

In French:

Lacan Quotidien n° 518 – « L'inconscient, c'est la politique », aujourd'hui – par Éric Laurent

<http://www.lacanquotidien.fr/blog/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/LQ-518.pdf>

In English:

<http://www.lacan.com/actuality/2015/06/eric-laurent-the-unconscious-is-politics-today/>

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[ERIC LAURENT: "THE UNCONSCIOUS IS POLITICS," TODAY](#)

Éric Laurent, June 23rd, 2015

Probably given in Nantes in May 2015

In May of 2002 in Milan (1), Jacques-Alain Miller commented on a phrase drawn from Lacan's lesson of May 10th, 1967, Seminar XIV, *The Logic of Fantasy* (2): "I am not even saying 'politics is the unconscious'—but, quite simply, *the unconscious is politics!*"

This phrase had been cited in a completely incorrect manner in a book on the psychopathology of political life. It highlights the maternal style assumed by the exercise of power, emphasizing the attitude of listening to citizens' complaints and considers, furthermore, the political subject primarily as a victim whose complaint is to be "heard". The author claimed to not to understand the second part of Lacan's phrase, considering only the first part comprehensible: "politics is the unconscious," for politics consists of fantasies, dreams, failures and anxieties. In response, J.-A. Miller reminded us that this is not the case, that politics is not made of "fantasies, dreams, failures and anxieties", that this scope itself is entirely too large to specify the political. He stressed *if* the formulation "politics is the unconscious" is valid, *it is so only* in Freud's sense of politics, a politics hinging on the father. He notes that Lacan said, "the unconscious is politics," beginning not from the father but from the unconscious as that which is "to define." J.-A. Miller then proposes a series of reflections which find their start in this Lacanian sentence.

He first noted that it was Freud who wanted to reduce politics to the unconscious, as he focused on the terms, "identification, caesura, repression, including repression of *jouissance*." (3) Lacan, rather, takes his departure of the unconscious in accord with the famous aphorism: *the unconscious is structured like a language*.

J.-A. Miller linked this phrase with that of the political scientist Marcel Gauchet, from his newly published book *Democracy against Itself*. Miller said, "This is specifically where politics is: it is the place of a fracture of reality." At that time, emphasis was still placed on the victory of democracies after the collapse of the Berlin wall.

Thirteen years later, the moment is totally other: in 2014, Tony Blair gave a series of lectures under the title *Is Democracy Dead?* The atmosphere was not quite so depressing in 2002 with regard to the weakness of democracies, but even so M. Gauchet had already stressed that the triumph of democracies is no cause for

enthusiasm; rather, it calls for a certain depressive affect—one certainly more *light* than it is today. He saw the cause for this in the fact that in democracy the truth is never *One*, that it is divided into contrary opinions.

J.-A. Miller's third remark insisted on the trans-individual character of the unconscious as presented by Lacan. This is consistent with the statement that the *master's discourse is the discourse of the unconscious*. It extracts the unconscious from "the solipsistic sphere and puts it in that which we call 'the City', making it dependent on "History."

This provides the reflection that constitutes his fourth remark, that the city no longer exists, the political space of the city or of the nation-state being caught within globalization. What was made apparent by the fall of the Berlin Wall is the regime of the limitless.

The fifth point signals the end of the political value of transgressing sexual prohibitions and the transformation of these transgressions into new laws. This is part of the rise to the zenith of a civilization of *jouissance* as such, and corresponds to a sentence from Lacan's teaching: "where the essential term is that of *jouissance*, it is so insofar as it has no contrary." (4)

Also prescient for our time, in these lessons of 2002, is the emphasis of the political unconscious, starting from the meeting in May of 1967 when Lacan clearly advanced for the first time the proposition that *The Other is the body*, and not the mind, as some had believed: "The Other, when all is said and done, and if you have not already guessed it, the Other here, as it is written, is the body! [...] The fact that the body is made to inscribe something that is called the mark would avoid a lot of worries for everyone and the resifting of a lot of stupidities. The body is made to be marked. It has always been done. And the first beginnings of the gesture of love, is always to outline more or less this gesture a little bit." (5)

The body as Other will find its full development in the final teachings of Lacan, with the result that J.-A. Miller's conference presentation for the following congress of the AMP, a presentation entitled "The Unconscious and the Speaking Body," (6) exudes the will of Lacan to substitute the term *parlêtre* for the Freudian unconscious. I developed this year, in the "Lacanian Readings," a direction within this latter teaching — notably of and around Seminar XXIII — as inspired by this conference, and I refer you to the recordings that can be found on the site *Radio Lacan*. (7) Here, I would like to continue a number of points raised by J.-A. Miller in 2002 and see to what extent they announce his 2014 conference and the recent developments of his thought.

The approach *parlêtre* permits us to retrieve the phrase that "the unconscious is politics," starting from the inscription on the body, from the body event. This is what J.-A. Miller did in a recent text that he prepared following the attacks in January, evoking the reference to blasphemy: "the immediate data of consciousness' correlative with this carnal displeasure, this 'body event' (Lacan) which, in my hypothesis, affects the Muslim." (8) This perspective is opposed to liberal morality, which conceives the community as an aggregate of individual decisions out of the common dimension. Of course, it is universal contemporary liberalism that has relaunched the search for anything that may be called 'common' in the political landscape. It should be remembered that the term "common decency" is Orwellian, but beyond the particularities of the Orwellian perspective, note first that the body event we are talking about does not affect the body as the body of the individual, but the body of the subject of language, which is from the outset trans-individual. The speaking body always comes to oppose the body of the individual. It speaks and demonstrates discourse as a social bond that is inscribed on the body.

This body is also one that is mobilized in relation to the work of modernity, oscillating between the exaltation of free time away from work and exhaustion at work. The risk of burnout, still lodged in the catch-all of psychosocial risk, now wants to be identified as such. Borrowing the English term “burnout” designates the difficulty of legislating on the matter without allowing a master-signifier derived from the Anglo-Saxon sphere. That is, one could only touch upon the order of such categories of psychopathology by way of an Anglo-detour. Health and psychosocial bureaucracies are divided over who will be the master of the final appointment. “France is still far from an automatic recognition [...] of its list of occupational diseases [which] allow the sick branch of social security to save 4.5 billion euros. Above all, this would put the burden on employers, responsible for the working conditions of their employees and main financiers for the branch of work-related injuries and occupational diseases (ATMP). A scenario that becomes even more logical as the ATMP branch is ‘flourishing’ [:] in 2013, it had a positive balance of 600 million euros.” (9) Naming new categories of victims is part of the biopolitical powers of the State. This brings us to emphasize that the suffering body is not only trans-individual — it is also beyond the psychological dimension. To stress that the victim is involved in his misfortune is insufficient, as he can remain perfectly exterior to it. Lacan puts this point strongly apropos the victims of Nazism and the concentration camps. (10)

In the lesson of May 26th, 1969, from Seminar XVI entitled “Clinic of Perversion,” as that of Seminar XIV of May 10th, 1967 above mentioned, Lacan rises forcefully against a certain use of the categories of masochism and sadism. To account for what may appear as passivity, submission, which, as noted by Primo Levi, could take hold of the victims of the camps, there is no need to make recourse to masochism. “The game of the voice finds its full register here [...] escapes; its place is hidden by this amazing dominance of the *objet a*, but the *jouissance* on its part is nowhere to be found.” (11)

Finally note that the “common” which comes to be inscribed in the body is not reducible to a particularity in the sense of part of a whole. This is why the “universalist” particularity can also inscribe itself within the body in the realm of “malaise,” as we have seen for the malaise of blasphemy. “Universal desire” itself presupposes an inscription on the body, a body event, which arises in those reacting to the only proposal of some multiculturalists. Some of them want to return the Universalists to that which would only be an ideological lie made to persecute particular multiculturalists. (12)

Concluding thought: belief in the body event implies that we have only the choice between weakened belief in the body and the imaginary hole that it implies, and delusion. This clinical perspective is, at the same time, highly political. It marks the pretensions of the master’s discourse.

-Translated by Ilya Merlin & Mikhail Pozdniakov,

JE notes : the use of ‘bodily event’ has been changed to ‘body event’

June 27th, 2015

1. Conference held in Milan on the 12th of May, 2002, taken over by JAM for his course “The Lacanian orientation. Effort for poetry” in Paris and published under the title “Milanese intuitions” in two parts, in *Mental* 11 & 12.
2. Lacan J., Seminar XIV, “The logic of Fantasy”, unpublished.
3. Miller J-A., *The Lacanian orientation. Effort for poetry*”, lesson of May 15th, 2002, unpublished.
4. *Ibid.*

5. Lacan J. "The Logic of Fantasy", op. cit. May 10th, 1967.
6. Miller J-A., "The Unconscious and the Speaking body", available on www.wapol.org
7. Evening Lacanian Studies at the school of the Freudian cause, by Éric Laurent: <http://www.radiolacan.com>
8. Miller J-A., "The 'Common Decency' of the *Oumma*", Lacan Quotidien, No. 474, February 7, 2015. See <http://www.lacanquotidien.fr>
9. Cailhol A., "Recognizing burn-out, a long process" Libération, May 25th 2015.
10. Rose-Paule Vinciguerra has recently written on this point in a text published on an online blog, see: www.pipolnews.eu
11. Lacan J., Seminar XVI "On the Other to the other", 2006, p. 259.
12. Miller JA, "Response to Rancière", Lacan Quotidien, n° 501, 7 avril 2015. originally published in [Lacan Quotidian](http://www.lacanquotidien.fr)

Notes on availability of references by Julia Evans:

[1] « [L'inconscient, c'est la politique](http://www.hebdo-blog.fr/linconscient-cest-politique/) » - L'HEBDO-BLOG
www.hebdo-blog.fr/linconscient-cest-politique/

Extrait d' « Intuitions milanaises », publié dans Mental n°11. Texte qui reprend le cours de Jacques-Alain Miller du 15 mai 2002, « L'orientation lacanienne », Département de psychanalyse, Université Paris VIII.

[2] Seminar XIV : 10th May 1967 : For notes & availability see [Seminar XIV: The logic of phantasy: 1966-1967: begins 16th November 1966 : Jacques Lacan](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1455) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1455)
<http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1455> : pXIX 205-206 of Cormac Gallagher's translation : It is, undoubtedly, not something undisturbing or something that may not appear to us, on occasion, to require to be highlighted, to remark that one or other thing that may happen in the world, and for example, quite simply at the moment, in a certain little district of South West Asia. What is at stake? It is a matter of convincing people that they are quite wrong not to want to be admitted to the benefits of capitalism! They prefer to be rejected! It is starting from there, it seems, that there ought to be posed questions about certain meanings. And specifically the following, for example, which will show us - which will show us no doubt, but today is not the day that I will even take the first steps in this direction - that if Freud wrote somewhere that "anatomy is destiny", there is perhaps a moment, when people have come back to a sound perception of what Freud discovered for us, that it will be said - I am not even saying "politics is the unconscious" - but, quite simply, *the unconscious is politics!*

I mean that what binds men together, or what opposes them, is precisely to be justified by that whose logic we are trying for the moment to articulate. Because it is for want of this logical articulation that these slippages can be produced. This means that before noting the fact that in order to be rejected, for the "to be rejected" to be essential as a dimension for the neurotic, the following, in any case, is essential: **that he offers himself.**

Note : "Anatomy is destiny" is from 'On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love' : 1912 : Sigmund Freud

[?] Tony Blair : Is democracy dead?

a) [Tony Blair: For True Democracy, the Right to Vote Is Not Enough - The ...](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/04/opinion/tony-blair-is-democracy-dead.html)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/04/opinion/tony-blair-is-democracy-dead.html>

4 Dec 2014 - **Is Democracy Dead? Tony Blair: For True Democracy, the Right to Vote Is Not Enough ...** We have become complacent about **democracy.**

b) [Tony Blair says democracy isn't everything amid claims he is to step ...](#)

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/blair-to-step-down-as-middle-east-peace-envoy-10109812.html>

15 Mar 2015 - **Tony Blair** has questioned the value of **democracy** in the Middle East saying “effective government” is more important - amid reports that he is preparing to step down from his high-profile role as peace envoy to the region. Speaking at a conference on economic development in ...

[5] Seminar XIV : 10th May 1967 : For notes & availability see [Seminar XIV: The logic of phantasy: 1966-1967: begins 16th November 1966 : Jacques Lacan](#) or [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1455](#) :

pXIX 213 of Cormac Gallagher’s translation : At this point, then, what is it? What is this Other, the big one, there, with a capital O? What is its substance? Huh?

I allowed myself to say - for in truth, even though in truth, you must believe that I allow myself to say it less and less, because one no longer hears, anyway, I no longer hear: it no longer comes to my ears - I allowed myself to say, for a time, that I camouflaged under this locus of the Other, what is called agreeably and, after all, why not, the spirit. The trouble is that it is false.

The Other, when all is said and done, and if you have not already guessed it, the Other here, as it is written, is the **body!**

Why would one call something like a volume or an object, in so far as it is subject to the laws of movement, in general, like that, a body? Why should one speak about falling bodies? What a curious extension of the word “body”! What relation is there between a little ball which falls from the tower of Pisa and the body which is ours, if not that it is starting from the fact that it is first of all the body, our presence as animal body which is the first locus in which to put inscriptions, the first signifier, as everything is there to suggest to us in our experience; except, of course, that things always impassion us. When one speaks about a wound, one adds narcissistic and one thinks right away that this ought to annoy the subject, who naturally is an idiot!

Nobody imagines that what is interesting in a wound, is the scar.

The reading of the Bible could be there to remind us, with roses put at the bottom of the rushes where Jacob’s flocks are going to graze, that different devices to impose a mark on the body do not date from yesterday and are quite radical. That if one does not start from the idea that the hysterical symptom, under its simplest form, that of a “*ragade*” does not have to be considered as a mystery, but as the very principle of any signifying possibility. You do not have to rack your brains. The fact that the body is made to inscribe something that is called the mark would avoid a lot of worries for everyone and the resifting of a lot of stupidities. The body is made to be marked. It has always been done. And the first beginnings of the gesture of love, is always to outline more or less this gesture a little bit.

There you are. This having been said, what is the first effect, that most radical effect of this irruption of the One (in so far as it represents the sexual act), at the level of the body.

[6] [The Unconscious and the Speaking Body : Paris : 17th April 2014 : Jacques-Alain Miller](#) : see [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=11959](#) for notes and availability

[7]

[?] this ‘body event’ (Lacan) :

J. Lacan, «*Joyce le symptôme*», in *Autres Ecrits*, Paris, Seuil 2001, p. 569. : Joyce the Symptôme II is published in [Autres Écrits: 2001 : Jacques Lacan](#) : See [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=756](#) for details.

There are two versions of this – details of both and availability is given in the following.

[Joyce the Symptôm \(Sinthôme\) I & II : 16th June 1975 : Jacques Lacan](#) or [here](#).
<http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=11952>

There is currently no English translation of this. Here, I think, is the French: p569 :
Joyce est le premier à savoir bien escaboter pour avoir porté l'escabeau au degré de
consistance logique où il le maintient, art- guilleusement, je viens de le dire.

Laissons le symptôme à ce qu'il est : un événement de corps, lié à ce que : l'on l'a, l'on
l'a de l'air, l'on l'aire, de l'on l'a. Ça se chante à l'occasion et Joyce ne s'en prive pas.
Ainsi des individus qu'Aristote prend pour des corps, peuvent n'être rien que
symptômes eux-mêmes relativement à d'autres corps. Une femme par exemple, elle
est symptôme d'un autre corps.

See also The Mirror Stage : Information and availability [Mirror Stage: 1936, 1938, 1949, 1966: Jacques Lacan](#) or [here](#) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=303>

IN ENGLISH

Joyce le Symptôme [II] in Autres Écrits, p569 : See [Joyce the Symptôm \(Sinthôme\) I & II : 16th June 1975 : Jacques Lacan](#) or [here](#).

<http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=11952> : p11 of Dominick Hecq's translation, see www.Freud2Lacan.com, Let's leave the symptom at that which it is: an event of the
body intertwined with: Heigho! One's got it, seems to have it, sings it, genges and
laitymen. One has it. Ladida. Nice song. Joyce obviously enjoys the tune.

Thus it can well be that some individuals amongst those Aristotle mistakes for bodies
are by symptoms compared with other bodies. A woman, for instance, is the symptom
of another body.

If this is not the case, she remains a symptom, says the hysteric – the ultimate
symptom.

[9]

[?] lesson of May 26th, 1969, from Seminar XVI entitled “Clinic of Perversion,” as
that of Seminar XIV of May 10th, 1967 : For notes & availability see [Seminar XIV: The logic of phantasy: 1966-1967: begins 16th November 1966 : Jacques Lacan](#) or
[here](#) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1455> :

pXIX 204-205 of Cormac Gallagher's translation : Is it something of this order that is
at stake? It certainly seems not. Since everything that analytic experience brings us
concerning the stage that is described as oral makes many other dimensions intervene
in it, and specifically, this corporal dimension of oral aggression, of the need to bite
and of the fear of being devoured.

Is this “to be refused” then to be taken on this occasion as concerning the object? In
truth, we would easily see its justification being highlighted in the following: that *to
be refused* would be, in this register, properly speaking, to save oneself from
being^{SEP}(5) engulfed by the maternal partner.

It would also perhaps be a little bit too simple to answer in this way the question of
the status of the “to be refused”. And to say that it is too simple is sufficiently
underlined by something which is repeated twice in the lines that I have just read to
you, by Bergler, and which associates to this oral neurosis, as being essential to it, the
dimension of masochism. The “to be refused” in question is a defeated refusal, it is a
“humiliating refusal”, the author again writes elsewhere, and this is why he allows
himself to introduce the label of masochism, which he describes as “psychic
masochism” on this occasion, consecrating, in a way, a popular use of the term
masochism, which I am not saying that one or other text of Freud does not give a
pretext for introducing, but understood and taken in this use, which is now more and
more current, is properly speaking ruinous.

The allusion to the reference to the object, at the level of this refusal, is here what alone might justify the introduction of the dimension of masochism at this level. It is incorrect to say that what characterises masochism, is the painful aspect of a situation, assumed as such. To tackle things from this angle culminates in the abuse of making, as some do, the pseudo-masochist dimension, the essential register, for example, of the whole analytic relation. There is here a veritable perversion, as much of Freud's thinking as of the theory and the practice. And this is, properly speaking, unsustainable, when the dimension of masochism is defined, specifically, no doubt, by the fact that the subject assumes the position of an object, in the most accentuated sense that we give to the word *object*, in order to define it as this effect of falling and of waste, of remainder from the advent of the subject.

The fact that the masochist establishes a situation regulated in advance and regulated in its details, which can go as far as to put himself under the table, in the position of a dog, forms part of a production, of a scenario, which has its sense and its advantage and which, incontestably, is at the source of a gain of *jouissance*, whatever note we may or not add to it, concerning the maintenance, the respect and the integrity of the pleasure principle.

[p205]

That this *jouissance* is closely linked to a *manoeuvre* of the Other which, I would say, is most commonly expressed in the form of *contract* (when I say "of contract", I am saying of *written* contract), of something which dictates just as much to the Other - and much more to the Other than to the masochist himself - his whole behaviour - is what ought to instruct us about the relation which gives its specificity, its originality, to masochistic perversion and is supremely designed to illuminate for us, into its depths, the part that the Other - in the sense that I understand this term, I mean the Other with a capital O - plays in it. The Other, the locus in which there is deployed on this occasion a word which is a contract word.

To reduce the use of the term "masochism", after that, to being something which is presented as simply an exception, an aberration, to reaching the simplest pleasure, is something likely to generate every abuse, of which the first, of which the first is the following, for which, good God, I do not believe I am using too strong nor inappropriate a term, in picking it out in Bergler's lines, from one end to the other of this remarkable book, full of observations that are very thorough and altogether instructive, in picking out, nevertheless, this something that I would call an exasperation which is not far from producing a spiteful attitude with respect to the patient: all these people that he calls, that he calls as if this were a great wrong on their part, "injustice collectors"! As if, after all, we were in a world in which justice was such an ordinary state that you really would have to go out of your way to have to complain about something! These "injustice collectors", in whom, undoubtedly, he uncovers their most secret operation in the fact of having been rejected. But, after all, can we not put forward against Bergler this idea that in certain cases, after all, to be rejected - as we have it moreover sufficiently in phantasies, but that is something different, I am speaking here about reality -- it is perhaps better, from time to time, to be rejected than to be accepted too quickly! The encounter that one may have with one or other person, who asks for nothing better than to adopt you, is not always... the best solution is not always not to escape from it!

Why this partiality which, in a way, implies that it would be in the order, in the nature of things, taking them at their proper angle, to do everything necessary to be admitted.^[1]_[SEP] This supposing that "to be admitted" is always to be admitted to a benevolent table.

pXIX 206 of Cormac Gallagher's translation : But what motivates these needs which are expressed in these biases that are paradoxical and always so badly defined if one refers them purely and simply to the reality gain, collected or not in their train, if one omits this first essential stage, in the light of which alone (I mean, the stage) what emerges from these results in the real can be judged? It is the *logical articulation* of the position, the neurotic one in the present case, and, in fact, of all the others. Without a logical articulation which does not bring in any prejudice about what is to be wished for the subject, what do you know about it? What do you know about it, if the need ... if the subject needs to get married to this or that person? And if he has messed up his marriage at one or other turning point, whether it is not for him a piece of good luck? In other words, what are you interfering with? When the only thing that you have to deal with, is the logical structure of what is involved. Of what is involved specifically, as regards a position like the one in which - to describe it as the *wish to be refused* (désir d'être rejeté)- you have first of all to know what the subject is pursuing at this level. What is, for the neurotic, the necessity, the gain, perhaps, in being refused? And to pin to it, in addition, the term *masochist* is simply, on this occasion, to introduce into it a pejorative note, which is immediately followed - as I pointed out earlier - by a directive attitude of the analyst which may on occasion go as far as to be persecutory.

[11] Seminar XVI : 26th May 1969 : p259 of French text : See [Seminar XVI: From an Other to the other: 1968-1969: begins 13th November 1968: Jacques Lacan](#) and [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1457](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1457) for notes and availability.

Note, the session of 26th May 1969 does not exist in Cormac Gallagher's translation. I have searched the 21st May 1969 & 28th May 1969 and can find no reference.

However, Seminar XVI : 26th March 1969 : pXVI 10 of Cormac Gallagher's translation, gives: But the following is of no less interest. What then is the o-object in the sadomasochistic drive? Does it not seem to you that highlighting the prohibition proper to enjoyment, ought also to allow us to put back in its place what people believe to be the key of what is involved in sadomasochism, when they speak about playing with pain and immediately retract and say that after all, it is only amusing if the pain does not go too far. This sort of blindness, of lure, of false fright, of tickling the question reflecting in a way after all the level at which there remains everything that is practised in this kind of thing, does this not run the risk, is it not in fact the essential mask thanks to which there escapes what is involved in sadomasochistic perversion?

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