

# TREATMENTS OF THE BODY IN OUR TIMES AND IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

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## **Every body is political**

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Psychoanalytic practice is not a bodily technique. However, the analytic scene includes bodies. In the plural: the body of the one who is analysed [him/herself], and that of the one who holds the place of the analyst.

These are the bodies that psychoanalysis puts on stage from the Freudian discovery that there are bodies that know nothing of anatomy. They are those that, in turn, are unknown to medicine.

From that moment on this implies revealing and establishing a politics of bodies, and the inclusion of the bodies as facts of language – that is, as political facts. Each body is counted one by one, but the body is neither one nor alone. This is because each body extends in several dimensions.

For Freud, the body is produced in the fragmented and dancing play of the movements of the drives. There it finds rhythm, tension, relaxation. Pleasure, unpleasure and the margin for a beyond the pleasure principle. There is body in the symptom – also in anxiety – where Freud knew how to read modes of satisfaction. There is body from the act that engenders narcissism and its ego. The majesty of the child, ideal of ideals, repeating the regal dreams of his progenitors.

There are bodies in Lacan: the one he risks apprehending, from what his psychotics teach him, in the foundational mirror; the one that conjugates the image of the other with the Other that sustains and assents.

That Other which, Lacan will say, is the body: place of the mark, pure presence of the animal body worked by the inscription that cuts, scans, punctuates. The body as a writing surface.

There is body in Lacan when he affirms that “there is no jouissance that is not of the body” and postulates it as “a new principle”(1). He thus unfolds a dialectic in which the body, jouissance, the subject and the fallen object, shard of the body, are intertwined: in the disjunct joints between body and jouissance, the body and the subject mutually segregate and articulate themselves without matching each other.

Lacan goes on to weave, starting from the Freudian body, that which, in the always traumatic clash between the living and language, emerges as a life invested by language. A body sustained by the “cut that presides over its dismantling” as well as a vivid image that strives to sustain an eternity of photography that the unexpectedness of symptomatic faintness disproves at every step. “Corporealized jouissance by the signifier” (2): another mode of dance.

We can postulate from this that there are two automatic “currents”: language and jouissance. “Machines” that, in spite of everything, are not homeostatic: they do not know how to keep an equilibrium, or even aim at it. They move in the sea of non-proportion, of misalignment and misunderstanding.

These two machines corner each other in their disproportion, each ruining the mechanics of the other: language, by engendering a jouissance that will be hopelessly foreign to it; jouissance, by finding its limit in the rejection of language.

The only possible treatment that mortifies it without pretending to abolish it – that is, without increasing it – derives from this misencounter.

Because jouissance requires a treatment. Otherwise, as Lacan teaches with his myth of the lamella, it remains as an irrepressible pure instinct of life, therefore deadly. Jouissance left to its own devices is incompatible with life, it destroys it.

The treatment of jouissance can only be by that which engenders it and at the same time puts a stop to it: the signifier. And its law: the misunderstanding.

For there is no treatment of jouissance by understanding; nor by discipline. Those techniques have existed since the dawn of time, failing over and over again but persisting in moral and religious ideals in all times and latitudes, under the most diverse garb that nevertheless poorly conceal the impossibility of “limiting jouissance”. Because the more it is limited, the more it spreads – generating the jouissance of limiting jouissance, and so on.

This is a form of politics over bodies, the one that sustains, in our days, the capitalist system and the discourse that sustains it. It is also the one that seeks to dominate through the “imperialism of biology”, to use a successful expression of Colette Soler.

This is the body that the capitalist discourse sustains as a machine producing construction or destruction (from the modern worker to the modern soldier there is less and less distance); or a machine that consumes jouissances that promise to be eternal and universal. A utilitarian machine that state policies are in charge of stripping to keep “healthy” until the last drop of blood.

Analysis finds and proposes a treatment of symptomatic jouissance by means of language, insofar as the function of the analyst makes room for a dimension of language that escapes, even for a short time, the empire of the signified: operating according to the law of the signifier that operates with misunderstanding, protecting a signifier that does not mean

anything and that allows sense to pass through as direction and movement. This implies a different politics of the body, based on the recognition that every body is political.

The Freudian gesture and the Lacanian efforts of formalization oppose to the utilitarian machine (close to the “naked life” proposed by G. Agamben) the manifest of the symptom and the treatment by the word in transference. This means that the symptom carries a truth that engenders a field of jouissance that does not admit bounding but treatment, that does not demand explanation but unfolding, that does not aspire to an idiotized well-being but to the interpretation that can cut out a desirable cause.

Bodies that come to our consultations, even when these are given through screens or talking microphones; bodies that have often been treated with violence by being ignored as bodies and only taken as pieces of flesh; bodies that accompany the worst subjective catastrophes. For if the body is taken as mere flesh, harm is imminent – since, following the lesson of Antigone, a body, even that of a dead person, is not carrion and requires the treatment it deserves. Not to give it the treatment it deserves is a fault that cannot be endured.

Every body is political because something in the body resists even when the subject has been subdued and its word obturated. It is a political body because it supports that which invests us so that we are not reduced to naked lives condemned to sacrifice.

Psychoanalysis, its practice, its artifact, is to give the body of the symptom the dignified treatment that makes room for mourning and desire. To sustain this policy may go against the laws of the city. That makes our ethics and our politics.

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Translated by Leonardo S. Rodríguez

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1 Lacan, J. (1966-1967) *The Seminar, Book XIV, The logic of fantasy*. Unpublished transcript.

2 Lacan, J. (1998 [1975]) *The Seminar, Book XX, Encore, 1972-1973*. New York and London, Norton, p. 23.