When, with the help of various appropriate techniques, the subject is reduced (pricked, punched, perforated) to an infinite heap of fragments, a supposedly unlimited collection of dots, subjectivity is destroyed, sensitivity and affect

yield before the simple *urge* to know *more*, before a *belief* in knowing more, which is shared by the analyst.

But why is there such a desire to know? Knowledge alone cannot constitute the unity of the subject; in fact it tends rather to splinter the subject, or even force its obedience to some absolute cause. Furthermore, the knowledge we gain from analysis is probably man's weakest resource if it is cut off, on the one hand, from a receptive affect or sensoriness, and, on the other, from the imagination as synthetic faculty. This faculty is disintegrated and threatened with internal and external gregariousness: one + one + one . . . resulting from a limitless scission or dispersion, multiples that have no horizon or point of assembly in the flesh.

8. In this abstractness, if we can actually call it such, analysis loses sight of the sexual dimension, which cannot be equated to an infinitely divisible materiality. That which is sexed is linked to perception, to its specific imaginary creation as well to regeneration, procreation, and more generally, life.

In analysis the subject is often reduced to the passive object of a hypothetical Other. In this way the subject can be cut up into infinite bits with no remainder. Why with no remainder? Because it has isolated itself within the faculty of analysis and abandoned the other faculties: perceiving, imagining, dreaming. If I devote all my energies to a faculty that has no resources behind it—as is the case with the faculty of analysis—I can never find myself in front of anything. I have even destroyed the object that I was.

I feel that subjective liberation and development mandate a method that is still ill defined because we lack an imagination capable of creating the sex, the flesh. To fill that lack, we need to put perception and creation into relation with art, with aesthetic perspectives, forms, colors, and especially with the play of contrasts.

We need to have two in each sex, not one sex divided between two. Perception and creation differ from one gender to the other. When we divide perception and creation between the two genders we impoverish both and destroy the identity of each. This false division ends up by changing human faculties: perception becomes sensation and the imagination becomes an imaginary that corresponds to a *pathos* of the senses.

If certain psychoanalysts appear unaware of the difference between the sexes this is because they place themselves, perhaps unconsciously, within a methodology that is far too narrow, which had

potential at a certain point in history and arose out of certain tendencies at that time. That method augurs ill for the future of the subject in that it has no resources of its own, is not founded within itself, and makes its appearance at perhaps the most impoverished time in the development of the spirit. In this context we need to remember that sexual difference is not to be recognized only from signs or signifiers that have already been coded, which are, in any case, far from unchanging. Sexual difference also corresponds to the possibility of different perceptions and creations.

Strangely enough, one perception that culture has clung to is that man keeps sight, the gaze, the reflection (Narcissus) for himself and allows woman to keep hearing and the echo (Echo). In order to repeat one needs to have first heard. Now, in the East, the ear is considered to be the most sensitive of all the organs, and it is also known as the female organ. Furthermore, some theories put forward the hypothesis that the ear is the place on which is inscribed the movement whereby the fetus in the final months of pregnancy turns itself head down. Could it be that woman, as mother, ceaselessly operates this turnaround?

From the point of view of the relation of colors, I can thus put forward the hypothesis that woman must convert sounds into colors, and man colors into sounds, or light into sounds. Between the two of them the whole range of colors and sounds comes into play. Each of them stands at one end of the range and has to work together with the other to realize the whole harmony, but without leaving hold of this or her genetic identity, which is the condition of life for each as individual as well as the force that attracts each to the other.

9. Hysteria has been and is still the source of energy that has not been coded—the flesh, the seed of analysis. Hysteria stands between woman and mother, women and mothers. It is in tension between them. Hysteria must not be destroyed but allowed access to the imagination and to creativeness. For the hysteric access to such an identity is effected through a sexualized art, a colored and sonorous art, an art whose libidinal resources blossom in duality and reconciliation, within one woman, between mother and wife, and among women. Thanks to such an art, the hysteric should be able to regain her perceptions—her virginity, her gender—and keep hold of them. Creativity is a goal only for someone who gives priority to *making an object*, to anality (?). For the sublimation of genitality—a dimension that is still unknown to us, particularly because it has been

buried beneath the idea that reproduction is our duty as women and the sole way we can achieve our sexuality—artistic creation represents a means, not an end. This is the indispensable road to take not only for psychoanalysis but, more generally, in every relationship, if we are to realize an art of the sexual that respects the colors, the sounds, and the forms proper to each sex.

This imperative solves the dilemma of art for art's sake. If art is a necessary condition for the establishment of a culture of affective relationships, and especially sexual relationships, then art is useful as a place where individual, bodily matter can be transmuted and sublimated. Art is not just an aid to a social body that has already been abstracted from the sexual dimension, though these are the traditional terms of the debate.

Without art, sexuality falls into a natural immediacy that is bound up with reproduction and into infinite particles. We women have either forgotten or we never learned the art of genital sublimation, perhaps because of a historic gap between the culture that corresponds to female genealogies and the culture produced by the social foundations of patriarchy. It may be that the female and male genders have never made cultural contact within that tradition. This is the strongest hypothesis I can advance to explain why this issue of vital importance to the individual and to culture is habitually met with a blind eye and a deaf ear.