

[The Signifier, the Letter, and the Body: Changing Perspective in Hysteria](#)

By [Avi Rybnicki](#) | May 1st, 2021 | [LRO 292](#)

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The Other is needed to construct a body, for a body is not something that we can take for granted. Freud's hysterics 'have a body', which transmits a message from an other to the other, they transport also the other's symptom; we can say with Miller and Laurent that in such cases a symptom is to the second degree, based on identification. In this there is clearly a socio-political aspect of each *Unbehagen in der Kultur*, *malaise* of each culture.

Taking it upon herself to express something of the discontent of the other, the hysteric conveys the unsayable conflicts of her culture, since in the Freudian unconscious the unsayable of the subject is related to that which a culture represses. So what do we observe now, considering it is often claimed that the hysteric no longer exists because everything is "free and permitted"? We could consider that hysteria today is still fulfilling its historic task of expressing the discomfort in culture.

Freud's hysteric reveals the insufficiency of the master—his holes, failures and cracks. This form of the hysteric symptom shows that the "king is naked". But the problem is that in this version the hysteric is stuck in identification, which means that she does not cease longing for the "real king", the one who lacks nothing. So she constantly arrives, every time again, with each object, to the failure in the other. In this Sisyphean effort, her body is imprisoned, unable to free libido to really love.

How does one interrupt this metonymic tragedy, rather than merely alleviating it? It's a question: how does one go beyond this rock of castration of the Other? This is Freud's question in *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*^[1]. He is dubious about the possibility of going beyond and leaves the challenge to the next generation.

Lacan developed the concept of the Freudian symptom and the question of the body, which both relate to another of Freud's questions: "Was will das Weib?" (What does the woman want?). In his last teaching, Lacan invented the *sinthome*, "the speaking body", "there is no sexual relationship" and "the woman does not exist". These concepts aim beyond the barrier of identification in the psychoanalytic cure, as well as the formation of the analyst. They also give us a new perspective on the hysteric and the cure because

they aim at something more primary in the symptom, an aspect of it that does not exchange with the other and thus is not attributed as an effect of the other's symptom. Rather than a message to the other, it is another body, effected directly by the "signifier as such", the letter, a body event, and not an equivoque of meaning transported by the signifier. In this way we can say it is "freed" of the other.

Of course, it needs to be enveloped by speaking to an other who listens and is attentive to the Freudian unconscious, structured like a language, in order to go beyond it to touch the desert of the real. This can be a change for the person because something of the subject that by itself has no meaning can appear and with this the possibility that something new occurs. This is crucial in our present era, where the belief in the Other has radically declined – indeed we say that the Other doesn't exist – and as a result of the bankruptcy of identification, more and more subjects wind up in despair, without any orientation. Psychiatry gives all sorts of names to these phenomena, placing them 'into' the individual or the brain, often obscuring the dialectical socio-political dimension.

Lacan's late teaching allows us to formulate the place of the hysteric today. She expresses exactly this confusion, as well as the problems of desire, drive, and the difficulty with turning to the other to love. In fact, perhaps what we are seeing now is a renaissance of the hysteric.

[1] Freud, S. „Analysis Terminable and Interminable” (1937). Standard Edition. Vol 23. Hogarth Press: London, 1961, p. 252–253.

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Note :

Freud: Analysis Terminable & Interminable: 1937c, SE XXIII, p209-54, Published at www.Freud2Lacan.com /Homepage (Analysis Terminable and Interminable (Die endliche und die unendliche Analyse))