

An intersubjectivity theory of perversions

Di Costanzo, S.¹

Abstract

Through intersubjective theory it is possible to define perversions as behaviors characterized by the negation of the subjectivity of the Other. In the paper it is observed that perversions are a mode of affective regulation; especially the perverse individual tries to deny the reality of the Other to avoid the anxiety associated to an intersubjective relationship. According to Jessica Benjamin's intersubjective theory, perversions are a behavioral mode of avoiding intimate development with the Other. In the relations that the perverse establishes there is no mutual recognition of subjectivity. Sexuality is therefore observed from a relational and intersubjective point of view. In the final part, some reflections are proposed on the therapeutic relationship of perverse individuals.

Keywords: Intersubjectivity; Perversions; Jessica Benjamin; Sexuality; Relational Theory.

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¹ ASL Napoli 1 Centro, Napoli, Italy

Corresponding author: Salvatore Di Costanzo, saviodicostanzo@gmail.com

Introduction

In this paper I define perversion as a mode of affective regulation based on the negation of the Other as a subject. In general, I believe that perverse acts are a non-relation in which the individual denies the recognition of the other as different from himself. I consider perversion as a mental functioning in which the individual through his own perverse fantasy objectifies the Other. In this perspective, perverse phenomena go beyond the deviations that sexuality can assume, although the different paraphilias are an excellent example of how the perverse dynamic is expressed. The adopted point of view is from a different Freudian perspective, referring to the Relational theory I agree with Mitchell (1988) on the assumption that sexuality is the vehicle through which the relational dynamics of the individual are staged. That implies the rejection of the concept of drive. As Mitchell has observed, sexuality is always referred to another, both internal and external, for such reasons it is possible to consider as deviant all those sexual acts that tend to exclude the Other from relationship. As Mitchell himself said:

Degradation does not lie, as Freud thought, in the a priori meaning of sexual activity itself; degradation is attributed to sexual activity to minimize the importance of the other (Mitchell, 1988, p. 102).

It is not my intention to say that all forms of perversion are a degradation of the relationship with the Other, that is, that they are the product of a negation of the intersubjective bond. I believe, in agreement with Benjamin and At-

las (2015), that perverse acts are a mode of affective regulation that in many cases is expressed through the annulment of the subjectivity of the Other. Sexuality is an experience of intimacy rooted within an intersubjective development in which the child's parenting figures are actively involved. The sexuality of the infant, discovered by psychoanalysis, matures and is based on the relational-intersubjective exchanges between the child and the caregiver within a relationship of attachment.

Affirming that sexuality is linked to relational and intersubjective phenomena does not mean belittling its biological foundation, but it means proposing an integrated model where the tools made available to man by biology such as sexuality interact with the relational context where they acquire personal meaning and maturity.

As Benjamin (2018) observed, pleasure and psychic pain always arise within an intersubjective relationship, sexual tension is constantly solicited by the Other, the difference between what is regulated and integrated within the relationship is what remains unregulated and dissociated depends on mutual recognition.

Adult's perversions perform the function of regulating the dissociated affect that have not found recognition within the first intersubjective matrix. Although sexuality in general can be considered as an expedient to regulate one's own emotional tensions, from my point of view a sexual act can be defined as perverse to the extent that such regulation implies the non-recognition of the Other, namely its objectification. Within perversions there is no mutual recognition, the perverse subject implements those "degradation" in which the subjectivity of the Other is denied,

putting into effect through sexuality those dynamics of power identified by Benjamin (2018) between doer and done to.

Omnipotence, reality and rejection of the Other

Masud Khan (1979) had already observed how in the perverse fantasies the individual tries to transform the Other into an object able to satisfy his own needs. Referring to Winnicott (1971), Khan argues that for the perverted the Other is never really another person, but it is a transactional object that manipulates according to its own subjective omnipotence.

For Winnicott the distinction between subjective object and real object is a fundamental stage of individual's psychic development. For the author, however, between subjective reality and objective reality there is another form of reality, the transitional one in which the individual recognizes the existence of external objects but does not abandon subjective omnipotence. With these words, Winnicott (1971) describes the transitional area:

I introduced the terms transactional objects and transactional phenomena to define the intermediate area of experience between the thumb and the teddy bear, between oral eroticism (subjective omnipotence) and a true object relationship (Winnicott, 1971, p. 13).

From an intersubjective point of view, this passage from subjective reality to objective reality is fundamental for the recognition of the subjectivity of the Other, to recognize his individuality. As Ghent observed (1990) this process involves a surrender in the presence of the Other, which is accompanied by a

strong anxiety linked to the fear of the loss of the Other and symmetry to the fear of losing oneself

The distinction between subjective object and real object is fundamental in order to understand perversions in an intersubjective perspective. The perverse rejects the objective reality confining himself to a subjective reality where there is no room for the recognition of the Other as a Subject. The same thing also happens on the contrary, in some perverse dynamics it is the individual himself who loses his subjectivity in order to be able to continue a bond with the Other, a bond based on submission.

Returning to Khan's intuitions, perversion acts are a technique of intimacy that is deeply solitary in its nature, in fact even if two people are involved in an intensified instinctual mode, it's essentially the invention of one person, there is no intersubjective relationship. Perversion is inscribed within a rejection of the object relationship itself, the perverse acts to be able to cancel the difference of the Other. The perverse dynamic is thus inscribed within a non-relation, a fictional bond in which the Subject can feel safe, in which his subjective omnipotence can continue to dominate his own inner world. As Khan observed, the perverse phantasy seems to be linked to a complementarity in which the other contributes to the perversion dynamic. In fact, this complementarity is the very essence of sexuality, in which the members of the couple recognizing each other so that there is a shared pleasure, in the perversion's phantasy there is no relationship, there is no mutual recognition. For these reasons pleasure is subordinated only to the perverse, implementing power dynamics based on polarity dominance-submission, which represent

exactly the opposite of what can be called an intersubjective bond.

Sexuality and affective regulation

Individual's sexuality develops and matures within the affective exchanges between the child and their caregivers (Benjamin & Atlas, 2015). Sexuality and intimate relationship are two paths that continuously intersect within the life of an individual, contributing to each other's subjective well-being. In the perverse act a split between sexuality and intimate relationship takes place, the subject acts a sexual behavior that excludes the recognition of the Other and his intimacy. As Beebe and Lachman (2005) observed in the relationship between the child and the caregiver there is a continuous interchange of affective regulation modes based on self-regulation and co-regulation. In the model proposed by the authors the intersubjective dynamic seems to be characterized by a constant oscillation between behaviors that stimulate the proximity of the other and behaviors that instead exclude the presence of the other. Affective self-regulation and co-regulation are two dynamic processes that develop and mature in relation to each other. In a true intersubjective bond, self-regulation does not exclude co-regulation and vice versa, in perverse dynamics instead we see the exclusion of affective co-regulation, as Khan said there can be no object relationship. It is therefore possible to affirm that perversions are a mode of affective regulation based exclusively on self-regulatory behavior in which co-regulation and the consequent recognition of the Other are excluded.

According to Stoller (1985), perversions allow the regulation of dissociated affections due to childhood traumas related mainly to

one's own identity. For the author, perversions are a script in which there is always the intention to humiliate another, such as overturning and triumph over childhood traumas and humiliations. Implicitly in the model of the author, there is the assumption that the perverse behavior does not recognize the Other as a subject but rather as object of their own fantasies of humiliation who represent an affective regulation strategy. Yet Michael Bader (2002) properly considered perversions as a particular mode of affective regulation. Bader's theory - influenced by control master paradigm - states that sexual fantasies are antidotes to one's own pathogenic beliefs that hinder one's ability to establish a true sexual bond. According to the author, such pathogenic beliefs are associated with distressing affective states such as shame, inhibition, guilt, and one's own ruthlessness. Sexual fantasies allow you to regulate such emotional experiences by allowing sexual arousal to turn into effect. For example, according to Bader, sadistic fantasies such as wanting to subdue the other by force are an antidote to one's own childhood guilt-based pathogenic beliefs.

Yet Bader does not clarify the difference between sexual fantasy and perversion, it seems that for the author are synonymous. He states:

Arguing that a certain degree of objectification is necessary for maximum sexual arousal, and that the ability to use our real or imaginary partner aggressively is necessary to overcome inhibitions, does not mean that objectification or selfishness are ideal in sex. In the best cases, sexual pleasure is deeply interconnected with our partner's sensitivity to feelings [...] in other words, there must be a tension between selfishness and nurturing, between using and satisfying each other. If one of the poles is absent, there may be problems. [...] Sex would even-

tually degenerate into an empty and mechanical act - a masturbation with someone who is there with us (Bader, 2002, p.16).

It seems that for Bader the sexual act is characterized by a continuous dialectic between objectification of the Other and recognition of his subjectivity to satisfy him, in other words a mutual recognition. It is therefore possible to assume that the sexual fantasy turns into perversion just when this tension is lacking and the Other assumes only the role of the object of their sexual fantasy. Sexual fantasy contributes to sexual arousal without compromising mutual recognition, indeed it is precisely the mutual recognition that allows both partners to satisfy each other's fantasies, thus contributing to the establishment of a satisfactory sexual relationship.

Once again, the perverse dynamic is inscribed within a non-relationship in which there is no possibility for any intersubjective bond. The complementarity that Khan describes is an essential element of sexuality based on mutual recognition and on the continuous oscillation between self-regulation and affective co-regulation, Perverse complementarity, on the other hand, is characterized by the absence of mutual recognition, where we see exclusively an objectification of the Other, a masturbatory act that alienates the Other, which nullifies his different being.

Perversion as Denial of the Other as Subject

Freud refers to the term perversion for the first time in the *Three essays on sexual theory* (Freud, 1905), linking the concept of perversion to the development of libido. According to Freud, the perversions are:

Anatomical prevarications of regions of the body destined to sexual union, or delays in intermediate relations with the sexual object that normally must be rapidly surpassed towards the way that leads to the final sexual goal (Freud, 1905, p. 25-26).

According to the father of psychoanalysis, perversion is the manifestation of the rejection of eviction, the perverse acts the defensive mechanism of denial for avoid the castration's anxiety, refusing to recognize the difference of the sexes. This denial is followed by a split of the Ego, where a part recognizes reality, and a part rejects it to avoid anxiety. What is avoided is castration, that is, a non-recognition of the woman as lacking the phallus.

In his 1927 essay on fetishism, Freud explains the denial in perversions:

In fetishism, therefore, things went like this: the boy refused to lose cognition of a given of his perception, that attesting that the woman does not possess the penis. No, this cannot be true since, if the woman is emasculated, it means that he himself is threatened in his own possession of the penis, something against which he rebels against that part of his narcissism that nature has previously assigned to that certain organ (Freud, 1927, p. 386).

Freud speaks of a narcissism that hinders the recognition of the absence of the penis in the mother, inasmuch recognizing this fact of reality would mean recognizing the existence of castration. In relational terms, on the other hand, the perverse by not recognizing the subjectivity of the other can avoid the anxiety that characterizes an authentically intersubjective relationship, that is, the fact that the other can move away and not always be

present. In the Freudian perspective, the perverse avoids castration's anxiety, while in a relational perspective the perverse avoids the anxiety linked to the recognition of the other as different from himself. With the introduction of the death drive, perversions begin to be associated with the primary aggressiveness inherent in the human being, even if Freud will never take apart the concept of denial as a founding element of perversion.

From an intersubjective point of view, the perverse dynamic is not based on the denial of the difference between the sexes, but on the denial of the existence of another subjectivity, which is different from me. What the perverse does not want to recognize is *the difference of the Other*, the need to recognize the *Other as a subject who can decide whether or not to satisfy his needs*. Freud had recognized the mechanism underlying the perverse dynamic, that is, the denial of a traumatic reality, but associated it rigidly with the theory of libido development.

Within the modern relational and intersubjective theory, which does not give a centrality to libido-sexual development, the traumatic reality that the perverse wants to avoid with denial is the recognition that the Other is a Subject, a different being that can be a source of pleasure but also a source of frustration. What the perverse wants to avoid is the frustration inherent in any intersubjective bond, in doing so the perverse also renounces the possibility of entering into an intimate contact with the Other, an intimate contact that presupposes mutual recognition.

From this point of view, the fetish does not represent as in Freudian theory the penis of the mother who has not been castrated; rather, it is a way through which it is possible to access sexual arousal without having to establish an

intimate relationship with the other, turning the other person into a mere fetish object. Perversion represents the negative side of intersubjectivity, which is the absence of the relation.

The perverse act always stages a dynamic in which there is an *active subject acting and a passive object undergoing* (Benjamin, 2018). All the different paraphilias represent a script in which the dynamic of power based on the active-passive duality is staged. For example, in exhibitionism, the exhibitionist actively condemns the other to a passive role of spectator of his exhibitionist tendencies, while in contrast in voyeurism, the voyeur becomes a passive spectator of the exhibitionist tendencies of others. According to Benjamin, the basis of an intersubjective bond is mutual recognition that allows one to recognize and experience one's own and other subjectivity. However, when there is no mutual recognition, according to the author one slips into complementary dynamics in which one's own subjectivity or that of other is denied. For Benjamin, the concept of complementary relationships aims to describe those dynamics "*doer and done to*" that generally recur in the therapeutic impasses. It is clear that this type of complementary dynamic also characterizes perversions. For the author, the essence of complementary relationships lies in the fact that there seem to be only two choices:

It is as if the essence of complementary relationships - relationships made of duality - resides in the fact that there seem to be only two choices: to submit or resist the pretense of the other (Benjamin, 2018, p.36).

For Benjamin an intersubjective relationship is instead characterized by a participation that is two-way and that becomes a vivid experience, something that we can understand and use to feel less powerless, in the words of the author:

We surrender to the principle of mutual influence in interaction, which makes it possible both to act responsibly and to recognize freely [...] It makes room for the Third, allowing us to negotiate differences and establish a bond (2018, p. 36).

Ghent (1990) described the process by which the subject becomes the object of the Other in a perverse dynamic. According to the author submission is the perverse drift of surrender, surrender to the Other means becoming aware of themselves while you are in the presence of another person. Submission does not allow the implementation of mutual recognition, it does not allow the establishment of an intimate relationship characterized by sensual and affective aspects. The establishment of a complementary dynamic allows the perverse not to recognize the Other as a different subject, but to give him a pre-established role that transforms him into the object of his own fantasy. In this way, paradoxically, the perverse also ensures that the Other can always be there, not as a subject but as an object. What the perverse cannot tolerate is the anxiety of loss of the Other, since, as Ghent (1990) observed, the intersubjective bond is characterized by the surrender to the Other, an elaboration of the fact that the Other may not always be available. The transition described by Winnicott from subjective object to real object can give rise to traumatic affections linked to a sense of abandonment of one's own omnipotence, which if

not properly regulated by the mother-child relationship, can be separated and dissociated. The perverse uses denial to avoid contact with his Self state, linked to the trauma of recognizing the Other as being different. The denial of the intersubjective relationship is a mode of affective regulation that the perverse puts in place to regulate his own dissociated internal states linked to the anxiety of the loss of the Other. In order not to lose the relational ties, the perverse creates a series of relationships in which the others are treated as objects. The perverse does not totally reject the relationship but exclusively its intersubjective dimension.

Reification and perversion

The theoretical speculation proposed in the previous paragraph can be expanded by examining Axel Honneth's (2012) insights into the concept of *reification*. From this point of view, we can define perversion as an act of reification of the Other. Through the reification of one's own image through the use of social media and the internet, the theory described here on perverse dynamics can be used for a critique of modern society that is taking on more and more perverse characteristics, where subjectivity makes room for reification, that is, the objectification of the Self and the Other.

Honneth, inspired by Hegelian recognition theory and Winnicott theory, defines reification as a social process in which the intersubjective space is canceled by the objectification process. Martha Nussbaum (Solinas, 2015) defines objectification as an extreme form of instrumentalization of other people, it's an ethical violation, a behavior that violates humanizing social principles where one subject

treats the other not in accordance with his human characteristics but as an object devoid of life and sensitivity, namely as "things" or as "goods".

The current society dictated by the laws of liberalism and capitalism risks in its perverse drift to equate human relations with simple commodities to be exchanged within a free space without laws (Salvatore et al, 2021; De Luca Picione & Lozzi, 2021).

Honneth, as a good heir of the Frankfurt school, observes that the term reification so used by Nussbaum indicates a violation of social ethics inscribed in an intersubjectivity ethic. The perverse in his act of reification violates intersubjective social ethics, recognizing in the Other, not a Subject, but an Object devoid of sensitivity and life.

As Khan observed, the perverse is able to create a complementary relationship dominated by an enjoyment that denies the subjectivity of the Other by transforming him into an insensitive and deadly object. Sexuality then becomes perverse when the denial of the Other leads to its reification, when through the process of objectification the Other becomes an object without life, so the perversion becomes a complementary relationship in which only one of the two can survive, as Benjamin claims.

To understand the importance of Honneth's thinking in the perverse drift of sexuality, one must understand the general scope of his theory. According to Honneth, following the young Hegel, it is through mutual recognition that individual identity is born, developed and consolidated (Solinas, 2015). Since his birth the subject is inserted within a mirror relationship, he identifies some traits of himself when these same traits are recognized as such by an external figure, by another subject. But recognition must be reciprocal, the subject must

recognize the other external as the one who is able to recognize. Honneth thus states:

The theoretical assumption according to which the development of the personal identity of a subject is in principle connected with the presupposition of certain modes of recognition by others (Honneth, 1992, p. 49).

According to Hegel's theory, the subject, to recognize himself, is obliged to recognize his partner: *to define myself I am obliged to recognize the other as a person able to recognize me*, the recognition is always mutual. In this case, the concept of epistemic trust as described by Bateman and Fonagy (2019) becomes useful. For these authors the concept of epistemic trust refers to openness by the subject to learning from the social environment, that is to the ability to recognize in the other the role of the one who is able to recognize.

Honneth notes that in the process of mutual recognition the individual is forced to mediate between autonomy and dependence. For the author, following the theoretical intuitions of Winnicott (1971), mutual recognition, and therefore the entry into an intersubjective dimension, implies the partial abandonment of infantile omnipotence. Self-consciousness implies acceptance of the disillusionment of being able to create the world through one's own omnipotence, mutual recognition is therefore a struggle between one's own infantile omnipotence, which makes the other object of my desire and acceptance of another subject beyond my control. As Benjamin also observed, intersubjectivity is therefore a dialectical dimension that must always be conquered.

Reification, in human relations, is the collapse of intersubjective tension, in which

the omnipotence of the subject leaves no room for the Other as a subject. As noted above, perversion can be identified as a mode of self-regulation, a mode that excludes the Other, giving up its independence. The perverse thus resolves the intersubjective tension transforming the Other as the object of his own sexual fantasy. The inability to establish a relationship characterized by mutual recognition is the very essence of perversion, in which the individual can show his own infantile omnipotence without worrying about any limit imposed by the other subject.

In other words, perversion is the renunciation to enter into intimacy with the other subject, a renunciation to enter inter-objectively in contact with the Other. It is a difficulty in managing the anxiety linked to the loss of one's own subjective omnipotence. Intersubjective tension always conveys the acceptance and management of the anxiety inherent the relationship. By renouncing the establishment of an intimate bond, the perverse escapes from the anxiety linked to recognizing the Other as a subject.

Keeping the other in mind. Intimacy and mentalization in perversions

The intersubjective dimension implies the need to keep the other's mind in mind. The ability to keep the other person in mind, which Bateman and Fonagy (2019) call mentalization, seems to be inhibited in perverse phenomena. The objectification process that characterizes the mode of relation of the perverse can be implemented only through an inhibition of mentalization.

As Mitchell (1988) observed, sexual perversions are attempts made by one individual to defend himself from entering into intimacy with the Other. Establishing an intimate bond

involves the acceptance of the subjectivity of the Other, involves the development of reflective abilities that allow us to be in tune with the other person. An intimate bond needs mutual recognition, a constant tension between individuality and relationality.

The inhibition of the mentalization capacity allows the perverse subject to transform the Other as an object, an inanimate thing, manifestation of a devitalizing relationship in which intimacy vanishes. Keeping the Other in mind also means having to recognize that the Other has a mind of his own, separate from our projections, from our omnipotent illusions. For the perverse, to refuse the subjectivity of the Other also means to refuse the anxiety linked to the absence of the Other, to the danger that the other person may abandon us, may decide not to love us. The perverse thus shows off his own individuality, focusing exclusively on the self-regulatory capacity of affective experiences. In the literature, few authors have written articles on the relationship between deficits in mentalization and perversions, the only observations that have been made relate to the sadistic traits of antisocial personalities. Bateman and Fonagy (2019) observed that in antisocial personality disorders (ASPD) one often observes an ability to read the cognitive aspects of the inner states of others, to the point of making inadequate use of this capacity at the service of the Self to manipulate others. Personalities with ASPD are very good at twisting reality. This manipulative use of mentalization is similar to Khan's ability to manipulate the other in his sexual fantasies.

In antisocial and perverse personalities, the goal of mentalizing others is not intended to facilitate an intimate relationship with each other, but on the contrary to exploit it for their

own benefit. This manipulative use of mentalization does not convey the recognition of the subjectivity of the Other. The loss of the ability to mentalize makes possible the use of the Other to satisfy their needs, the other person is for the perverse nothing more than a body.

Bateman and Fonagy (2019) identified a specific deficit in mentalization: *destructively improper pseudomentalization*. This primitive mode of mentalization manifests itself when there is a negation of objective reality that is attentive to the subjective experience of the other. This type of pseudomentalization is an abuse of mentalization and is intended to deny the subjectivity of the Other. This form of pseudomentalization seems to characterize the perverse personalities and their inability to be in an intersubjective relationship.

The misuse of mentalization allows the perverse individual to be able to deny the reality of the Other and submit him to his own sexual fantasy, focusing the relationship exclusively on the Self. The presence of deficits in the processes of mentalization in the perverse individual is at the basis of the denial of the Other, mutual recognition and the possibility of establishing intimate relationships.

The mode of being of the perverse

At this point, how can we define the existence of the perverse? How can we define the “*being in the world*” of the perverse? What is his presence? The perverse interfaces with the world through a denial of the intersubjective relationship with the Other, a rejection that puts him in a position of apparent tranquility. In fact often a pervert arrives in ther-

apy as a result of symptoms that seem apparently disconnected from his perverse fantasies. The ego-you of the relation in the perversions is transformed into a hypertrophic ego distant from the Other, distant in some ways even from itself since in some perversions it is the individual himself to objectify himself under the dominion of the Other denying his own subjectivity, in a process of surrender that assumes the connotations of a real submission. The presence of the perverse is linked to a happy isolation from the world, isolation that allows the individual to take refuge in an existential place, the perverse one, where painful emotions have no effect on the individual’s psychic stability.

Isolation can also involve one’s own Self, since the perverse act allows the dissociation of the painful affective nucleus of the subject, living in an inauthentic condition, far from one’s own affective experiences. This is the condemnation of the perverse to be excluded not only from the world populated by Others with whom to enter into a relationship, but also to be extraneous to himself in the act of dissociating his own emotional core.

The only way that the perverse has to manifest his own emotional core is through the perverse dynamic characterized, from the Relational theory, by the *doer and done to relation*. As it is conceptualized by Benjamin (2018), a mode of being that excludes the intersubjective relationship and binds the perverse subject to an objectification of his own Self or the Other that excludes any form of intimate relationship, an essential element of a genuine sexuality. The mode of being-in-the world of the perverse shows us his difficulty in entering into intimacy with the Other, a difficulty that makes it difficult to establish an authentic bond. As Mitchell (1988) observes, sexual

fantasies take on the task of intensifying the intimate bond with the Other, and the author himself observes that in the perverse developments of sexuality, intimacy is excluded. The inability of the perverse individual to establish an intimate relationship with the Other is also manifested within the therapeutic relationship. In fact, within the therapeutic setting the perverse tends to transform the relationship with the therapist in a stage where he plays his own perverse dynamic that allows the latter to defuse the possibility that the therapeutic relationship becomes intimate. The staging of the perverse act within the therapeutic relationship is not linked to the need to satisfy one's own drive through the therapist, but is the only mode of being that the perverse individual knows to get in touch with the Other, but above all with himself, with his own emotional core. The denial of intimacy is what allows the perverse subject to control his own disrupted emotional experiences that could take over in the event that the therapeutic relationship becomes intimate. The denial of the intimate bond as a mode of being-in-the world of the perverse haven't the only purpose of denying the subjectivity of the Other, but it also aims to regulate the dissociated affective states that in an intimate relationship would take over by plunging the perverse individual into a destabilizing anxiety.

Conclusions

The impossibility to access an intersubjective dimension represents for the perverse a defense against the anxiety caused by the recognition of the other as an autonomous individual and not always available. The perverse cannot renounce his own infantile omnipotence, accepting that the Other has his

own subjectivity, his own mind, is too painful.

Freud had already identified that perversion is a question linked exclusively to the denial of a difference. In the drive theory, this denial is linked to the difference of the sexes; in the intersubjective vision, the denial is linked to the negation of the subjectivity of the Other.

The intersubjective dimension requires the subject to be able to tolerate that the Other may decide to be or not to be, a basic ambiguity that characterizes human relationships. The process of mutual recognition allows us to resolve this ambiguity, recognizing to every subject of the relationship needs, desires and emotions to share, to live together. The perverse rejects this ambiguity, cannot tolerate a world in which the Other is mentally separated from his own fantasies, from his own projections. Perversion places at the center of its own mystery a basic incapacity: to be a Subject among many Subjects, to recognize Otherness. The perverse, through the use of a manipulative mentalization, does nothing but submit the Other to his own omnipotent fantasy, a way that he has to be able to overturn the possible traumas suffered during childhood. This closure to the Other can be the response to early relational trauma, a response that condemns the perverse to not being able to develop intimate ties as Mitchell observed. This impossibility of developing intimate ties does not allow the perverse individual to develop authentic emotional ties, accumulating an inner malaise, which, however, the individual turns out to be disconnected from his own perverse dimension. In fact, perverse personalities often come to analysis for depressive or anxiety problems that are apparently far from the perverse dimension of personality.

The perverse not only denies the subjectivity of the Other, but, through a real manipulative act he objectifies it, he makes the Other object of its own omnipotence. The objectification process, made possible by an improper use of mentalization, is the central core of perversion, since it allows the Other to be kept at a distance and to deny its autonomy and independence. The objectification process also represents a real affective regulation strategy, since it allows to regulate the anxiety associated with the possibility of interactively relating.

The relational dynamics of perversion are also staged with the analyst during psychotherapy. The perverse, through the objectification process, places the analyst in the passive role of spectator of their sexual fantasies. In doing so, the perverse denies the subjectivity of the analyst, bypassing a central element of psychotherapy: the fact that it is based on a relationship. In the treatment of perversions, the very establishment of a relationship, characterized in a dialogical sense by an *I* that dialogues with a *You*, is not possible, is eliminated *a priori* through the manipulative gesture that the perverse puts into action. Thus the analyst finds himself stuck having to play a role well defined by the perverse dynamic, a role that places him passive spectator of sexual fantasies, or in the worst cases places him to act a role complementary to the perverse dynamics. In the treatment of perversions, as well as in the treatment of serious psychopathological frameworks, the analyst's act of recovering his own subjectivity is the essential element if one wants to begin to give life to a process of change. This approach to treatment, already exemplified in the writings of Benjamin, characterizes the intersubjective approach in general, but finds its natural feasibility in perversions. In fact, the perverse

must learn to have to relate to an Other, to have to accept the subjectivity of the analyst, although this creates a strong anxiety. Since perversion is a clinical condition characterized by the impossibility of an intimate relationship, psychotherapy will have already been successful if the analyst will be able to involve the patient within an intimate exchange with the Other. If this does not happen the analyst remains trapped in sexual fantasies that leave no room for mutual recognition. In doing that, it is inevitable that initially the analyst, through enactment, becomes a protagonist of the perverse world brought by the patient. Only through the recovery of his own subjective dimension, the analyst will be able to come out of the objectification acted by the patient.

Therefore, through the development of an intersubjective relationship in analysis, not only the analyst will be able to regain his own subjectivity, but even the patient may arrive to discover his own subjectivity. This path implies abandoning the role of perverse adopted to avoid the anxiety linked to the awareness of the freedom of the Other, of his inability to submit to his own omnipotent fantasies.

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