



# THE REAL OF THE BODY AS AN EFFECT OF LANGUAGE

## ALEXANDRE STEVENS



## PRÉCIS

In this conference Stevens develops Lacan's notion of the Sinthome as the language one learns to speak that has effects on the body. These effects or marks left on the body by language, entangle the speaking being. He traces the concept of the body in Freud and Lacan, and in the three registers to situate which body are we talking about when thinking about the sinthome. The body will no longer be just an image or taken in a symbolic order or the place of partial jouissances of the body linked to bits of real. In Lacan's final moment of theorization about the body the sinthome and its repetition as real of the body will be the mainstay and wellspring of the symbolic. The Other of the signifier One, without meaning, is the body, the place where the effects of the jouissance of the S1 are written. The real of jouissance, opaque to meaning, is here this conjunction between the One and the body, the place of a mark of trauma on the body that led Lacan to the invention of the writing of the sinthome and its repetition, the iteration of a particular libidinal trait, in Freudian terms, a fixation, a One of jouissance always returning to the same place. This One, out of meaning, does not mean there is no possible articulation, it will be necessary to read the letter in its materiality to catch hold of the body. The path of analysis will consist in knowing about this knotting of the body in the sinthome, knowing found in reading and not in understanding.

*Liliana Kruszel*

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**Alexandre Stevens** is a psychoanalyst with practices in Brussels and Paris. He is a member of the École de la Cause Freudienne (ECF), the New Lacanian School (NLS) and the World Association of Psychoanalysis (WAP), and he is currently the President of the NLS (2020-2022). Alexandre Stevens is a Coordinator and Faculty at the Brussels Clinical Section. He is a psychiatrist who founded in 1982 an institution for children with severe difficulties, particularly autistic, Le Courtil.

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# THE REAL OF THE BODY AS AN EFFECT OF LANGUAGE

I would like to orient myself in this presentation with a sentence from Lacan in a session of his last Seminar entitled, *The Moment to Conclude*.<sup>1</sup> I quote him and comment. Quote: “Analysis does not consist in being freed from one’s sinthomes, since that is how I write symptom. Analysis consists in knowing why one is entangled by them.”

Comment: The sinthome, written like this s.i.n.t.h.o.m.e, is a name of the real in Lacan. The sinthome as what is the most real for the speaking being. And Lacan goes on saying, “This happens because there is the Symbolic.” That is to say – I understand it this way – that the symbolic is what allows, or provokes, the constitution of this real sinthome.

I continue with Lacan’s quotation, “The Symbolic is language; one learns to speak and this leaves traces. This leaves traces which are nothing other than the sinthome and analysis consists (...) in realising why one has these sinthomes, so that analysis is linked to knowledge.” That is to say that language has an effect on the body, marks the body with traces that entangle the speaking being and which are the sinthome, a real effect. It is clear here that Lacan takes the unconscious on the side of the real. And also, then, that the real of the body is an effect of language.

This is the position of the last Lacan. I would like to examine the place of the body in relation to the real in the course of his teaching.

## 1. WHICH BODY?

When we talk about the body in psychoanalysis we must distinguish which body we are talking about. Are we talking about the imaginary body, the symbolic body or the body as real?

There is a first approach to the body as real that appears in Freud as in Lacan. It is the organism as real, the body of organs, the biological body.

In Freud we find a series of comments that suggest this. Among other things,<sup>2</sup> we can quote the well-known expression, “(a)natomy is destiny.” He uses it twice. First to explain the drive’s fixation to some object, such as the persistence in sexuality of “coprophilic instinctual components.”<sup>3</sup> He explains them by the anatomical localisation of the genital organs “inter urinas and faeces” in humans. The second time he uses this expression is in the text, *Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex*, to distinguish the response of the girl from that of the boy in the resolution of the Oedipus complex.<sup>4</sup>

But Serge Cottet remarks in a published text that anatomy seems to be the real of the body in this Freudian expression, but that in fact the sexualised body is structured by the symbolic for Freud. The difference between boys and girls is indeed played out in the mode in which the Oedipus complex intervenes, that is to say in the symbolic.

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1 Jacques Lacan. Seminar 1977-78, *The Moment to Conclude*, 10.1.78, trans., Gallagher, Cormac.

2 Freud also refers to neurones, for example in his “Project for a Scientific Psychology,” to describe the psychic apparatus, but at the same time he emphasises the function of the psyche as related to language. These references are rather to be taken as a sign that Freud wanted to articulate his invention in relation to the science of his time.

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3 SE XI, p 189

4 SE XIX, p 178

In Lacan's texts we find a similar approach in the mirror stage. We can consider, in this text, that the subject is, "affected by two discordant bodies."<sup>5</sup> According to Jacques-Alain Miller's expression in his text "*Biologie lacanienne*", the two bodies are the organism as real and the body grasped in its unity as an image. The body in its initial presence, as pure organism, as real, is fragmented and it is through the image that it is made One, a wholly imaginary One.

But it is not so much on the side of the organism that we should look for a real as conceived in psychoanalysis.

## 2. IN FREUD

It seems to me that in Freud we can specify the link between psychoanalysis and the body on two levels. First there is the constitution of a certain imaginary unity of the body, the one that Lacan will specify in his Mirror Stage, which is already present in Freud's conception of the ego. And secondly there is in Freud an approach to the real in the body with the term 'drive', a real thus situated more in line with the lacanian definition of this term.

The Ego, as presented by Freud in his text, *The Ego and the Id*<sup>6</sup>, is an agency of great heterogeneity. It includes the perception-consciousness system and the preconscious, but also presents itself (the ego) as having an unconscious part, the censor subject. It is also a unifying and alienating image of the body. And finally, it is a set of identifications – very heterogeneous then.

By the time Freud arrives at his second topic, the ego has become above all corporeal. It is not only a part of the id transformed by the Pc-Cs system, it is also linked to the body itself and to the sensations that the body experiences. It is a surface being; it is the image of the body as Lacan will develop it in *The Mirror Stage*. It is the axis marked a-a' on schema L. It is a unifying image, the efficiency of which can be clearly identified by its failure in the schizophrenic when, because it is not constituted, it leaves the body fragmented.

"The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego."<sup>7</sup> This is what Freud wrote in *The Ego and the Id*. But this unifying image is always truncated. Of course, it is not yet Lacan's mirror stage, because here it is not really a matter of an alienating image constructed on the basis of an external image (in the mirror) and thus on the image of another, but it is the body constructed as a unifying image. And he concludes this chapter by repeating and thus insisting, "the conscious ego (...) is first and foremost a body-ego."<sup>8</sup>

The other approach to the body taken by Freud is on the side of the real, with the drive. The id is logically first, as the place of drive, of jouissance, and the ego is itself a part of the id placed at the service of the reality principle, through a confrontation with the outside world. We can, of course, see a part of alienation in this intervention of the outside world, but it is not so logically precise as in the Mirror Stage.

In other words, for Freud, first there is the id, and then "a part of the id (...) [that] has been modified by the direct influence of the external world,"<sup>9</sup> that is, the ego. In the light of Jacques-Alain Miller's course, *L'Être et l'Un*<sup>10</sup>, we can say that there is, first of all, the One all alone. The id is perhaps a first way of approaching the *Yad'lun*, a Lacanian neologism translated by Bruce Fink in English as, "(t)here is such a thing as One," as the pure existence of the One, formulated in the last period of Lacan's teaching.

The body thus appears in this Freudian text in two forms: the imaginary body which is the ego-body, image and unifying form, and also the real body which is the id, the place of drives. We can talk about two bodies in Freud's work: the ego and the id, the image and the drive. As Jacques-Alain Miller puts it, "What Lacan calls the body is the incarnation of the Freudian id, it is — I say it first in French, "*le corps en tant qu'il se jouit*" — "the body in so far as it enjoys itself."<sup>11</sup> It is the link that one can see from Freud to the last Lacan. But Lacan will start his approach of the body with the image.

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5 J.-A. Miller, "Biologie lacanienne et événement de corps", *La Cause freudienne*, n°44, p.20  
6 SE XIX

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7 SE XIX p 26  
8 SE XIX p 27  
9 SE XIX p 25  
10 JAM, *L'Être et l'Un* (18 May 2011)  
11 JAM, *L'Être et l'Un*, *ibid*

### 3. THE BODY AS IMAGE

I quote Miller in his course *L'Être et l'Un*, "The most obvious characteristic of the first Lacan is a triumphalist optimism characterized by the domination of the symbolic over the imaginary, which contrasts with the terrible pessimism of his last teaching. Jouissance — in the first period of Lacan's teaching — did not strictly speaking enter into the real but was placed on the side of the imaginary. (...) the body was only considered on the basis of its form, which governed its jouissance."<sup>12</sup> And indeed in this mirror stage, Lacan describes the "illuminative mimicry" and the "jubilant activity" linked to the discovery of his body image<sup>13</sup> by the subject. These are all terms that evoke a jouissance of the body. And it is the image, the perception of this form, that thus commands the jouissance of the body, a jouissance that Lacan situates in the imaginary at that time.

And furthermore, as Jacques-Alain Miller points out in Lacan's study of Schreber's case, the jouissance of the body is still (or once again) situated at the level of the image. This is what Lacan refers to as "transsexualist jouissance" in Schema I.<sup>14</sup> Transsexualist jouissance is a jouissance of the particular image of an idealised body constructed in the Schreberian delusion. This imaginary body is the one on which the narcissistic jouissance of the subject is based.

The body is thus situated as an image and more precisely as the place where one experiences a jouissance of this alienating image. Of course, this image is subject to the displacement of the signifier, or as Jacques-Alain Miller says, "only shadows and reflections taken up in the ballet of symbolic terms".<sup>15</sup>

At this first moment of Lacan's teaching there is a certain exclusion of the real, which is what always returns to the same place. This real is, at that time, disqualified and stupid, like the stars that always return to the same place.

Here then, the body that psychoanalysis is concerned

with is not real, it is a constituted and constitutive image since it is, "the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form."<sup>16</sup> That's what Lacan says in *The Mirror Stage*. And in the whole of this first period of Lacan's teaching the symbolic will appear as determining the imaginary.

Thus in a first stage of Lacan's teaching the status of jouissance is imaginary, but it consists in a certain effect on the body, an effect that is somehow real.

### 4. THE SYMBOLIC ORDER AS REAL

And the symbolic order will gradually impose itself as the cause. But, "(t)he real is cause," says Miller.<sup>17</sup> Only what causes an effect can be said to be real.

And what Miller calls a "real-order"<sup>18</sup> is the effectiveness of the symbolic law that operates as a real that has effects. We think here of the schemas of the purloined letter. It is the real supremacy of the symbolic.

This symbolic order imposes its effects automatically. The signifier introduces possibilities and impossibilities. And it has an effect on the subject's body. Lacan thus points out the effect of feminisation that the letter has on the body of the one who holds it.

But the power of the signifier is essentially to have a mortifying effect. "The symbol first manifests itself as the killing of the thing,"<sup>19</sup> says Lacan in "The Function and Field." It is this death that constitutes "the endless perpetuation of [...] desire," and that transcends the pure living animal. "Empedocles, by throwing himself into Mount Etna, leaves forever present in the memory of men the symbolic act of his being-towards-death."<sup>20</sup> This is from Lacan in the same text. It is the double effect of the signifier: symbolic death in life and symbolic life in death.

In *Radiophonie* Lacan again affirms that it is the symbolic that gives a body to the subject. I quote him, "(t)he one whose being which is supported by it [the body of the symbolic] does not know that it is

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12 JAM, *L'être et l'Un* [T.N. Cf. Jacques-Alain Miller, "Progrès en psychanalyse assez lente", *La Cause Freudienne* 78 (2011), p. 175. (pp.151-206).]

13 JL *The Mirror Stage*, *Écrits* p 75-76

14 JL *Écrits* p 476

15 JAM, *L'être et l'Un*, p 26: "qu'ombres et reflets maniés par le ballet des termes symboliques" [!]

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16 JL *Écrits*, p. 76

17 JAM, *L'être et l'Un*, cours 2 (p 19)

18 JAM, *L'être et l'Un*, (p 33)

19 Lacan J., "The Function and Field", *op.cit.* 262.

20 *Ibid.* p.263.

language which grants it to him, to the point where he would not be there since he could not talk about it.”<sup>21</sup> It is language as the condition to have a body.

But the relationship of the body to the symbolic has already changed in *Radiophonie*. Previously the structure had a disembodiment effect, whereas “(t)he body (...) is now grasped by direct incorporation of the symbolic,” as Eric Laurent says in *L’envers de la biopolitique*.<sup>22</sup> The disembodiment is a mortification effect while the incorporation has an effect of jouissance.

In the meantime, the status of enjoyment has been changed. And the body comes to life, shall we say.

## 5. A BODY SEIZED BY BITS OF THE REAL

As soon as the status of jouissance is modified in Lacan the body becomes real or at least marked by bits of real. As Miller remarks, “once jouissance was no longer held to be the preserve of narcissism, another body, one not reduced to its specular image, became its support.”<sup>23</sup>

In *Seminar XI* another meaning of the real appears. With the distinction between two types of repetition, *αυτοματων* and *τυχη* (terms he took from Aristotle) he gives a new meaning to the real. Automaton is the signifying repetition that obeys the symbolic order, whereas *tuche* is the irruption of a real, a chance encounter, which does not obey the symbolic order.

The automaton is subject to a symbolic order. The signifier insists, returns, repeats itself. It is repetition as Lacan first conceived it, with Freud, a repetition of the signifier. *Tuche* is a completely different kind of repetition. It is no longer a repetition in the symbolic order. It is the repetition of a trauma. It is the real that is the principle of this repetition that occurs as if by chance. “This, as if by chance” says Miller, “already announces what Lacan will emphasise in his very last teaching, that the real is without law.” And he adds, that “‘Real-order’ comes to be opposed by ‘real-trauma’, that is, the real as inassimilable.”<sup>24</sup> The real-trauma, that of the *tuche*, is a new effectivity, which puts a

spoke (unrayon) in the wheel of the symbolic order.

This has effects on what can be said about the body in psychoanalysis. The body no longer appears only as an image or taken in a symbolic order, but also as the place of a different, partial jouissance of the body, linked to bits of real. This is what gives the object little a its rightful place: bits of real, bits of jouissance. They are non-eliminable remainders, which also refers us to the symptomatic remainders that Freud found resistant to analysis.

Jacques-Alain Miller specifies that it is also the moment when Lacan took *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* seriously.<sup>25</sup> What changes in this text, in relation to Freud’s previous writings, is the status of the symptom. In his earlier texts, it is a question of discovering the meaning of the symptom, of deciphering it, of extracting the truth from it. None of this is still the case in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*. Now it is a question of clarifying the function of the symptom. As Freud said, “(a) symptom is a sign of, and a substitute for, an instinctual satisfaction which has remained in abeyance; it is the consequence of the process of repression.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, the satisfaction of the drive can only be obtained through the symptom. In Lacanian terms, the jouissance is that of the symptom. It is easy to understand why Miller considers that this text by Freud opens the way towards the last Lacan.

But Freud limits his conception of the end of the analysis to pinpointing the mode of castration at stake for each of the sexes, that is to say, to the formulation of the phallus as symbolic. There is no way for him to go beyond this, which leads him to propose a finite and an infinite analysis, in other words, an analysis that must always be returned to periodically. It is in one of his last texts, *Analysis terminable and Intermittible*.<sup>27</sup> This is how Freud comes to a halt on the way towards the formulation of this real of the body.

To go beyond this point, “it is necessary to re-establish a gap between the unconscious and the id. The question then becomes that of the relation between

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21 JL Radiophonie, Q2, translation Anthony Chadwick

22 Eric Laurent, *L’envers de la biopolitique*, p 31

23 JAM, *Lêtre et l’Un*.

24 JAM, *Lêtre et l’Un*.

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25 JAM, *Lêtre et l’Un*.

26 SE XX, p 91

27 SE XXIII, p 216-253

the unconscious and the id.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, it is a question of not confusing the unconscious of Freud's first topic with the id of the second topic. The unconscious is situated on the basis of the signifier and develops in the signifying equivocations. The id must be separated from it. It is the place of drives, of *jouissance*, therefore, which does not respond to the laws of the signifier. The body is the body traversed by the drives.

At this moment in Lacan the little *a* appeared as a piece of the real. But this moment stops when Lacan reduces the object little *a* to a semblant. I quote Miller, “(t)his logical moment will find its stopping point in Seminar XX *Encore*, Chapter VIII, when Lacan says that the object is “unable (...) to sustain itself in approaching the real.”<sup>29</sup> This is where the last Lacan begins.

## 6. THE SINTHOME

This is what brings us to the last period of Lacan's teaching. I quote Miller, “(t)here is a second version of the real, not the bits of real, but the one that Lacan calls the *sinthome* — with the spelling s.i.n.t.h.o.m.e. It is really something else, since the *sinthome* is a system well beyond the bits of real. The *sinthome* is the real and its repetition. (...) The real itself thus appears, as the mainstay and wellspring of the symbolic.”<sup>30</sup> Repetition thus comes from the real.

To get to this point, and make the link between *jouissance* and the real, several things were required. And the first of these was a *jouissance* not linked to the prohibition. In Freud, *jouissance* is linked to Oedipal prohibition. And for Lacan also *jouissance* will be linked for a long time to what is forbidden. A sentence in the *Écrits* testifies to this. It is on page 700 of the English edition, “(c)astration means that *jouissance* has to be refused in order to be attained on the inverse scale of the Law of desire.”<sup>31</sup>

It can be attained only if it is refused. *Jouissance* was thus linked to desire. One desires the object especially as the law prohibits it. The law of desire is that which creates desire by prohibition. And *jouissance* is thus situated on the basis of the prohibition, on the basis

of a saying “no”, in other words it is situated within an oedipal framework. At that time, *jouissance* thus remained linked to its phallic expression.

What changes in his last teaching is that *jouissance*, as real, takes first place. As Miller says in *L'Être et l'Un*, “(i)t is precisely beyond prohibition that Lacan could think of positivized *jouissance* as the body in so far as it enjoys itself (*celle d'un corps qui se jouit*). The difference is perceptible - *jouissance* is no longer attached to a prohibition, it is a body event.”<sup>32</sup> The body event is not related to desire. It is not a signifying repetition of this dialectic of desire. The *jouissance* here is that of trauma, of a contingent shock. It is a chance encounter, not subject to the law of desire. Miller adds, “(i)t is no longer bound in a dialectic but is the object of a fixation.”<sup>33</sup> The body event is a letter of *jouissance*.

Lacan was only able to formulate feminine *jouissance* after having cleared *jouissance* of its link to prohibition. In this course Miller will extend this feminine *jouissance* to *jouissance* as such, linked to what Freud calls “fixation”. Regarding this *jouissance* of the body here, note that it is not simply a body in so far as it enjoys, but a body in so far as it enjoys itself (in French it is not “*il jouit*” but “*il se jouit*”). It is not at all the same thing, since this body that enjoys itself is therefore the body of autoeroticism. That is the real of the body in the last Lacan.

What Lacan calls *Yad'lun* that is, “there is such a thing as One,” is the One of existence, pure real of the signifier One all alone, without meaning, that is to say without the two. Therefore, there is no sexual relation, no two. This situates the body in the series of the three affirmations:

- 1st: *Yad'lun*. That is, there is the One, the One exists.<sup>34</sup>
- 2nd: There is no sexual relation.
- 3rd: There is the body, that is, it exists.

Miller puts it like this, “(t)he body appears here as the Other of the signifier, which is what Lacan implied by saying that the Other is the body.”<sup>35</sup> Before this, the Other of the signifier was the Other of truth, it is the

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28 JAM, *L'être et l'Un*.

29 JAM, *L'être et l'Un*.

30 JAM, *L'être et l'Un*.

31 JL, *Écrits* p 700

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32 JAM, *L'être et l'Un*.

33 JAM, *L'être et l'Un*.

34 *Yad'lun* is usually translated as: "there is something of One" or even, as Fink does, "There is such a thing as One."

35 JAM, *L'être et l'Un*.

meaning of the paternal metaphor. I remind you that it is the definition of the Name-of-the-father given in the *Écrits*, “(t)he signifier which, in the Other, qua locus of the signifier, is the signifier of the Other qua locus of the law.”<sup>36</sup> Now, in the last Lacan, the Other of the signifier One, without meaning, is the body. The Other of truth is the place where meaning is said. The Other of the body is the place where the effect of jouissance of the S1 is written. The real of jouissance is this conjunction of the One and the body.

This jouissance, opaque to meaning, linked to the mark of trauma on the body, led Lacan to “invent the writing of the sinthome.”<sup>37</sup> The sinthome will be the repetition, an iteration of this mark of jouissance. And Jacques-Alain Miller brings it closer to the Freudian concept of fixation. As Freud says in *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*, when speaking about the development of the libido, “even in normal development the transformation is never complete and residues of earlier libidinal fixations may still be retained in the final configuration.”<sup>38</sup> In Freud, fixation is always linked to the repetition of a particular libidinal trait. This can be found in many places in his work, although he did not give this term much scope. It was Lacan who in fact developed this notion in the sinthome. And Miller adds, “(w)hat point of fixation means is that there is a One of jouissance, always returning to the same place.”<sup>39</sup> A One that produces a symptomatic re-iteration.

The One alone, which here determines the sinthome in its repetition, is meaningless, as meaning necessarily implies the two of the signifying dialectic. However, this out of meaning, this *hors-sens*, does not mean that we see nothing, that there is no possible articulation. As Miller says, “in order to be heretical, analytical practice supposes, not that we leave the field of language, but that we attune ourselves to its material part, to the letter instead of being.”<sup>40</sup> Being, that is the signifying articulation with the meaning. It is therefore a matter of reading the letter to catch hold of the body (*pour attraper le corps*).

Reading is not the same as understanding, it is rather grasping a logic at work. In *Le Moment de Conclure*, Lacan says, “(t)here is surely writing in the unconscious, if only because the dream, (...) the lapses and even the witticism are defined by the readable. (...) The readable, that is what knowledge consists of.”

And he adds a note concerning the analytical act: “The supposed-to-know-how-to-read-otherwise.”



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36 JL, *Écrits* (en), p 485  
37 JAM, *L'être et l'Un*, p 94  
38 SE XXIII, p 229  
39 JAM, *L'être et l'Un*  
40 JAM, *L'être et l'Un*



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Liliana Kruszel, *Editor*

Pierre-Gilles Guéguen, *Advisor*

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