The speaking body and it drives in the 21st century

Presentation of the first lesson of the seminar “Speaking LALangue of the Body” by Éric Laurent

Pierre-Gilles Guéguen

Psychoanalysis, since its invention by Freud, and thanks to Anna O., has been a therapy by speech, even if the familiar expression that Anna O. gave it (Chimney Sweeping), played on an erotic equivocation.

In any event, and despite the unfortunate attempts by Wilhelm Reich, the practice continued and still continues to exclude the direct treatment of the body. The bodies are present (we never say enough how much this is an indispensable condition), but without contact. The relation to the Other, that of the analytic treatment, categorically introduces between the analysand and the analyst, language as support of speech which infallibly turns around sexuality and the failure of the attempt by the subject who complains of his symptom, to find a support of his being in the sexual relationship. All in all, psychoanalysis only speaks of bodies, even if, and this is what makes it a bit suspicious to medicine, it does not cure them through physical intervention.

Post-Freudians thought about summarising the process of psychoanalysis and the relative silence of the analyst through the simple trilogy of aggression, frustration, regression. By this, they reduced to phrases in a manual for students in a rush, the assiduous research of Freud’s with regard to what he expected of the effectuation of symbolic castration through the process of speech, and his hopes of curing neurotic symptoms.

For Freud, who was a doctor after all, had to abandon the idea of intervening on the body (electro-therapy), or on thought (hypnosis), even though he constantly listened to his patients talking about their bodies and their loves and their sexuality. The ‘Three Essays on Sexuality’ are in this regard very telling. Freud treats nothing but the use of bodies and their jouissance there.
Everyone has the two major texts in mind where he gives clues on the body in the clinic. ‘On Narcissism’ in 1914, followed by ‘Instincts and their Vicissitudes’, 1915, not to forget the texts on the death-drive after the turning point of the 1920s. The drive as concept, the silent drive, the drive as conveyor of death, drive jouissance of the subject - but the subject amid culture and the atrocious wars at the beginning of the 20th century - are so many declensions, so many indicators of the insistence of the body in the Freudian doctrine.

Lacan, through the image and re-reading Freud, foregrounded again the concern of the body in his article on the Mirror Stage. He showed how the body is given to us by the unifying image that is accompanied by a symbolic acquiescence of the Other. In this way, the doctrine of the supremacy of the symbolic over the imaginary, the latter supposed illusory, is introduced in the psychoanalytic clinic. The clinic of the fragmented body is the common thread for Lacan’s interrogation, without him yet being able to give a satisfying response. He sees very well however, from the first seminars, that the ego, far from being unifying, is only an effect of alienation from the other, and that it is the drive that the psychoanalyst in his clinic has to do with. Lacan has to put into question again the Freudian theory of primary narcissism, without discarding it completely. After having established in Seminar VI that desire, as desire of the Other, is charged with ‘perverse’ libido, contrary to what he said before, he advances in Seminar VII, no doubt as a response to the clinic of the time of ‘object relation’, the place of an object that would be the subject’s, in the sense of belonging to language, while at the same time being excluded from it. This complex articulation is especially detailed in the Seminars X and XI, by making of the object an empty place and a jouissance of orifices of the rim on the integumentary body.

In the Seminar on the four fundamental concepts this phase in Lacan’s doctrine unfolds more forcefully, in particular in the critical dialogues with Sartre and above all Merleau-Ponty, which make of this Seminar one of the most important advances in the intellectual universe of the époque. One should also mention that in the meantime Lacan adopted the structuralist theses of Levi-Strauss and in particular Jakobson, Saussure and Benveniste, to define the relationship of the subject to language. With these, he finds shelter against the psychologism and familialism in the psychoanalysis of the IPA, and affirms with it the decentring of the subject in relation to the world of nature, the famous epistemological break to which Lacan will not return. In this period, he makes of the phallus the key to his teaching, “the symbolic phallus, impossible to negativise, signifier of jouissance”. 1 In Seminar XI and the following ones, Lacan takes up again the Cartesian path, especially Decartes’ ‘Meditations’, to confirm that the extended body, and doubt, are the foundations of the being. The certainty that Lacan presents in this Seminar is the certainty that the analysand finds in language a way of being represented by a signifier for another, which is to say that what dominates in Seminar XI is the division of the subject, which is abolished as a lack in being, to forthwith find himself represented by his alienation in the

---

1 Lacan, J., Écrits p. 826
Other. At this point the jouissance of the body emerges, whence the formula of the phantasy ($<>a)$. The question remains, to which Lacan will only reply in Seminar XXIII: LOM his body, he has it.

In the text in the Ecrits entitled ‘Position of the Unconscious’ Lacan launches a new period in his teaching, which will detach him rather quickly from structuralism. Without developing it here, let us only signpost that Lacan introduces at this moment the myth of the lamella, which will later return several times in his teaching. With this he foregrounds the omnipresent jouissance, and reformulates structural formalism by introducing the organism. This moment is fundamental. It accompanies the putting into question again of the paternal function and in particular the normative function of the father in the subject’s assumption of a sexuated position. As Lacan says at that moment, “It is not true that God….”, to which Lacan adds the dead father, the idol of the neurotic, “...made them male and female”. 2

An international meeting, in which Lacan participated, will decide the new orientation of his doctrine and the accent put on jouissance and the body. It is the congress in Baltimore in 1966, to which the great linguist Chomsky contributed. He, contrary to Lacan, goes down the path that leads to the neurosciences, even if Derrida continues in his exploration of language subtleties and offers the theory of the Differance...

Lacan by contrast changes course, refuses to make language a memory trace inscribed in neurons, and put briefly, comes back to the theory of the drive, of which he had never wanted to accept that it can be read in the text of the dream, contrary to his disciple and friend Leclaire. He addresses logic now (in contrast to Derrida), closer thus to Deleuze, also invited to this congress. This gives rise to the Seminar of the Logic of the Fantasy where the body is like an elaboration of creationist meaning, starting from a hole. A hilum from which the symptom “swings back in creative effects”. 3 About this new definition of the body of the speaking being, Eric Laurent, in his seminars given at the ECF in the year 2015, highlighted several successive steps, responding as they are to various questions that become more refined, and culminate in Seminar XXIII.

It is particularly present in Radiophonie that Lacan is interested in the path that Deleuze drew in his Logic of Meaning, but in which Lacan does not take into account the analyses of jouissance that the great Spinoza specialist has made with his colleague Guattari, by supposing mechanical bodies in which un-differentiated connections permit the circulation of the flow of jouissance. Nonetheless, Lacan makes reference to the double valency of language, which is both vehicle of meaning, which is incorporated, and the materiality of words, which, like the bodies without organs, are infinitely divisible and connectable by shock between them, being carriers of a schizophrenic jouissance. The body becomes the surface of the inscription of the signifier. It is

2 Lacan, J., Écrits p. 720
3 Lacan, J., Écrits p. 52
the signifier (out of body) that carves up the body and its organs into localisations of jouissance. This is how one must understand the oft quoted sentence on page 409 in the Autres écrits:

“I will return first to the symbolic body, which implies no metaphor, which goes to show that it alone isolates the body in the naïve sense, namely that with which the being supports itself without knowing that it is language that gives it to him, to the extent that it would not be there, were it not for speaking of it. The first body makes the second by being incorporated in it”.

In this text, Lacan distinguishes the material body and the body that the Other of the signifier accords to the subject by the inscriptions it traces on the substance of the body. We are, as we can see, far from the idea that the body is only accessible through the signifying representation. Everything happens as if, at the moment of Radiophonie, Lacan already puts forward the surplus jouissance, namely a jouissance which does not take the masculine model of the ‘all’, but exceeds it. In particular starting from civilisation and the gadgets that it imposes. It is from an experience of jouissance that the inscription is made on the body in terms of what Freud called fixation and not a preliminary Other that does not exist, that determines the subject in a relationship to castration and the norm of the father. The Other that Lacan designates here is a negative greatness.

One year later, Lacan in Lituraterre takes up again his intuition that was already laid out in Radiophonie: jouissance is first, it is inscribed in the body from the clouds that are the Other, like rain on Siberia, causing the effects of furrowing and of distribution of jouissance on the body, from intangible signs, as out of body. Nevertheless, the letter insists. It is a Lacanian concept that raises frequent equivocations or approximations. Eric Laurent said this about it: “Lacan says that writing as orthography, is not essential to language. Rather, and he opposes it well, the letter resists as phonetic substance”.

The letter makes a shoreline of the body, being at the same time out of body, and it is distinct from the signifier and its phallic games that are linked to meaning. Yet, it is not literature. It is not the equivalent to the object cause of desire, because it is insistence, first, a meteor that scrapes the hole that opens the substance of the body to the signifying jouissance.

The letter signals that man has a body and again, this having a body is opposed to the structure of the hole of being of the speaking being. Jacques-Alain Miller in his Course of 2011 gives all its weight to this step by Lacan on the path of the sinthome. Miller opposes letter and lack in being, and he sees there the existential realisation in the sinthome as Joyce defines it. “With the sinthome we balance on the side of existence”.

---


5 Laurent, E., Seminar at the ECF available on Radio Lacan

6 Course by J-A Miller, L'Être et l'Un (Being and the One), lesson of 25.5.2011
This is what makes Lacan generalise the case of Joyce. The subject has a body before being a lack in being, and he has it only through this body having been percussed by Lalangue, and analysis will consist in refining the phallic meaning in order to return to the hole, this lack, which is not lack in being, but sinthome, and which orients the subject as living (knowing himself to be mortal is included in this), in the ways that are unique to him of enjoying of his body (jouir de son corps). The fantasy that always turns around one unreconstructible phase, as Freud showed, bears witness through its iteration of this indelible mark.

Translated by Natalie Wulfing