Freudian References on the body

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It is useful to recall that Freud found no support for the image of the ego, other than the body. Freud only spoke of the body in relation to the ego, as being the ego’s material base: it is a represented body, an imaginary body. The body is defined as the projection of a surface, an abstraction that reduces the body to two dimensions — not an inside, an interior, but rather an outside [1]: the narcissistic image of beautiful unity masks a fragmentation to which the drive subjects the body; the drive fragments the body’s jouissance insofar as the drive’s source is at the surface, namely, the holes of the body. Indeed, the notion of the edge of the drive, taken up by Lacan, implies a surface typology. This anatomically perforated surface localizes the oral, anal, scopic, and genital drives. Thus, Freud sometimes reduces the ego to the body itself (Ich Körper) to the point that the subject, divided by the unconscious, may feel the effects of this in a bodily fragmentation, as in hysteria. The fact that Lacan says “functional fragmentation” [2] on this subject demonstrates the signifier’s impact on the body. The whole problem is to know how language is articulated on this surface, whether perforated or unified by the image.

Beyond The Hysterical Body

Lacan gives many references to anatomy with respect to the phallic image that gives it form
and unity, notably the phallicization of the body in the gracile form of femininity. Here we are on the level of the narcissistic image of the body that acts as a plug for its fragmentation by the drive.

The question of the relationship between the body and the unconscious can be described in two ways, and in connection with two periods of Lacan’s teaching. First, the effects of the signifier on the body: the model of hysteria. This supposes an unconscious that is homogenous with the drive, that is, a shared structure between the symbolic unconscious and the functioning of the drive. Here we have the concept of an “edge” that permits this encounter.

Erogenous zones constitute a major anatomical reference; their delimitation “is the result of a cut that takes advantage of the anatomical characteristic of a margin or border: the lips, ‘the enclosure of the teeth,’ the rim of the anus, the penile groove, the vagina”[3]. The object itself is described from the anatomical cut: nipples, phallus, etc.

The shared structure between the unconscious and the functioning of the drive only becomes explicit with Lacan’s Seminar XI, when he describes the temporal pulsation of the unconscious as “something that opens and closes”[4]. Jacques-Alain Miller has described this moment in Lacan’s elaboration in “Six paradigmes of jouissance”[5]. From this perspective, we have, on the one hand, a body mortified by the signifier, and on the other hand, the recovery of jouissance in the form of the object a. Nevertheless, it is not at all a question of an enjoying substance (substance jouissante), apart from this recovery through the object.

Second, there is an entirely different conception of the relationship between bodily jouissance and the unconscious, that we might call post-Joycean: the body is no longer defined by the drive but rather by the body-event. The bodily holes responsible for the fragmentation are no longer taken into account. We are not far from Deleuze’s bodies without organs to which [Lacan] alludes in the Seminar XXIII (p. 214 [6]). The body is not described as a lack, but as one more [un en plus]. It can be deduced that the body exists as a bag of skin, empty, outside and beside its organs. Whence the mystery of the speaking body, if the consistency of this body is an empty set. As Jacques-Alain Miller has emphasized, much more could be said about this rather dense page [7].

It is worth bringing up the question of the psychosomatic symptom here. It justifies a new binary that is not that of the soul and the body, but rather of the body and the organism. Aside from the phantom limb symptom, it is worth giving a greater extension to the notion of the body than to that of the organism. One may consult Le phénomène psychosomatique [8], especially Jacques-Alain Miller’s lecture on this distinction [9]. Indeed, one needs a notion of the body that is compatible with a surface of inscription. To define the psychosomatic phenomenon as a writing, Lacan took the model of the cartouche in hieroglyphic writing: by analogy, the body indulges in writing something [10]. Finally, the writing body is of the domain of observation and raises the question of writing, not of saying [du dire]. Something else must therefore be constructed without direct observation: the speaking body.
Finally, it should be noted that topological figures like tori have an explicit reference to the body itself, notably in the human body, like the digestive tract, which keeps the subject from confusing itself with a sphere.

**References to Philosophy**

We are reminded that the binary of the body and the unconscious is not unlike a famous dualism: that of the soul and the body, a hallmark of seventeenth-century philosophy. We find an echo of the mystery of the speaking body that Lacan evokes in the Cartesian problematic, to which Jacques-Alain Miller refers in his lecture. Descartes also makes a mystery of the union of the soul and the body. A famous quote could be commented on in a congress: “I am not in my body like a captain in his ship.” How is it possible that two substances as truly [réellement] distinct as thought and body, can act on one another in a reciprocal causality? Such a thing is conceptually unthinkable, yet is experienced in the most evident way by every subject affected by the senses and passions. We should consult Martial Gueroult’s canonical book, to which Jacques-Alain Miller alludes, the commentary of the Sixth Mediation. Lacan does not dwell on Cartesian dualism, but we find a Cartesian vocabulary in Encore, in for example, the syntagm of the “enjoying substance.”

Another lead: Lacan is sensitive to the philosophical elaboration of Merleau-Ponty, who tries to define “the intertwinnings” that form the body and the world, the extension of my body in the world, the indissoluble unity that he calls “the flesh” in The Visible and the Invisible, which questions the anatomical limits of the body. We find a prolongation of this corporal entity — that is, the real of the body subtracted from the narcissistic image — in Francis Bacon, who paints heads as “frightening meat,” as well as in Deleuze’s analysis of him in Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation.

The gaze itself envelops things, “clothes them with its own flesh”; “the look is itself incorporation of the seer into the visible, quest for itself [… within the visible […]. My body model of the things and the things model of my body”. Thenceforth, “[w]here are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh?” It is the field of the visible that defines my body, as a thing of the world. In this work, many pages are consecrated to bodily feelings, independent of all organic function. In his article on Merleau-Ponty, Lacan insists on “the body as the expression of speech”.

It remains to be seen how to understand the unconscious and its relationship to a body that is no longer reducible to its cuts. This is the whole problematic of the speaking being in its relationship to the enjoying substance.

**The Pornographic Body**

The reference to baroque eroticism, characterized by the veil and the mask on a sexuality not confined to signs of jouissance is, of course, the form of artistic sublimation that is most opposite to pornography. In the Heideggerian perspective, we find the impact of technology on sexuality, the machine in the service of the most shameless drive to see. One seemingly finds here a sexual activity without taboo, or prohibition, but also without
semblant. A too much, full of jouissance, excluding all lack: neither veil nor castration, an always-active phallus. No transgression either, since there are no laws or rules. And, above all, a taboo on speech. Aside from a few misogynous insults, eroticism and sentiment are also excluded, and have no place. This is the epipheme of an antinomy between jouissance and speech. To say that there is, in fact, no sexual relationship is to say that every body can replace another without any singularity and without identity.

This limit, which the spectacle of pornographic jouissance constitutes, indicates something of the call to a jouissance that is separate from the unconscious, and to the fiction of a mastery of being [l'être], as Jacques-Alain Miller has suggested in his lecture. Here also we obtain the negation of the unconscious whereby the speaking being “imagines himself master of his being, which means, not being language”. This quote by Jacques Lacan can be applied here in the sense that the “I think”, like speech, seem useless and superfluous for a jouissance of the body, assumed to be self-sufficient. This is a sign of our times, which misunderstands the function of perversion, the instrumentalization of a jouissance which is not that of the pervert, but rather that of an assumed Other.

Translated from the French by Ian Curtis

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