

"Body Event in Psychoanalysis"¹

Gil Caroz

In order to grasp what is a body event in psychoanalysis, we must first get an idea of what a body is in psychoanalysis. Let's begin with some remarks on the subject: what is a body in psychoanalysis?

Let me say first that the body we are talking about in psychoanalysis is a human body. When we speak of an animal, we do not use the word "body" but the word "organism".

The organism of the animal is a machine that operates according to a predetermined program, a knowledge which is called: instinct. When an animal is hungry, what he should do is registered as knowledge in the instinct, and he obeys to this knowledge. Concerning the activity of reproducing itself, and I am deliberately not using the word sexuality, the animal reacts to pheromones. (Pheromones are chemicals emitted by most animals, which act as messengers between individuals of the same species, transmitting information to another organism. This information functions particularly in sexual attraction). When the organism of a bitch is ready to be fertilized and emits pheromones, dogs that are coming to the area act in the same way as their heart beats. This is not a choice for them. They are subordinated to this behavior. They cannot decide not to come. They cannot have considerations like: I have to pay attention not to be too eager, I do not like blondes, she is too big for me, she is not rich enough, she scares me, I am not in the mood, etc. In order to make this kind of considerations, one must have language as an asset. So, dogs do not have these kind of considerations. They react to the presence of pheromones with a behavior of searching a contact with the bitch for a reproductive activity. Nothing comes to interfere or to prevent that. Instinct drives the dog to act in the most appropriate way, the one which is registered in the organism itself, in the same way a key fits in a lock (this is how Lacan says it somewhere). There is a preexisting program that says how it should work.

This is exactly what lacks in human beings: a program, which says how this should happen, an instinct. This is what Lacan says when he tells us that there is no sexual relation: there is no formula that tells how a man should approach a woman. In human beings, word and speech compensate for this lack of program, this lack of knowledge. However, word and speech, with all their ambiguities, are not as effective as instincts and so, they do not allow the same harmonious relationship between man and the world that surrounds him, as the harmonious relationship of the animal with its environment. The relation of the animal with the environment, regulated by the knowledge of instinct, is

¹ Presented in Dublin at the ICLO-NLS series: "The Knowing-How of Psychoanalysis: Clinical Conversations with members of the WAP", 15th October 2011.

not ambiguous at all; whereas man is condemned to the doubts generated by the signifier.

For example, a beautiful old Israeli song addressed to a woman, says: "When you say 'no', what do you mean? I am not sure. But your 'no' is so charming, that it seems to me more inviting than a 'yes'." In the 60s this beautiful song was not allowed to be played on the Israeli radio because women's organizations put political pressure by saying that this song encourages a disrespect of women. When a woman says 'no', said these organizations firmly, she means "no" and nothing else. But unfortunately, psychoanalysts know that things are not so simple. Sometimes saying 'no' is the only way to say 'yes'. This is the point made by Freud in his article about negation. Lacan also discusses the ambiguity of the signifier when he mentions, several times, the Jewish story of the two Polish Jews on the train, one of them asking desperately the other: "Why, why are you telling me that you're going to Lemberg, in order to make me believe that you are going to Krakow, when in fact you are actually going to Lemberg."

I think you are beginning to grasp that if there are events in the human body, it is because there is always something wrong with Man, and this thing which does not function in a smooth way brakes into the routine course of the things of the body. This burst is an event. In the animal's organism, there are no body events because the organism of the animal proceeds according to the instincts predetermined program. If the key fits into the lock, it works each and every time; while in humans, there is never a key that corresponds to the lock, and this because of the language.

Let's consider things from another angle. If we consider that Man is an animal that has language at his disposal, we must add that man is the only living creature who knows *jouissance*. An animal does not know *jouissance*. *Jouissance*, although is close to the the living being, is also conditioned by language. This is the meaning of Lacan's saying in *Seminar 20*, that the truth is sister of *jouissance*. The truth which is of the symbolic, an articulation of signifiers, always goes hand in hand with *jouissance*. This is also a condition of psychoanalysis: psychoanalysis is a practice in which the subject feels a pleasure or even *jouissance* when he tells truths.

Jouissance is an excess, an excess of pleasure or displeasure that exceeds the necessities of survival of the organism. Pleasure and displeasure are in the proper functioning of the body. We eat in order not to be hungry, and it gives us a certain pleasure. But if we eat too much or too little, which is almost always the case (nobody has a 'normal' relationship to food), we are in the register of *jouissance*. And this "too much" or "too little" goes along with the signifier, in its symbolic or imaginary version. The obese eats too much to fill a void or a psychological lack of love. The anorexic patient eats nothing, that is to say, she shows to her mother that beyond body care, she wants her mother to give her love, that is to say a symbolic gift and not a substantial one.

So, *jouissance* does not belong to the signifier, to the symbolic, it belongs to

the register of the living being. What is alive in human beings. In animals there is no *jouissance*, because there is no excess. Everything happens in a correspondence with its needs and a total identification to its organism. The animal *is* its organism, whereas man is not his body, he *has* a body. And this body not always corresponds to the idea that the subject has about himself. It is in this space, between what a man thinks of himself (or his being) and his body, that the body event appears. *Jouissance* is a body event because it is perceived by the subject as strange to the body image and intimate to the subject at the same time. It comes from outside, and yet it is internal. We have remarkable clinical examples of this phenomenon: first in Little Hans' case, who experiences his first erection as a horror which does not belong to him, which is external. Another example is that of Schreber who experiences a feminine *jouissance*, that of the phrase "it would be wonderful to be a woman in the sexual act". But this *jouissance* also threatens the masculine identification that supports his entire body.

Let's summarize what we have said so far, namely, that the body event is a burst of language and *jouissance* in the smooth functioning of the organism. In saying this, we say that the body event participates in the formation of the symptom in the analytical sense of the word. This can be seen with greater clarity in the symptoms of hysterical conversion. An organ is eroticized, that is to say, it is invested with *jouissance* in a way that it is made dysfunctional and, at the same time, it reflects a truth. The young woman whose hand is paralyzed while medically nothing can explain it, reflects a *jouissance* of the superego, a *jouissance* to be punished. And at the same time, the paralyzed hand tells a message of truth: the young woman's affect of guilt, due to an intense practice of masturbation.

But the event is not the symptom itself. The symptom is a long-term construction, a repetition of the inaugural traumatic event. Another way of putting it is that trauma is the paradigm of the event, after which it will repeat itself under the form of a symptom. Speaking of trauma, we have to distinguish the Freudian and Lacanian use of this term. For Freud, trauma is linked to an event in the sense of an accident, a bad encounter, etc. which you can describe as a scene in reality, even though it depends on the signifier. The case of Emma, best known as the 'proton-pseudos' case, is an example of it. This case shows the way in which signifier and *jouissance* are tied, and in particular it is a case where one can see a *jouissance* that precedes the signifier. As you may remember, the young girl returns three times to the store where the merchant caresses her genitals through her clothes. These are moments of *jouissance*, which she cannot yet put into words. It is only retroactively, retrospectively, when she has the words to speak this moment of *jouissance*, that it becomes traumatic: a burst in the life of an innocent little girl. We can see how for Freud signifier and *jouissance* depend on each other in the creation of the event. What constitutes the event as traumatic is the memory of the event in reality.

Lacan follows Freud's path, but somehow purifies the Freudian theory of trauma. He empties it of the drama and the story that surrounds it, and makes

of the trauma a moment of encounter between the body and a trace of the signifier. This moment of encounter, an archaic moment, precedes any sense or signification. In order to speak about this moment of encounter between the signifier and the body, Lacan makes a particular use of the term "mother tongue", making it equivalent to the care of the mother, as it introduces the child into the world of sexuality. The constitution of erogenous zones is mixed with language such as transmitted by the mother's expectations and care. This language bears the singularity of the private language of the family, which is different from the public language whose code is the big Other. If the unconscious interprets the real, the mother tongue precedes it as a primordial interpretation, a first kick ('*coup d'envoi*') of the symbolic system, a *lalangue*. Of course, for us, this original moment cannot be isolated as such, because the symbolic big Other is always already there. These early signs are not even the S1 that we can grasp in analysis.