



The «mystery of the speaking body»

Il «mistero del corpo parlante»

Le «mystère du corps parlant»

O «mistério do corpo falante»

El «misterio del cuerpo hablante»

The body: consistency of the *speakingbeing*

Psychoanalysis has always dealt with the body; from its beginnings, the symptom ingrained in the body offered by hysterics led Freud to consider its truth value. Through the study of the hysterical conversion, Freud established the foundations of psychoanalysis, by then building up the theory of the drives, in an attempt to give an account of the excess of excitation in the body and the search for its satisfaction by means of the relation with the object, which insists beyond what is obtained by the satisfaction of the need. Although Freud thought that the drive is essential and the motor of the individual's psyche, it always presented to him a mysterious and unyielding side. He wrote in 1920: 'The drives are the most important but also the most obscure component of psychoanalytic theory'¹. The fact of the drive's insufficiency to find the wished for satisfaction—as the object never fills in the emptiness generated by the lack of satisfaction— provides an account, already in Freud's work, of the status of the human being's original loss of *jouissance* as impossible to be recovered.

Lacan takes up Freud's theory of the drives in its foundations; but he contributes significant differences: in the first place, the articulation between the drives and language, which introduces a fundamental rupture between what in the human being partakes of the animal world —of the living— and the human as speaking being. Lacan's thesis that the signifier enters the body via the Other's demand and the drive constitutes for a long period the axis of his teaching. In *Radiophonie* he defends this thesis and affirms that the symbolic, defined as body, is the first body, which when it is incorporated makes the second body.²

But if we return to the first theories that concern the body in Lacan's teaching, we must consider the theory of the mirror stage of 1949, where he presents the thesis that the body is determined by its image — a thesis that appeared very early in his teaching and that he never abandoned entirely, although he introduced some important qualifications later. At that time the perception of the body image, operating as a Gestalt, is responsible for the cohesion of the body in the face of the prematuration of birth specific to the human being. The articulation of the image with the organism induces a feeling of unification of the body, tied up with the baby's experience of jubilation, which we can understand as *jouissance*. The prematuration of the human being is the basis of an emptiness, a lack, that the image attempts to fill in.

In his Seminar *Encore*, Lacan returns to the question of the body as a result of his developments on the real, and links it to *jouissance*. He introduces the notion of the body as an 'enjoying substance', and refers to the living as the primary condition of *jouissance*, and to the body as its support.³ This *jouissance* is the real located outside the symbolic, it *ex-sists* in relation to the symbolic, it is not completely absorbed by it, and constitutes 'the mystery of the speaking body'⁴. As a consequence, the subject, subject of the unconscious, constituted by the signifier, gives way to the speaking-being, the speaking individual in his particular being of *jouissance*, subject of the enjoying body, which implies the presence of the body as it is affected by *jouissance*. In 1975, in *Le Sinthome*, Lacan considers the body again, and states that it is the only consistency of the *speaking-beings*⁵; he defines it as the support of the imaginary, and underlines that the fact of its presence, its location in space, is one of the qualities of consistency: 'The body does not evaporate, and in this sense it is consistent'⁶.

How are we to understand these statements after his developments on the body and *jouissance* of 1972? It seems that Lacan emphasizes once again the imaginary of the body. Yet towards the end of his teaching, when Lacan works on the question of the Borromean knot—in which each of the three registers acquires autonomy in relation to the other two, and the symbolic loses its pre-eminence over the imaginary and the real—the imaginary does not refer only to the image; the nucleus of the imaginary is consistency. He employs the term *skin* to indicate that what is at stake concerns the surface, but in the sense of the surface of a bag: the skin as a bag that envelops, that contains in its interior the body organs in a state of cohesion. The body is no longer only the image; the imaginary implies *jouissance*, the real.

We read in the fourth chapter of *Sinthome*: «The real is based on the fact that it does not have any sense, that it excludes sense, or more precisely, that it remains as a consequence of being excluded from sense. [...] The form that is most deprived of sense of which is nevertheless imagined is consistency.»⁷

The real, *jouissance*, which is outside sense, but not outside the body, is the consistency of the speaking-being. The body *qua* enjoying substance, the place of *jouissance* and the place for enjoying, is the support of the speaking-being; it is the condition of the real unconscious.

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Translated by Leonardo Rodríguez

¹ Freud, S. (1920g), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, SE 18.

² Lacan, J. (1970), *Radiophonie*, in *Autres écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 2001.

³ Lacan, J. (1998), *The Seminar*, Book XX, *Encore*, 1972-1973, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*. New York & London, Norton.

⁴ Lacan, J. *Ibid.*

⁵ Lacan, J. (2004), *Le Séminaire*, Livre XXIII, *Le Sinthome*, 1975-1976, Paris, Seuil.

⁶ Lacan, J. *Ibid.*

⁷ Lacan, J. *Ibid.*