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Body Betrayal

This paper recounts the difficulty a young homosexual male experienced on entering analysis. This difficulty was centered around an inexplicable fear of talking about his sexuality, both during the analytical session and outside it. Such talk, he felt, "would betray the body"

In the first interview he referred to a vague discomfort related to his job: late arrivals, delays in delivering reports, difficulties with commitments and with action. This discomfort was accompanied by a feeling of loneliness and a tendency toward "lethargy," laziness, and indefiniteness. "All I do is complain," he said. In later interviews he recounted that during the time he needed to arrive punctually for his commitments, he could not resist the impulse to contemplate his nude body in a mirror and remember his mother who was a seamstress by profession. As a child he accompanied her to her clients' home. He described himself on these visits as "a lovely little thing for my mother to show off".

When he was still quite young, his mother abandoned the family for another man. This obliged his father to take charge of the children. She visited them twice a week. From this point on, he remembers two things: the father's persistent ineffective reproaches of the mother for having abandoned the family; and the onset of his contemplating his body in the mirror with the secret hope of being rescued by his mother. Instead of being rescued, something else happened. A profound process of identification with his mother resulted in a growing tendency toward feminization.

This identification resolved his intense bond with his mother and established the basis of his future libidinal object-choice. From this moment on, the presence of the phallus would be required of his partner. From an individual case one could say that we obtain the universal principle of the Freudian male homosexual: identification

with the phallic mother creates denial of the castration of the Other and culminates in a narcissistic object-choice. Such a lover is supposed to love him as his mother had done in the past.

It is on precisely this aspect of the love object-choice that the particular details of this case begin to unfold. The young man made his choices mainly in pornographic movie houses, specifically during the lapse of time between his entrance into the theater and the beginning of the projection of the film. During this time there was still enough light for him to look for the *regard* of the other which would reveal his sexual requirement: the presence of the phallus. Once the mutual recognition had taken place, he waited for the chosen one to sit at his side and begin to masturbate him. If the "meeting of the eyes," as he called it, did not occur, he would leave the theater and wait for the next show.

Some time later, in associating with his sexual activity at the movies, he related that his father was a photographer who had worked as a cameraman. Picture-taking had begun as a hobby for which, as he tells it, his father had a great deal of talent. Later, pressured by his financial situation, he became a professional photographer. He remembered that his father would show him his work saying, "Look for the detail and when you find it, take the picture." He criticized his father for having left artistic photography. He reproached his father in a similar way to how he reproached himself: his father was "a mediocre person incapable of completing, or coming out of his lethargy, always complaining about everything, and doing nothing to change anything."

The reason he gave for preferring to find men at porno movies was due to the fact that there was no need to speak. Everything happened in silence. If he spoke, especially about his sexuality, he became anxious. He felt he was betraying his body. "My body is an ideal. I prefer not to talk about it, only to have more and more contacts, even though this condemns me to absolute loneliness. I reassert myself when I think that I am a body, and I allow myself to be contemplated and masturbated".

He always stopped at this point without producing any associations. He was visibly anxious. It seemed evident to me that not only was there something he did not want to know there was something he wanted to protect as well: a pact with his mother. Betrayal of his body meant betrayal of his mother. This pact protected them both from castration. Somehow this man knew that if he placed the symbolic dimension of his body at stake *by speaking about it*, the pact would be broken. The horror of knowing about maternal castration

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would come through. He had to maintain himself as an "ideal" in order to give full value to the body-phallus equation, and offer this to his mother as a solution to the problem of castration.

On the other hand, this delicate balance was maintained by the means of eye-contact. In this case eye-contact helped to find pulsional satisfaction via the scenes in the film where the young man could perceive the instant of the gaze (regard) which produced the encounter or connection between two people. This aspect of eye-contact seemed to be related to the young man's supposition that his father obtained libidinal jouissance through photography.

My patient had successfully maintained this balance until the moment he began to go out with a man who courted him as if he were a woman. As he fell in love, his anxiety and discomfort regarding his body began to increase. He needed to offer his body to his lover for contemplation in order to calm down. I believe this is the moment when the phantasm enters the game as action. Both "being contemplated" and "being masturbated" reveal that he transforms his being as a subject to place himself instead as an object. Through his rituals in front of the mirror, he recreated objects that his mother looked at while she dressed, those objects of her desire for which he substituted his body. During the precise moment when he should have been preparing for action (at work, etc.), instead he contemplated his body in the mirror. This was his basic maneuver to recover the lost object in the imaginary. And it is the reason he could not get ready for action, or naturally assume certain tasks. This would have been the same as renouncing his mother. The word by which he defines his life is "lethargy". This indicates, certainly, that this man is detained in time in an unfinished mourning for his mother. Such mourning is based on a true loss in the real which organizes both his choice of homosexual object and the symptoms of which he complains.

In the destitution of this defective identification perhaps we can find, paradoxically, the possibility of changing his homosexuality, only because he is not comfortable with this choice. At one point he fell in love with a woman who treated him like a mother. Although he had a sexual relationship with this woman, he says that that part of the relationship was not what interested him about her. This choice, which he said he made for narcissistic reasons, did not change his homosexual object-choice. After a short time he left her because he could not stand her interest in her own femininity. He did not want to know anything about the difference between woman and mother. He did not even want to visit his own mother.

By not seeing his mother, he could ignore the fact that she desired someone other than him. For this young man, Woman can only exist as mother. As a woman in her own right she becomes a traitor.

All this material was related during the preliminary interviews which took place over several months. No matter how revealing these interviews were regarding the subject's relationship to castration, his libidinal organization, his object-choice, and even the articulation of these elements in his history, I must say that up to this point he had not yet entered into analysis. The few *questions* he asked and the few associations he made during the sessions really had no echo, made no impact on him. It seemed that he came to see an analyst with the sole purpose of regaining his balance. Especially at the beginning of these interviews he arrived late, used up important time taking off his jacket or just looking around the office. When he spoke, he spoke slowly, choosing his words very carefully, as if he were observing himself and describing what he saw. He produced no associations from the information he gave me which might indicate a connection between the "subject supposed to know" and his unconscious knowledge. Indeed, when a patient does not want to risk any knowledge, how can there be subjective modification?

The step which analysts are always waiting for in order that an analysis may begin was missing: the step from the complaint of suffering to the analytic symptom itself. I thought he had yet to create a symptom and that is why I continued patiently to see him. My only guide was the persistent indication of subjective division he offered: his increasing discomfort with his body. In fact, no matter how hard he tried to maintain the ideal of his body intact, even incorporating his phantasm into the game, the desired balance did not return as it had before. For several months I listened to his discomfort and to the sketches of a question he asked about the repetition of his contemplative acts.

The path toward analysis was threatened by frequent unadvised interruptions. During one such interruption, he left his lover to find refuge once again in the pornographic movie houses. Then he established a relationship with a bisexual male who, much to his surprise, awakened his curiosity when he spoke of sexual relations with women. The only thing that did not change was his discomfort when he would realize suddenly that he was making an allusion to his body. At that point he would stop talking and recount a strong urge to return to the pornographic movie theaters. I understood

that if I urged him to relate to that wish, I would surely push him into an acting-out.

If indeed the entire life of this subject was constant "acting" in order to reassert his position, now, within the framework of the analytical process, these acts could be considered acting-out. I decided to wait for a shift in his identification with his mother and in connection to the vague complaint of his initial request: not to talk about his sexuality is as not to betray his body. The silence with which he protected his pact with his mother, even at the expense of a paralyzing passivity, hid a piece of truth which he dared not express: the real traitor had been his mother when she left him with his discredited father like "a piece of junk". She pushed him into a feminine identification which was not completely consolidated, as we have seen, because he continued waiting, with resignation, for maternal rescue. In any case, as the sessions progressed, he became more and more aware that he could not ignore the axis around which his life revolved.

He had reduced his visits to pornographic movie houses. And he was able to speak more and more easily about "my mother's betrayal". At this point my only action had been to let him talk about it, and to wait.

Freud was not wrong when he proposed free association as the golden rule of psychoanalysis. Freud sensed that the signifier always betrays the subject. The analyst just has to allow it to do its job. Lacan has taught us that just because the subject talks in the session does not mean he has entered analysis. It is necessary that he take charge of what he is saying. That is what occurred progressively with this individual, precisely from the moment he began to question the maternal rescue that never happened.

He himself indicated the final step toward the analytic couch on the day he was able to clearly formulate his dilemma: "Either I come to analysis to talk about my body and my mother although I feel I am betraying them; or I condemn myself to continue living in lethargy passivity, and indefiniteness, waiting for someone to rescue me like a child".