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## The Body, the Visible and the Invisible

Conference given at the 7th ENAPOL

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We hail from the empire of images, the topic of this 7th ENAPOL that concludes, and we march towards the enigmas of the speaking body, topic of the 10thWAP Congress next April in Rio de Janeiro.

From the empire of images to the speaking body there may be various conceptual paths drawn from the experience of psychoanalysis. I believe I have found a thread, a bridge by which I propose we walk with the desire to find you, each and every one of you, on the other side. It is a desire, since the bridge that I propose we cross is none other than the invisible, precisely that which appears to escape, at least at first, the empire of images or the power of the visible. It is not easy to follow an invisible path, seemingly a job for a poet, ever since Arthur Rimbaud defined it as such in his "Letters known as of the Visionary (Seer)": "examining the invisible and hearing the unheard-of"[1]. But we know that this is also the analyst's task when he accompanies the analysand in his work: examine what escapes representation; what is not evident; what only appears as missing.

And so, to continue with the cinematographic references in this 7th ENAPOL, we should be like Indiana Jones in the final trail in his search for the Holy Grail. You surely remember the scene in which he must cross the abyss by means of an invisible bridge putting to the test his confidence, his blind faith in that which cannot be seen to take a step into the void and continue on. Speaking

of Lacan, sometimes, we are not much different when we treat the unconscious. In all, remember that after having crossed the invisible bridge, Indiana throws a fistful of sand in the void. The sand remains on the invisible bridge showing its profile, the contours of its form that is impossible to represent, which ensures him that he can find and return along the exact path later. So, this handful of sand that shows the place of the invisible passage and that can liberate us, even though it is in a second moment, from blind faith, that fistful of sand is our concepts, the terms arising by the analytic experience that we owe to those that have come before us.

### **The invisible phallus**

We see the first step to crossing the invisible bridge. What is the best term that we have in psychoanalysis to designate the invisible, the experience of the subject of the unconscious? Just as Freud situated it, starting from the first clinical testimonies, and just as Lacan formalized it at the beginning of his teachings in the fifties, that term is the phallus, the symbolic phallus that names the lack *par excellence*, the lack of a penis in the mother's body. The invisible makes itself present in the experience of infantile sexuality due to the child's belief in the mother's phallus. In fact, the case of little Hans is still exemplary here, the Freudian child being the first poet in the task of examining the invisible, in that all images of the visible would take on a signification as a result of that fundamental invisible that is the maternal phallus. The mother's body is the first site of the invisible, due to the inscription of the signifier of the symbolic phallus that represents the absence of the object, an absence that gives its phallic shine to a whole series of objects that more or less fascinate the subject throughout his life.

Let's say then that for psychoanalysis, first, the empire of images rests on the power of the invisible, of the invisible phallus that shines because of its absence in the mother's body. Further, that this invisible side of the object is not localized just anywhere; rather it is first incarnated in the Other's body. This is the first bridge, the first knot between the body and the invisible that marks the subject's experience with his or her body and its image.

But in order for this invisible to take a body, to put it in those terms, it is necessary that it is already inscribed in the symbolic by language, the famous phallic signifier that orders the significations of the Other, of the symbolic unconscious. The phallic signifier is, in the first teaching of Lacan, the handful of sand that will orient the subject to confront the invisible of the Other's desire, to show the bridge that connects him or her to that desire, even bringing it into existence. Later on, it is about navigating in the field of *jouissance*, the *jouissance* of the Other sex, of which the phallic signifier is still the compass by which the subject attempts to represent that which has no image.

It is from there that the *jouissance* will have a body for the subject, localized in or out of limits that are more or less precise.

When the subject does not have this fistful of sand unified by the phallic signifier, we know the clinical consequences that result. The subject must cross the chasm that separates him or her from the Other by inventing other bridges. Sometimes these are delusional bridges, like in the Schreber case with his mission “to be God’s wife”. But we are not sure if this is more delusional than the bridge that presupposes a belief in the maternal phallus, when it orders the relationship between the subject’s body with his or her world and his or her fantasy.

In fact, the symbolic phallus already has a delusional something when it supposes the completeness of the symbolic Other, just as much as the completeness of the image of the body.

Even though the specular image pretends to show the subject a totality in the field of the visible, there is not, as a matter of fact, a complete image of the body - this is the induced supposition of the imaginary phallus. There is always the invisible as irreducible. The famous painting by René Magritte, “Not to be Reproduced” in which we can see a man from behind looking in a mirror at a reflection of himself also from behind, presents the paradox of manifesting in the virtual space that which cannot be seen, the  $-\phi$  of the imaginary phallus in terms of the Lacanian algebra. Moreover, the painting is much more pertinent if there is room for the impossibility of the image to represent the totality of the object, and the fact that the invisible is where its power lies to capture, to fascinate, to attract.

### **The Mateo case**

In this point, the potential for imaginary capture in the speaking being is different from the effect it produces in the animal world, in which the image exercises its fascination in diverse ways. It is an effect that was studied by Lacan early on in his Mirror Stage, with his references to Roger Caillois’ precious studies on mimesis and camouflage in nature. Animals and nature also live under the empire of images, with phenomena that cannot be explained by the simple survival instinct, but which appear to show a strange liking for the uselessness of *jouissance*, be it in the ability to become invisible by means of camouflage or to attract another species’ attention under the guise of forms and images that are absolutely unnecessary from a biological perspective. For example, some non-edible species that have nothing to fear from their environment are nonetheless mimetic with it, demonstrating what Caillois calls “exaggerated precautions”, an unmotivated luxury. However, this same unmotivated luxury makes certain types of caterpillars simulate the image of some bushes so well that farmers often cut them down because they cannot tell the difference. Or

the *Phyllias* case, the leaf insects that go as far as devouring each other, mistaking each other for authentic leaves. The empire of images offers us many examples in nature of the power of the image that cannot be explained by the survival instinct, a sort of autonomy of the imaginary that is not articulated with biological functions.

Yet, in the speaking being, as a result of the knotting with the symbolic of language, the image's power of fascination is raised, so to say, to a second power: it functions more by what it hides, than what it shows, more by what it evokes in the invisible, than what it denotes in the visible. Because of the knotting of the image and the signifier, there appears a fundamental disorder between the body and its imaginary unity, which the concept of the drives present as the experience the subject has with one or the other, with the body or its image.

Let's see a precious example of this, taken from a case that was transmitted to us recently in the Clinical Conversation of the NEL, by our colleague Jimena Contreras. This is the case of Mateo, a boy with notable difficulties in orienting himself in relation to the Other's desire, and in ordering the world of images and symbols, which he inhabits chaotically, starting from the images and symbols related to his own body. But that does not impede him from having a special sensibility for what he cannot see and what remains invisible to him of his own body.

One day he arrives at the session, spreads out on the floor a series of blank sheets of paper, lies down across them and tells the analyst: "Draw me." It is a demand: he asks the Other to draw this "me" of himself that he cannot see, and which he experiences like a strange otherness. It is the first way in which he tries to throw sand on the invisible bridge of his body, a body that he experiences as something quite strange. It is a handful of sand that he borrows from the Other so that his profile can appear, giving him a body in some way. The process continues, when, not satisfied with it, Mateo, in his examination of the invisible, makes a copy, a replica of the profile drawn by the analyst. He cuts around it and draws in greater detail the face. He could have done so directly on the original traced by the analyst, but Mateo prefers to do it on the copy, he prefers to do it, so to speak, on the specular image of the first image that the analyst made for him. It is this second copy that he chooses to cut, in order to give a body to his profile and not a profile to his body.

We could perfectly graft this series of fundamental operations onto Lacan's well known optical schemawhich distinguishes the production of a real image, of the body inaccessible to the subject, of the specular image that reproduces this real image in the mirror, permitting the subject to cut out the limits of his body. It is the construction of the Ideal Ego, a real image, almost a hologram, from the symbolic point of the ego-ideal.

But it is at the moment in which Mateo wants to draw his face in the cut out copy of his profile that a new abyss appears, a leap he cannot make. So he asks for help with a demand that is still more precise, and more exemplary of his examination of the invisible as well: “What am I like from behind? Draw me”. You see that Mateo is an excellent student of René Magritte, and the day he discovers the portrait of Mr. James called “Not to be Reproduced”, he will be quite surprised. Mateo knows that the construction of his face, this face he is looking out from, depends on the part behind, the invisible part for him, for its unity, but it is from this part that the gaze itself is constructed as an object for the scopic drive. He knows it without knowing it, of course, but it’s because Mateo’s examination is not satisfied with the first image of himself, that he asks the Other. The question “What am I like from behind?” is also “Who am I from behind?”, in that place where no image can give him the consistency of a lost unity. In that place there really is no painting by Magritte that would suffice. What might suffice is Lacan’s excellent response to the question “What am I?”, in his text “Subversion of the Subject...”, building on a quote by Paul Valery: “I am in the place from which ‘the universe is a flaw in the purity of Non-Being’ is vociferated”[2]. You have to give the invisible, what does not have an image or representation, more than one look in, in order to find a possible solution to the question of being. There is no mimesis or camouflage that will work, only by means of language and the signifiers that localize and order the redoubled lack – the defect in the purity of non-being – can the speaking being be approximated, the being of the speaking body.

A series of operations will continue for Mateo the exemplary logic of the construction of a body from the fragile consistency of the sheets of paper. Mateo takes the next step: “I have to draw the hands.” The problem is that he has to draw them with his own hands and we are not so sure that they are as easily at hand as we suppose. He again asks the analyst for a hand. There, with very sharp precision, the analyst responds that he doesn’t know how to do that. The Other, in reality, cannot lend a hand in order to draw hands. The non-knowledge of the analyst is here fundamental to continue constructing the invisible bridge of the speaking body. The analyst knows, nevertheless, that he counts on Mateo’s poetic *savoir-faire*, who insists: “I must try”. Mateo gets to work again, trying to unite the disunited parts of the profile of his body with other sheets of paper. It is a task, the analyst tells us, which takes him several sessions, with moments of great satisfaction but also successive encounters with the impossible, with a real that resists being included in this series of operations. Mateo will take in hand a new fundamental instrument, the instrument of number, to assemble his body by means of the invisible. For example, after joyfully corroborating the magnitude of his construction before the united pieces of paper – “How big I am, I am 6” - he expresses a desire for his singular creation of a body made of paper. He does this with an expression that resonates in Spanish with all its connotations – “I wish I could get it up”. The erection of the body that lies inert, is, in effect, a fundamental moment. As Freud indicated, this was true in the evolutionary history of the human being. It is also and especially a moment of phallic erection, which gives a new unity, a number as well, to the body that can be considered as a series

of loose and uncountable pieces of separate organs. But, how can we keep up a bunch of pieced together sheets of paper with only some strips of paper? It is impossible. Mateo is not intimidated by this impossibility, and he will take in hand numbers again, to attempt to represent the invisible: "It doesn't matter," he says, "I forgot to bring cardboard. I will paste 8 sheets, that way it will be thick enough to stand". Why 8 and not 7 or 10? How many are necessary in order for that monstrosity to stand? We could say 8 sheets simply because 8 is greater than 6. It would be from a quantitative perspective, a scientific perspective, as the attempt to quantify something that in reality is unquantifiable. It is about the eminent function of the number that, in essence is different from quantity. The number is, as Lacan indicated, the most real that language can convey and transmit, to address that which is impossible to represent, to treat that which has no possible image. It could be the number Pi, if we want to approach it closer to the real, that is in play in the construction of Mateo's speaking body.

If there is anything this case teaches us it is precisely that the invisible is neither the complement nor the imaginary alternation of the visible of the image of the body. The invisible is the way in which the real of the body of the drive insists as the bridge that needs to be constructed so that the body becomes, effectively, a speaking body, a body trapped by language in the first place.

### ***Lalangue and the colour of the emptiness***

This was precisely the key to Lacan's criticism of the phenomenology of his epoch, which had found in the perception of the image the royal road, the route to ontological consistency of the body as the place of consciousness and the seat of the subject's being. Let's say that this perspective of phenomenology, fecund at its time, is still the horizon towards which the psychology and cognitive sciences of today helplessly wander, unable to go any further on this road. Lacan's critique of perception in the 60s is still relevant today.

Perhaps the title of this intervention, "The Body, the Visible and the Invisible", resonates for some of you with the title of a text that was especially commented on by Lacan in Seminar XI in 1964. It is the posthumous work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty "The Visible and the Invisible", to whom Lacan pays homage.

Lacan utilizes in this seminar a dialogue and a debate with the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whom he esteemed as a close friend.

The body in the phenomenology of perception, just like the one promoted by cognitivism, with its references to neuroscience, is not a speaking body, so to speak, but rather a seen body, a body structured and represented by the images of reality formed by vision.

To Merleau-Ponty we owe the affirmation taken up by Lacan, “that we are beings who are looked at in the spectacle of the world”[3]. In effect, this ENAPOL has shown the great clinical relevance of the scopic dimension in the experience of the subject of our time. More than a voyeur, the subject nowadays speaks of the gaze in the spectacle of a reality that has become itself an omnivoyeur, a testimony of the ascent of the scopic object to the social zenith. The eye and the mind, for Merleau-Ponty, are the two poles that structure the relation of the subject, reduced to the experience of his body, with the world.

Lacan indicates that this alternation is not only about the order of the visual. The eye is only a metaphor of what he calls the “*la pousse du voyant*”, the push of the seer, the push of the scopic drive that is distinct from the visual organ, from the gaze and from the objects it orbits.

There are two phenomena that Lacan evokes in his critique of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, two events in the body that our analytic clinic deems constitutive of the subject and that escape all possible phenomenology of perception, as well as any current cognitive representation. First, the castration complex, of the cause as function of the perceived lack in the body of the Other, of which we have already spoken. Second, the “privilege of the fetish” in so far as it constitutes desire and sexual *jouissance*[4]. The fetish, as a paradigm of masculine desire, incarnates the presence of the invisible in the visible of the body of the Other. Remember the classic example evoked by Freud in his text, “Fetishism”, in which the object in question is reduced to the most evanescent that can exist in the empire of images, a shine on the nose. What causes the subject’s desire and fixes the conditions of his *jouissance* is something as immaterial as the “*Glanz auf der Nase*”, the reflection on the nose that traverses the subject’s languages, German and English, to become a “glance on the nose”, a fleeting glimpse of the nose on the body of the Other. The image of the body of the Other begins to lose its form in order to manifest the invisible of that which does not have a form in the object, but that constitutes its true power.

It is an excellent example to capture the passage that we find in the teaching of Lacan from the constituting function of the image of the body of the other, the specular image, to the function of the speaking body that is not defined by its form, or its image, but rather by its being inhabited by the *jouissance* of language, by the signifier reduced to its translinguistic support, by the letter that constitutes that which will take it to the notion of *lalangue*, written as one word, *lalangue*, from which we lucubrate with language and which can only be defined by the equivocations propitiated by the letter.

It is a privileged bridge for passing from the imaginary body to the speaking body of *lalangue*, hanging over the last part of Lacan's teaching.

For the moment, in the 60s and in his critique of the phenomenology of perception, Lacan reveals a dimension of the invisible that only the psychoanalytic experience has been able to localize and that escapes in its dialectic with the visible, be it as representable by the image or quantifiable by the cypher.

The "push of the seer" resides ultimately in an experience of *jouissance* in one's own body that Lacan refers to the Freudian notion of libido, a mode that suits us to remember. "The libido in Freud," he writes in his text *Freud's Trieb and the Psychoanalyst's Desire*, "is an energy that can be subjected to a kind of quantification which is all the easier to introduce in theory as it is useless, since certain *quanta* [certain quantities] of constancy are recognized therein. It's sexual colouring, so categorically maintained sexual by Freud as its most central feature, is the colour of emptiness: suspended in the light of a gap"[5].

It is impossible to obtain an image of libido as colourful as the images of magnetic resonance, with which current technology promises to trap the meaning, normal or pathological, of the subject's experience. In this useless search by contemporary technology to make an image of libido, the neurosciences have come to accept it, in its paradigm as a term that contrasts with the term *quanta* utilized by Lacan. The term used by some authors to designate the singular meaning of the subject's experience that is impossible to represent, is the term *qualia*, which evokes the quality that escapes the quantification and the imaginary representation of the body.

"Colour of emptiness", "light of a gap", of an indentation, are without a doubt the most appropriate expressions to designate the push that the drive makes present in the speaking body.

The speaking body is a body that is affected by this colour of emptiness of the libido, by this breach that the drive opens in the seen body.

The speaking body, the body affected by *jouissance*, speaks and sees through this colour of emptiness of the libido, which is inapprehensible by the image even though it was by means of the image that the subject received and localized the first effects of *jouissance* on his or her body. Let's say that this *jouissance* will only obtain its resonance in the body at the moment that it is bathed, immersed in *lalangue*.



Following the bridge of the invisible of the body, we are brought from a body that was defined first by the image, by the form or the *Gestalt* localized in the specular image, an image that is always under the power of the invisible, towards a body that is defined by a *jouissance* substance that *lalangue* grafts onto its imaginary unity.

### **The Body, the *jouissance* substance**

There is then with regards to the body and image a sequential logic in Lacan's teaching, that Jacques-Alain Miller has clarified in several courses, and that has helped us to continue along this invisible bridge, a bridge that goes from the visible of the specular image of the body to the body as a *jouissance* substance, impossible to apprehend by the image. It is a sequence that we can also corroborate in the experience that the subject has with the body and its images. At the starting point, just as Jacques-Alain Miller in his course "Sutileza sanalíticas"[6], "the imaginary is a place of *jouissance*; the subject enjoys the imaginary [an imaginary] that for Lacan is primordially scopical. The body is, above all for the first Lacan, the form of the body, not the *jouissance* substance." Only in the second logical time, and after having reduced the symbolic of language to a lucubration over *lalangue*, the body is affected by the signifier as a "*jouissance* substance", a substance that "is a conceptual modification [of the famous Cartesian *res extensa*] of the extensive substance that reintroduces the body, the unity of the living body". This *jouissance* substance of the body that speaks, affected by *lalangue*, that we should continue investigating in its diverse forms in the analytic clinic, modifies the body of the being that speaks in a true mutation, a mutation that is not in the least of the genetic order but that comes to modify the action of the genome throughout the singular life of each subject, and, therefore, a modification that is transmitted in the experience of the speaking body.

On this point, we note another term that the science of our times takes as the key to a supposed evolution, namely the term "epigenetic". The "epigenetic", the future of the sciences of life, are defined today as the set of those non-genetic factors, attributed generally to the ambiguous field of the "environmental", that intervene in the determination of an organism and the experience that the *parlêtre* has with it, and its body.

What Lacanian psychoanalysis discovers in the experience is the existence of *lalangue* as a decisive factor in the mutation of the body as a *jouissance* substance. As a result of this, the *jouissance* of the image (that also exists in the animal world) changes statute, or register. Only *lalangue* makes it possible in a metathesis, in a simple permutation of the letters of the words in Spanish, the image becoming an enigma, including the invisible, and especially the invisible of one's own body that we

have investigated here. When an image should be read, it becomes an enigma in a hieroglyph, as Freud indicates in the analysis of dream imagery.

The speaking body, denuded of the phallic image, in the real of language, is pure *lalangue* incrustated in the flesh, and also an enigma that begs to be deciphered. This body is *jouissance* of *lalangue* without any possible image: it is only perceptible through the a-semantic resonance that the word produces in the body. This otherness of *jouissance* is at the same time his or her closest and furthest invisible, but it is audible nevertheless in each one of the words of his or her symptom.

At a moment in which the techno-sciences are obsessed with the idealist dream of constructing a mind without a body (and this would be also the nightmare of a Macedonio Fernández and his “Way of a Bodiless Psyche”), there appears the irreducible of the speaking body in the contemporary symptoms, something different from the debate in favour of the human being, against all the announcements of a post-humanism. It is the ethical bet that listens to *lalangue* of the contemporary symptoms, which is the true nature of the post-human that each and every one of us is.

It is a paradox, because we feel the reality of the images as result of our imaginary consistency that Lacan calls, in the last part of his teaching, “un-corps”, “a-body”, but also “encore”, again, which is one of the names of *jouissance*.

Finally, the One of *jouissance* produces the body that we call our own, but of which we never have a precise image and much less a complete one. From this perspective, all of the techno-science projects that are done under the banner of “human improvement” are all attempts to equate the narcissistic image of the body to the ideal of the new epoch. As with the case of Mateo, techno-science constructs its own body out of paper, like every subject. And like every subject, there will always be that which does not fit between one and the other, the symptom as a sign of irreducible *jouissance*. This is what does not fit and continues to be invisible and what motivates us to speak about it, of the body and its *jouissances*, it is what motivates us to have a speaking body without becoming it.

It is this speaking body that will reunite us in Rio de Janeiro for the next WAP Congress. I hope to see you there, and do not forget to bring a handful of sand.

***Translated by Alejandro Betancur Velez***

[1] Quotation taken from: <http://www.mag4.net/Rimbaud/DocumentsE1.html>

[2] Lacan, J. (2006) *Écrits*, [B. Fink Translation]. Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire. p. 694. See <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=242>

[3] Lacan, J.; *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, tr. A. Sheridan, Penguin, 1994, p. 75 See <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1145>

[4] In his text “Homage to Maurice Merleau-Ponty”, *Autres écrits*. See <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=734>

[5] *Lacan, J. (2006) Écrits* [B. Fink Translation]. On Freud’s Trieb and the Psychoanalyst’s Desire. p. 722 See <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12902>

[6] Miller, J.-A.; <http://www.libreriapaidos.com/9789501288612/SUTILEZAS+ANALITICAS/>  
Published in Spanish [ tr: AnalyticalSubtleties]