

# LACANIAN REVIEW

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# ONLINE

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COVID-19 2020

#61 to #66

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## Evasion

By *Marco Focchi* (Italia)

Comedy is certainly one way of escaping the tragic conflict that imprisons the neurotic: when we are able to alleviate the many competing tensions which grip the subject, we can free his libido from its chains, and let it surface in laughter. Whereas, in tragedy, the hero struggles against an obstacle and falls, in comedy the protagonist stumbles, but always gets up, and the thousand misadventures which befall him do not discourage him: a vitality is reaffirmed within him which the chains of the signifier are unable to mortify: in fact there is always a possibility of evading them, of playing with them, of making fun of them. Puns are also a way of making fun of the mortification imposed by the signifier.



Comedy, humour and irony are all different ways of escaping the weight of the institutions that control our lives, not just the social one but also the subjective one. It's an escape from the imposition of being what we must be – with our documents in our hands, the ones the police ask for when we have to be identified – in order to become what we actually are: an object, waste, a spark of life without an identity card.

The idea underlying comedy's elusive movement is basically one of escape, an escape from having to be oneself, a self-desertion.

Jean Genet is certainly not a comic author, but Sartre presents him as *comédien*, an *actor*, and if he adds *martyr*, it is to indicate that it's a choice, to underline the idea that nobody is a clay which has

been shaped by the world, everyone is his own author. This is the argument about freedom which is emphasised all through Sartre's philosophy, revealing a blinding ambition to be a master of oneself.

Genet however, was certainly not a master of himself, and, like the rest of us, he did not choose the cards that the game of life dealt him. He was an abandoned child who was adopted by a peasant family, caught to steal money, rejected, and sent to a reformatory. He took that rejection to heart, and decided to become a thief, throwing himself into a risky, provocative game of subverting the values of the world, and putting in their place all that is considered base: theft, betrayal, humiliation, shame, and elevating them to the heights of poetry. The *Thief's diary* is the manifesto of his inverted morality, where his heroes are his lovers, Stilitano, Armand, Lucien, and a thousand others. They are the scum of the slums of despair, of the most sordid places, of the most vile enterprises, but they are raised to a lyrical anti-world, ennobled by words that would be suitable to describe the deeds of the most heroic knights, but with which Genet glorifies scam-artists, pimps, prostitutes and vagabonds.

In the reformatory, when he was fifteen, perhaps by mistake, he got hold of a book of sonnets by Pierre de Ronsard, and that grandiose language made a huge impression on him. When he began to write he realized that he could never use the argot that his companions spoke. Argot was suitable for a writer like Celine, with an academic education, who can bring language down into the slums of life and find comedy in its debasement. Just think of the *Talks with Professor Y*, inventing its own style by breaking the classical canon of the French language. Genet no, Genet expresses in a high language what is lowest in life, because he needs to get it out of the ghetto where criminals, beggars and layabouts are locked up, and where, while posing, they provide photos for tourists, as told in an extraordinary episode of the *Thief's diary*.

Escapism – it's the red thread running through our speech. Laughter allows us to wander from the constraints of life's seriousness, but for Genet, more than just the comic aspect, there is a subtle humour in his writing. It is not the raucous laughter of one who has fooled the world, nor the derision that exults in having overturned rejection. There is rather the display of an elusive beauty, which no prison can incarcerate, which no imprisonment can exclude.

In an interview published towards the end of his life he says: "I started writing in prison. Writing enabled me to get out of prison. When I was free, writing no longer had any function."

In fact, everyone always needs to escape, and not just now in this time of forced imprisonment for everyone all around the world, and for a period that is difficult to specify. There is always a possibility to escape from the quagmires of life, from moments of inertia, from being captured by an invasive Other, from the incessant rhythm that fills our days, one after the other, when the chains of duty are constantly hanging over us. And each of us has our own way of laughing, that is, of lightening up, of being rarefied, of drifting, of sneaking out. You always have to invent a way out, because there is always a lock waiting around the corner. Genet did it by writing.

For us, prison can simply be the rhythm of our days, and now in particular, at a time when we are not driven by appointments, by the thousands of things we have to do, by everything that dictates the usual times during which our life passes by. But above all, escape is a flight from the weight of being ourselves. It is not walls, whether of prison, or of our homes, that imprison us, it is the walls of our self. Our patients testify to this, especially in this period, when together with the empty time of indefinite waiting, they feel their anxiety growing within them.

Too often, and rather derogatively, this period of medical emergency has been compared to a war. There is no worse tragedy than war, and Freud noticed how neurotic conflicts lessen during wars,

because people are preoccupied with practical problems of survival, with the great effort needed to obtain things that are easily available in normal times. In war, however, the fear of battle, the confrontation with death, is tempered by the physical presence of the companion next to you, by the sense of belonging to a group bigger than you. We know that panic in battle is unleashed when this group falls apart, when everyone feels alone against a united enemy that totally outweighs one's own individual strength.

We therefore understand, the need, during this period of isolation in which we all are, to maintain a sense of social cohesion, by all possible means: press conferences, social media contacts, songs from balconies. Nobody should be left alone in a time which has no definite end, unpunctuated by the various events that normally articulate social life.

This is why, for those who remain locked up in their solitude at this time, the reduction of conflicts noted by Freud in wartime does not occur. Rather, the real danger of contagion, by depriving us of social contact, increases neurotic anxiety, because it does not allow an escape.

However, there is also another effect that we can take into account in the current disarticulation of our social life. It constitutes in fact a pause in which we can, for once, see the things around us, the things that have always been there in our daily lives and that, out of habit, we have not seen for a long time: the trees that sway outside the window, previously unnoticed character traits in the people we live with that this imposed slowdown has suddenly revealed, memories that we haven't indulged for a long time, and that are now reborn as in a renewed existence. And life, the life usually passing through us unnoticed, whose slow pulsing we now perceive.

Through his discovery of writing, Jean Genet projected himself out from the walls of his prison towards the infinite ways of the world. Each of us can find his own path, his own escape, and can find it in the most authentic way right now, at a time when escape can be understood in a different way from the trivial one of entertainment, to which for too long we have been accustomed by *la société du spectacle*, the show business analyzed by Guy Debord.

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## A Spoke in the Wheel

By *Oscar Ventura* (Spain)

***Q:*** *Tell me something good that is going to come out of all this...*

***A:*** Perhaps many of the things we can learn no doubt depend a lot on the outcome of "all this", because "all this" it is a very appropriate way of naming it. We say "this" to name the pandemic, the confinement, the generalized anguish, the fear of contagion. We psychoanalysts use a very precise



concept with which we try to account for an event for which we cannot find words to name, we call it the real. This is not exactly reality, it is rather the encounter with the traumatic, with the sudden, with the unforeseen, there where the calculations fail; then there is an encounter with a real that we had not previously considered, and this impacts on subjectivity, both collective and individual. Well, we are at that moment. And what remains to us as a resource is invention, looking for new solutions to new contingencies.

Perhaps this is a privileged opportunity to rethink politics, to grasp in all its depth the vulnerability of the human condition. Can the pandemic impose some kind of political rectification? This real that we are traversing allows us to put into perspective the radical fragility of this poor species that we are, always in tension with the burden of destruction that inhabits us, with what we call the death drive. It is an opportunity to return to the helplessness that unites us. The pandemic puts in play something in common that traverses the whole of the social bond. The virus is anti-segregative, it makes no distinction in who it infects, and although there are populations at risk, no one is immune in principle. We are all equal before the senseless law of the virus.

Perhaps on the basis of this crisis we can bring into view the noble features of the human, those that unite us in our helplessness and solitude, this aspect of the affects not entirely traversed by the death drive. And curiously, bodies are brought to life when we put into action the authenticity of the relationship with life and death, with the things that matter. Societies begin to give some examples of this in the midst of a pandemic despite governments, like that in Brazil, where the supposed authority of a reckless, proud and hate-sick president is being questioned by the population and by the good sense of some politicians who are taking action beyond him.

It is necessary to maintain a blunt critical spirit in the face of the unleashing of the discourses that kill, of a social reality that tilts dangerously towards processes of segregation increasingly devoid of shame and modesty. We see very clearly the disaster and the confusion produced by the enunciations of types like Trump, Bolsonaro, Orban and their local replicas in Spain, in Italy, in France, and in the whole of Europe.

This is an opportunity to make holes in these discourses without a war – to which they are so prone – to rethink the fragility of contemporary democracies, the concept of the rule of law, the very concept of the State. Perhaps it is the occasion to dignify politics on the basis of this unprecedented contingency introduced by COVID-19, to put a spoke in the wheel of this senseless and inhuman form of capitalism in which we live.

*Translated by Roger Litten*

Excerpt of the interview with *Óscar Ventura* by *África Prado* for the newspaper INFORMACIÓN, originally published in Spanish under the title: “*The shadow of a police society still hangs over the future*“, and in [ZADIG España](#).

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# Stigmatization

By *Argyris Tsakos* (Greece)

## *Stigma and the Uncanny*

“Stigma”<sup>[1]</sup> according to Goffman, is the deviation that results from the difference or non-harmonization to the dominant social data; acceptance (if it supposedly exists) is actually under dispute. It refers to deeply discrediting and humiliating characteristics, unwanted forms of diversity of the individual that are so crucial to the social identity, that the individual becomes “inhuman”. In addition to various traits involved in “Stigma”, whether they are acquired (physically, mentally, culturally) or congenital, it is itself a social construction and therefore neither natural nor inherent<sup>[2]</sup>.



As a consequence, we comprehend that the whole issue of stigmatization revolves around the “Uncanny”<sup>[3]</sup> problematic. The uncanny, ο “*xsenos*” (ξένος, *the one who frightens us*) becomes the “double”<sup>[4]</sup> so that we project to the body of this other and to the group in which it belongs, our horrible, dark and unbearable side that has been repressed<sup>[5]</sup> or isolated. It is the “*kakon*” (κακόν) of the subject, the extime object of the subject, das Ding, the most intimate and most external of the subject at the same time.<sup>[6]</sup> “People regard as uncanny everything related to death. The basic truth that all men are mortal, is not of general acceptance and our unconscious has indeed very little space for the idea of our own mortality,” as Freud<sup>[7]</sup> underlines.

## ***A Generalized stigmatization***

As F. Ansermet mentions on the Covid-19 pandemic “the same phenomenon is the same for everyone, but each one reacts differently, starting from each own’s singularity.”<sup>[8]</sup> The answer to the real of the pandemic, has to do therefore with each subject individually. We cannot however overlook, the fact that the pandemic has turned every subject into a potential carrier of death. It stigmatized, desecrated and contaminated each of us, as someone who can transmit death. One must avoid the other and all of us “we must stay at home”. Stigmatization, self-marginalization and self-exclusion are hence practices, that now concern the daily lives of all subjects. All are treated as potentially “miasmatic” or “contagious” carrying and transmitting death, disrupting the nature of death, which “normally” should be either unexpected or occurring in old age. It is as if the whole population is now on the borderline between unhealthy and untreated, abandoned to the irreversible.

In our daily lives, we witness a kind of conscious or unconscious (bio)politic racism towards “vulnerable groups” with “underlying diseases”. We could make a metaphor here to the analogy of “genotype – phenotype” and how the former acquires a potential transparency: how the genotype, or the real of the cell of each subject “comes to the surface,” being itself an evaluative superego criterion.<sup>[9]</sup>

## ***And then what?***

It is well known that regimes want to control the speech and jouissance of the subjects. Populations must be manageable. This imposition and management is the core of biopolitics. Cynicism and inhumanity that characterize neo-liberalism, are expressed and embodied in Boris Johnson and Donald Trump. For the first, the population is just a herd; for the second economy and numbers come first. But the most worrying about democracy, comes from Hungary and Victor Orban. The 56-year-old nationalist and far-right prime minister has taken emergency measures in disguise of treating the pandemic (which is the new “enemy” after immigrants). It imposes a state of emergency on the country, without consent of the parliament. Using the pretext of urgently ensuring health, as well as personal and material security for the citizens and the economy, the government will be able to suspend the validity of laws and take extraordinary measures through circulars. Orban’s policy raises reasonable concerns that the Hungarian prime minister will abuse power. The new law involves imprisonment for the journalists that spread untrue information on Covid-19.<sup>[10]</sup> A group of members of all political parties of the European Parliament, has written to European institutions during the pandemic, in order to defend democracy.<sup>[11]</sup> But in the end, Hungary is officially the first dictatorship of Covid–19 within the European Union, while the latter is reacting weakly.

It is clear that there is a huge uncertainty and concern for democracy, the economy, social cohesion and global stability. The real of the pandemic imposes the presence and circulation of death around the world. Life is limited to a long and anxious awaiting for most of the people. Under the circumstances given, it is also clear that everyone must construct ways to encircle the real that was triggered by the pandemic, in order to build a subjective future.

[1] Stigma is a Greek word that in its origins referred to a type of marking or the tattoo that was cut or burned into the skin of criminals, slaves, or traitors in order to visibly identify them as blemished or morally polluted persons. These individuals were to be avoided particularly in public places.

[2] Goffman, E., (2009). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York : Simon and Schuster p. 1.

[3] Freud, S., (1919). *The “Uncanny”* in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 15, English Translation Strachey (1925), London, 2001, Vintage Books. pp. 219-256.

[4] As above. This phrase seems to be an echo from Nietzsche (e.g. from the last part of *Also sprach Zarathustra*). In Chapter III of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920 g), Standard Edition, Vol. 18, 22, Freud writes a similar phrase “the perpetual recurrence of the same thing” between inverted commas.

[5] As above. [T]he uncanny [*unheimlich*] is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar [*heimlich*]. (...) [T]he *unheimlich* is what was once *heimlich*, familiar, the prefix “un” is the token of repression”.

[6] Lacan, J “De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité, Paris, Seuil, 1975, p. 302 ; J. Lacan, “Presentation on Psychical Causality”, in *Ecrits*, Seuil, 1966, p. 123.

[7] Freud, S., (1919). *Op. cit.*

[8] Originally published in *Lacan Quotidien*, No. 876. Available online in English at [TheLacanianReviews](http://TheLacanianReviews).

[9] The genotype is the set of genes (genome) of an organism, while the phenotype is their external imprint on the image of that organism.

[10] [www.cnn.gr](http://www.cnn.gr)

[11] [www.dw.com](http://www.dw.com)

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## France is Bacon

By *Alasdair Duncan* (UK)

There is a story, a meme, which is finding a revival on the internet just now, circulating on Facebook, and no doubt elsewhere too.

The story relates to a celebrated post on Reddit from a decade ago, in which the poster (Lard\_Baron) said that when he was a child his father said to him “Knowledge is Power – Francis Bacon”, to which he had heard “Knowledge is Power, France is bacon”.



What, he had wondered, was the link between the two? Lard Baron says that he'd tell the quote to people, and they'd nod knowingly, which he found strange. Or someone would say “Knowledge is Power”, and he'd complete the quote – “France is Bacon”, and they'd look oddly at him. He'd ask a teacher the meaning of the quote and they'd explain Knowledge is Power, and totally ignore the meaning of France is bacon. When prompted further for explanation – “France is bacon?”, they'd respond enigmatically “yes”, and he didn't have the confidence to press further.

There is a sense in which to the matter of knowledge reduced to a device of power, with all its imaginary effects, the non-sense of *France is bacon* is the perfect response, a deflation. And it is not just France which is bacon now, we all are a bit, some of us more than others perhaps.

At a time when imaginary effects related to knowledge and power, and of not knowing, are widely felt to be pressing, we see its effects in the daily press of news and commentary trying to make meaning where there is something, or a certain nothing, difficult to digest, just as in the rise of conspiracy theories, this well timed meme, with its deflationary effect on imaginary jouissance, may not be without its uses.

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# Smoke and Mirrors

By Robyn Adler (Australia)

*“One should not look at anything. Neither at things, nor at people should one look.  
Only in mirrors is it well to look, for mirrors do but show us masks.”*  
Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*

This quote has been hanging around me for quite some time now. It appeared in the exhibition catalogue of my first and last solo show as a contemporary artist, coinciding with the aftershocks of the 9/11 crisis. The exhibition entitled ‘*art, artifice, adoration*’ revolved around the story of the alleged WW1 spy, Mari Hari, executed by firing squad in Vincennes. As a single mother, Dutch born Margaretha assumed the identity of an exotic Javanese dancer in order to survive. Mata Hari’s artifice resulted in death and the exhibition marked the death toll for my aspirations as an artist, the images of 9/11 seeming in excess of symbolic digestion, the production of yet one more image seeming unnecessary, indulgent, wasteful. I turned to study images instead and embark on my own symbolic death through psychoanalysis. Such a wager producing not only the inexistence of God, but of the impotence of the father as guarantee of speech.



Twenty years later, we face yet another crisis. This time it threatens each of our bodies. Australia, having commenced the year with ravaging bushfires, now participating in a global pandemic. In this short time, we have become well acquainted with masks-first “P2 masks” entered our vocabularies and, within an instant of that instance, “N95 masks”. I see in today’s headlines: “*The one COVID-19 number to watch*”. The ‘growth factor’, the new measure of all things, taking the place of the father, is the only thing that counts. I read: “There’s one single number that reveals at a glance whether the coronavirus outbreak is getting better or worse. In coming weeks, it’ll be worth understanding and keeping track of it”. Keep track of this number if you want to understand! The calculations of our bodies held in the safety net of scientific committees, presented to us as graphs- instantly legible inscriptions addressed to the whole of society. If we each do our bit, we can change the trajectory of this inscription for the greatest good-utilitarianism’s injunction of the “greatest”, the maximum, the useful, at the expense of the singularity of pleasure and pain that refuses to be measured relatively. So long as we keep looking in mirrors that only show us masks.

The use of online conferencing platforms enables us to get back to work with minimal disruption of productivity. We adapt readily, fit into our neat little boxes on the screen that defy both contagion and speaking all at once. We have to learn to interject differently, to prepare a script in advance, to communicate effectively. Yet suicide rates have sky-rocketed and crisis lines are receiving

unprecedented numbers of calls. There is no doubt our masks and distance from people and things, are increasing anxiety in very singular manifestations despite our communal efforts to “flatten the curve”. Masks and mirrors are inadequate faced with the invisible real.

What escapes the specular image of masks and mirrors is the body of LOM. LOM, introduced by Lacan in *Joyce le Symptôme*, is homophonic with what precedes it: “*Nous sommes z’hommes*”. We could translate as “we the people”, the opening phrase of the preamble of the US constitution or the 1789 *Déclaration*, its preamble oscillating between the ‘Man’ (*l’homme*) of the title and the people (*les hommes*) of its opening line. Lacan emphasises the “*sommes*”, the being of the people in an ontological register devoid of substance. “We (are) the people” as a generalised mass only count to the extent that we assume a pre-given place on a graph, communicating via lathouses, the only “[e]vidence of a common measure and an exception, which, under his rule, bends”;<sup>1</sup> a utilitarian function in which the Name of the Father is replaced by the injunction to Count!<sup>2</sup>

But LOM, this minimal condition of the human,<sup>3</sup> escapes this generalised mass. LOM, with its erased definite article, homophonically both singular and plural, gender neutral, trinitarian and with its resonances with the three letters DNA, is not on the side of *being* but of *having*. “Man has a body, it is by the body that one is had. The other side of habeas corpus”.<sup>4</sup> Previously, in the 1974 seminar in Nice, Lacan had said: “Man loves his image like what is closest to him, that is his body. Only, his body, he has no idea of it. He thinks it’s me. Everybody thinks it *is* them. It *is* a hole. And on the outside, there *is* the image. And with this image he makes a world”.<sup>5</sup> This hole in the centre of life, marked as a letter of *lalangue*, of L-O-M.

One of the things man can do with his body is speak, but he speaks with *de l’une bévue*, the blunder<sup>6</sup> of *lalangue*. In effect this renders his body useless compared to animals endowed with the instinctual knowledge they require for survival. The unconscious, as the speaking body, is not at all useful in the utilitarian sense. It operates in a manner that is “detrimental to happiness and the well being of the subject...Through the stupidity of the unconscious the human species survives”<sup>7</sup>. So whilst by his body he is had, LOM is never fully reducible to biopolitical capture because this inherent uselessness, this opaque kernel of *jouissance*, renders him incapable of being fully represented. Something always escapes and remains on the side of the singular, leaving him with a body only he can do something with.

What longing do we have for a new use of bodies? Bodies political by virtue that they are countable one by one as part of a collective, not a homogenous mass condemned to be graphically represented by the discourses of science and capitalism? An urgency has arisen as the “requirement for post-Joycean psychoanalysis: aim for an analysis that is not two-dimensional”.<sup>8</sup> If the real is life, as Lacan inscribed in the circle of the real during *La Troisième*, then it is equally the impossibility of life. ‘We the people’ suddenly tossed out of our comfort zones and into the uncertainty of an invisible pandemic that forces us to invent something. Mata Hari, or “eye of the dawn”, was able to do something with her body in order to survive, for a while at least, an awakening that led to a certain satisfaction. Salomé, well, there’s another satisfaction. Each left idiotic, countable, opaque remainders- scraps of symptoms, no longer speaking the language of the Father,<sup>9</sup> in the place of History.

1. Jacques-Alain Miller, ‘Le Despotisme de la Utile: la machine panoptique de Jeremy Bentham’, *Ornicar?* 3, May 1975

2. See M-H Brousse for a discussion on the “statistical superego” in “Ordinary Psychosis in the Light of Lacan’s Theory of Discourse”. *Psychoanalytical Notebooks*, No. 19, July 2009.

3. Jean-Claude Milner elucidated this during a recent trip to Australia. See *Relire le Révolution*, or in English, *Political Considerations About Lacan's Later Work*, Crisis and Critique, vol. 6, no.1.
  4. Lacan, *Joyce le Symptôme, Autres Ecrits*.
  5. Lacan, The Lacanian Phenomenon, Seminar of November 30th, 1974.
  6. Literally “twice seen”.
  7. Jacques-Alain Miller, A Reading of Some Details in Television in Dialogue with the Audience, Barnard College, New York, April 1990.
  8. Eric Laurent, *A Portrait of Joyce as a Saint Homme*, TLR5, p. 30.
  9. See Eric Laurent, *L'Envers de la Biopolitique*, p. 43.  
Image: Aubrey Beardsley, The Climax, Illustrations for Oscar Wilde's Salome (1893), detail.
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## The Biopolitics of Infection

By *Tammy Weil* (Israel)

Writing this text began with a question that troubled me concerning a global phenomenon now taking place in dealing with the Corona crisis: How does it happen, in our capitalist world, that the belief in “infection” persuades so many people to accept far-reaching restrictions, in the name of “protecting” the sick and the elderly? Since when did they become such a “precious commodity”?



Freud calls a belief an illusion, “when a wish fulfillment is a prominent factor in its motivation, and in doing so we disregard its relation to reality.”(1) I argue that in the case of the Corona crisis, the fact that reality doesn’t contradict the belief in “infection”, actually obscures the strong hold that this belief has, in the desire to wish fulfillment. I will try to follow this assumption, and its consequences.

Nowadays, the use the authorities make of the “biological” signifier “infection”, exercises a “crowd effect” similar to what Freud designates as “the contagious effect which the individuals exercise upon one another, and by which the original suggestion is strengthened.”(2) Culture uses the crowd’s suggestive effect of “contagion” in favor of “moral values,” and motivates individuals to “infect” each other with anxiety, and avoid transmitting the corona virus through their bodies.

One of the reasons for cultures’ success may be the ambivalence, that underlies identification.(3) This ambivalence has an effect of deception, making it difficult for the individual to recognize and resist the suggestive power of “infection”.

Culture doesn’t stop in its role to protect the individual from the powers of nature, but rather continues its deeds by humanizing it.(4) On the one hand, it protects the individual, by subordinating the horror of nature to the human dimension of “infection”, thereby convincing us that we can “feel at home in

the uncanny and can deal by psychical means with our senseless anxiety.”(5) But at the same time, it continues the act of nature. Healthy people are instructed to stop working, as if they are already sick, old people are instructed to isolate themselves, as if they have all the time in the world to live and be in touch with their dear ones.

On the individual’s side, one can explain identification with the illusion of “infection”, as steaming from an unfulfilled malice wish to infect others, to get rid of the sick and the elders, which drives a feeling of guilt. People all over the world cast isolation on themselves, in an act which can be seen, not only as an attempt to restrain the impulse, but also as self-inflicted punishment, under the illusion that their wish has actually realized.

Both healthy and sick individuals take part in this illusion. Freud demonstrates the ambivalent motive for claiming equality, through the syphilitic’s dread to infect others, that is rooted in an unconscious wish, to spread his infection and not be the only one infected and cut off from so much.(6)

Culture’s demand for uniformity and equality, through the body- signifier “infection,” reminded me what Lacan said on the final consequences of the arising fraternity of the body, as leading to racism.(7) Signs for this dangerous course, indicated by Lacan, could be detected in the early stages of the epidemic in Israel, when it seemed that the cultural suggestion didn’t have a similar effect on certain traditional groups. A feeling of rage arose amongst many members of the secular Jewish society, following photos of Jewish religious crowding, praying in a “Minyan,”\* and arriving in big crowds to the funeral of a major rabbi. One could say that segregation, directed toward the minority’s jouissance, steamed from the threat it might create a rupture, that would weaken the power of the cultural hypnosis, and reveal the crowds rejected jouissance on the wish to “infect”.

A scene from family life had the effect of breaking the hypnotizing effect: The son told his mother, that if he would have high fever, he won’t allow her to take care of him, lest he was infected by the corona virus and would infect her too. Her words immediately extracted from her: “Are you crazy?”

This was a moment of rupture between the family and the larger group.(8) The suggestion activated by culture, through the signifier “infection”, brought the unconscious wish too close to the real, and threatened the subtle balance of sublimation within the family. Freud may have referred to this point, when he attributed the moment of resistance to hypnotic suggestion to the individual’s knowledge that it is “an untrue reproduction of another situation, of far more importance to life.”(9)

To conclude, the effect of the use culture makes of the crowd’s suggestive “infection” powers, has long exceeded reality, and got too close to the real. These days, Israeli Prime Minister “Binyamin Netanyahu” has come out with a slogan: “Love is remoteness”. The use of the signifier “infection”, which enforces rejection rather than remoteness, seems to bring us closer to what returns from the real, and to the abolition of the split, that which allows us to make use of the semblant, and not know, in a good way, about our wishes. This may be a moment, that reveals one version of what Freud sees, as an unavoidable rift between love and culture.(10)

\* The quorum of 10 Jewish adults, required for certain religious obligations.

1. Freud, S., “The Future of an Illusion”,1927, SE, Vol. XXI, p. 31.
2. Freud, S., “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego”, 1921, SE, Vol. XVIII, p. 77.
3. Ibid, p. 105.
4. Freud, S., “The Future of an Illusion”, op. cit.

5. Ibid, p. 17.
6. Freud, S., "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego", op. cit., p. 12.
7. Lacan, J., The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XIX, "...or Worse", Ed. J.-A. Miller, Transl. A.R. Price, Polity Press, 2018.
8. Freud, S., "Civilization and its Discontents", 1930 [1929], SE, Vol. XXI.
9. Freud, S., "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego", op. cit., p. 116.
10. Freud, S., "Civilization and its Discontents", 1930 [1929], op. cit. p. 103.

[Image: By Sodabottle – Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, [Minyan waiting for the tenth](#)]

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