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#49 to #54

From Body to Body

By Paz Chaiat (Israel)

The word “epidemiology” originated in the Greek language. Epic=inside; Demos=the people; The Hebrew word for “plague” is “Magefa”. It contains a sound material of the word “Body”, which in Hebrew is called “Goof”. The invisible virus goes, via human encounters, from body to body. This is how it spreads within “the people”, the crowd.

What can we learn about psychosis?

In normal days, we meet the impossible in our clinical work with subjects who are outside discourse, understood as a social bond. These crazy days, we are attempting to write down something of our unique impossible that emerged in the face of the real. A real that is covered with the crown and cloak of the signifier: “Corona”. It is interesting to note that for some of our psychotic patients, there is now a sense of relief. One said, “*Now everyone has to keep a distance from each other, to keep one another*“. Now, it is not only her who is afraid of people. And yet, she makes a difference between her private delusion that keeps her away from people (in order to avoid hearing imperative voices), and between the Corona that keeps everyone at social distance not to get infected. In both cases, the consequence is bodily isolation. In both cases she believes. The first, however, is only hers. The difficulty in separating herself from the other, which is usually supported by her singular delusion, is now also supported by social rules linked to the epidemic. The social distance that is required by reality now with the purpose of not becoming infected, is like a prosthetic device which supports her private delusion and reduces the burden.

Reflection is not Body

These days body isolation is necessary to maintain life and order. But how do we maintain the social fabric? Faced with helplessness and isolation, many are hanging their hopes in online video sessions,



as a kind of replacement to the human encounter that is currently impossible. Are the online apps enough to maintain the connection and affiliation as the distance between the bodies stretches? Online sessions are an attempt to trick the Borromean knot, in a time when the presence of the body is banned. Video is not a substitute for the presence of body. Video concerns the mirror reflection. At the most, meeting via videocalls can remind us the body presence of live past meetings. Yes, video reflection may give a little comfort, like the mirror. But we must remember that it is a different platform that in some extent leaves the body out of game.

Isolation brings with it a symbolic separation, coupled with the threat of decomposition and unstitching of society. It becomes more challenging to maintain the body-to-body connections. Moreover, even the single body as a unit is threatened. That is, not only the body of the other becomes contagious, but one's own body too: our hands touching invisibly contaminated surfaces, covered by gloves. The segregation and strangeness of the other, at the end of the day, relates to that alien and parasitic part that exists within the subject itself.

Modes of Presence

By *Florencia F.C. Shanahan* (Ireland)

I believe that analysis is not a puzzle but rather a mosaic, made not of pre-existing pieces for which there would be a predetermined place and whose arrangement would make a whole of good form, but rather made of pieces, splinters, *tesserae* that one keeps finding, cutting out, discarding or taking from the other in the transference, in order to compose a picture that is never complete, even when it is finished.



I will thus try to say a few things that might at times be contradictory. They don't resolve any general question. Nor, I think, do they lend themselves to any deduction. They are small fragments that emerge in the time of elaboration in which I find myself. They will find their place in the mosaic that continues to create itself after the Pass.

My first analyst never took my contact details: neither my postal address nor my phone number. I fantasized many times about disappearing; he would not be able to get in touch with me; he would not know where to look for me; he would wonder whether I had died. For almost eight years I religiously attended sessions of fixed time. Three blocks from where I lived. Forty-five minutes each. A ritualized setting that fed my already excessive superego and mortified my body. The analyst's stillness and silence often left me at the mercy of the muteness of the drive, of which I made myself the partner. I learned there that meaning does not only feed on words.

The analyst who allowed me to get out of that and to find a logical end to the experience of the unconscious of which I am the subject, moved around a lot. He too said very little. But he displaced his body incessantly. Frantically cutting up pieces of paper with sharp scissors or typing noisily on the keyboard. He took calls during sessions, he sometimes muttered things. There I learned that the silence was not of the Other.

Could I have continued living if he had not received me by phone every day when my mother and my brother suddenly died? I don't know.

Could I have gone to the encounter of the good hole if he had not received me daily by Skype, holding his gaze on the screen, for more than a month, while I was traversing the most radical anguish at the time of the subjective destitution that opened up the way towards the end? I don't think so.

However, I do believe that my analysis could not have come to its end if it had been "virtual". Especially since the impulse towards the exit arose, as I transmitted in my first testimony, from the moment when I left my lighter on the analyst's couch. There is no doubt that this could not have happened in a phone session or by video call. That small object left behind impresses the urgency that made me get on a plane to return, opening the door to the last *s/cession*.

The voice *as object*, as it came into play in my analysis – in its extraction and in its incorporation – is by no means the voice of communication. I will try to advance something on this in my next writing.

Without doubt, practice online or by phone exists. It is a fact. What status does it have? The questions that arise from this concern psychoanalysis as such, and not only that with which current circumstances confront us.

I think that what is at stake is, above all, how to find positions in the enunciation that go in the direction of what Lacan called *well-saying* and against those positions that the neuroses are always ready to feed: looking for explanations for what one does or fails to do; trying to obtain validation from the Other for what one does or doesn't do; forcing the pegs to fit into the little holes to accommodate the real to reality...

It is a question of not disposing oneself too quickly to say what psychoanalysis is and what is not, ignoring the implication of a singular desire at the base of each act which, as such, has no guarantee. It is a matter of not supporting oneself on tradition, on signifiers frozen in the mouth of an authority, or on the dead knowledge of what has already been said, with the illusion of protecting psychoanalysis from its fantasized degradation.

Obviously when it comes to justifying one's own practice as a means of earning a living, or in terms of its permanence in the market as one more of the objects offered for consumption, there the problem is different. And it concerns what we call the formation of the psychoanalyst.

Pandecracy or Bureaucracy in the light of the “Battle of Veneto”

By *Gustavo Stiglitz* (Argentina)

I read with amazement an interview sent to me via WhatsApp by Alejandra Glaze, whom I thank. In it, the Spanish newspaper *El Confidencial* calls on Sergio Romagnani, 81 years old, immunologist and internist, Professor Emeritus of the University of Florence. He was one of the first to alert public opinion about the risks of Covid-19, caused by the coronavirus and its great speed of transmission. Romagnani was consulted by the authorities of the Tuscany region, who immediately adopted the practice of testing health workers, unlike the residents of Lombardy.

His disciple Andrea Crisanti, was “repatriated” to the University of Pádova in Italy, by no more nor less than Imperial College London – now renowned for the report published in March by Neil Ferguson and his team, orienting a whole strategy of modes of social distancing to slow the spread of the virus – where he worked as a researcher. This report has been recently commented on by Eric Laurent and Elena Levi Yeyati.



The interviewee – Romagnani – highlights the different evolution of the disease in zones that are very close but which adopted different policies and strategies against it. On a small scale, the Professor Emeritus points out the enormous difference between what happened in the town of Vo (Veneto) and that of Codogno (Lombardy), both red zones since the start of the pandemic.

In the first, advised by Crisanti, the authorities decided to test all the inhabitants. The result of the small sample was that a large number of asymptomatic citizens – who later developed symptoms – were carriers of the virus and a source of contagion. Based on these results, the strategy consisted in isolating all positives, symptomatic or not, with which the spread was drastically stopped. None of this happened in neighbouring Codogno, nor was there – now on a large scale – an equivalent to the so-called Battle of Veneto in neighbouring Lombardy. The data are overwhelming and can be read in the interview.

So far it is simply – as if the number of lives at stake were something simple – a question of different policies against the disease and their results. But the striking thing, the phrase of Romagnani that really impacted on me is the following: “Veneto is controlling the coronavirus by not following the WHO.” How can that be? Undocile and successful!

I immediately recalled Lacan’s warning in *British Psychiatry and War*: “...that this war has sufficiently demonstrated that it is not from too great an indocility of individuals that the dangers for the future of humanity will come.” The paragraph continues with a reference to the “dark powers of the superego” that are linked to “the most cowardly abandonments of conscience”, which I dare not continue here.

But what is clear is the indocility of the measures taken in Vo (Veneto) in relation to the recommendations of the health authority (WHO). How is this to be explained? Did the experts at the WHO not know what two Italian doctors and researchers were clear about from the beginning?

Romagnani answers this question in a way that is as clear as it is terrifying: “I think that fundamentally they failed because they are bureaucrats who have made a career in their offices, but have not lived the experience in the field, they have not been in the laboratories handling viruses nor involved in epidemic situations in other countries. The politicians have let themselves be advised by bureaucrats rather than experts.” Nooooo! Lapidary.

To the difference so well pointed out by Miquel Bassols between the real of the virus that follows its laws and the lawless real of the epidemic in speaking beings, we will have to add the real of pandecracy or bureaucracy. Ridiculous names, of course, but what was an invention to try to plug the hole of contingency has become a true lawless real that – apparently – can say anything and generate any counterproductive and deadly effect. A true spoke in the wheel. We always knew that bureaucracy was an obstacle, but we never thought that it was an obstacle to life itself. Kafkaesque, or the next thing, is to go even further.

If we make the people of Vo, the subject Vo – authorized as we are in what this pandemic is teaching us about the relations of the collective and the individual – that subject, undocile to the tyrannical will of the figures handled in the offices, has proved to be more on the side of life than his docile neighbour in Codogno, verifying Lacan’s idea.

It is clear that there is no properly human life, at least as we understand it today, if it is not for the singularity of each member of the collective who, grouped according to their particularities, make up a universal. I find in this a great little lesson.

Translated by Roger Litten

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Photograph @ Manuel Silvestri/Reuters

Virtual Reality

By *Gustavo Dessal* (Spain)

The smallness of our existence can acquire dimensions that we had not before suspected and, by contrast, lives accustomed to passing by without limits run up against an implacable barrier. Confinement and the norms of social distancing have changed the rules of the game, and isolation puts to the test the resources of each and every one of us. On the one hand, the pandemic is a political event, independently of the cause that has triggered it. It is a political event that reveals the idiosyncrasy of nations, the priorities that states establish, and the things upon which efforts are concentrated. It is

political because it brings to light the truth that is dissimulated, negotiated and corrupted in local and international organisations.

“We might have a parallel pandemic of authoritarian and repressive measures hot on the heels of the sanitary epidemic”, said Fionnuala Ni Aolain, spokesperson for the United Nations on questions of counterterrorism and human rights, in reference to the decrees that a great many countries are passing, and which it is not clear they will withdraw once the catastrophe is over.

It is a political event because it uncovers the socioeconomic differences that determine different degrees of suffering. Here, in the supposed First World, there are children and young people who cannot do their virtual classes because they do not even have at home a single computer or mobile phone. A video filmed in a poor neighbourhood of South Africa shows the army impossibly attempting to keep ten member families shut up in their ten square metre shacks constructed with cardboard boxes and cans.



The infection is biological, but the pandemic is clearly political.

It is political because, once again, the ruling class takes advantage of the misfortune in order to profit from the trafficking of its opportunistic discourses. Dutch and Belgian supremacists consider that the Spanish and Italian health systems are not a question that pertains to the European Union. The Mediterranean custom of caring for the elderly is a habit that is unhealthy for the economy. Silicon Valley brought us the good news that we will live for 120 years. But now Dan Patrick, vice governor of Texas, ruins the party by announcing that those over 70 should sacrifice themselves to save the market and the American dream. Lacan, with reference to Nazism, spoke of the sacrifice to the “dark gods”. The current gods are not dark at all. They are transparent like the water of yesteryear (today’s, thanks to pollution, no longer is), and are known by the names of the Dow Jones, Nikkei, Nasdaq and Ibex 35, to mention just a few of these modern deities.

But the pandemic is also an experience that sends shock waves through the most intimate resources of each and every one of us. Just as an organism reacts in an unpredictable way to the action of the virus, each subject’s response exceeds the limits of any standardised psychological protocol.

The extent to which we are born, live and die confined to the interior of a virtual reality that we manufacture to our measure is once again confirmed, this reality having existed much before we could imagine the invention of the internet. It is something inherent to our condition as beings who breathe in an atmosphere of chatter. The virus does not only feed on our lungs, but also swallows up the vocabulary to express such suffering: there are not enough beds, ventilators or words to account for what is happening.

Confronted by such scarcity, it is understandable that all kinds of wishes proliferate that augur a new world, a regenerated humanity, a conscience purified of the excesses to which we have given ourselves over. Discourses that call for repentance and contrition compete with others that begin to seriously consider that we might do without all governments and entrust to Amazon the management of the

affairs of state: it is always reliable and delivers everything on time. No reality exists that is not virtual, as we saw in *The Truman Show*, until non-sense intrudes from behind the screen and we begin to lack air and speech.

The virtual reality that the speaking being fabricates is the simple and everyday amnesia that makes us forget the body to which we are finally reduced. It is better that we forget everything possible of this body, for when it manifests itself this is never to announce something good. Many people wonder when we able to kiss each other again, and whether with the passing of time there will not return the definitively unhygienic behaviour of spitting or urinating in the streets. We thought we had seen everything, but this is not the case. Luckily, in the global madhouse there are always free beds...

Translated by Howard Rouse

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Coronavirus: Life in High Definition

By *Jeff Erbe* (USA)

This moment pushes us to reconsider the real of nature against disorder in the real. Miller writes, “capitalism and science have combined to make nature disappear.”^[1] With the quieting of social chatter and abrupt downturn of our frantic, totalizing capitalistic activities, one notices the call of a bird. Last week, warmth of the first spring sun felt anew on my skin, interpreted less as a change of season than sensed as though the Earth momentarily stopped rotating. At a time when we could submerge ourselves in a flood of information, amidst this ever-urgent demand for data, what use is psychoanalysis?



Perhaps if we remember to silence ourselves, we make a gap between the graphs and listen for the new life that this virus is.

Can we read this coronavirus as a delimiting of disorder in the real, as an attempted return of natural order? Certainly this period has not been without disorder—hospital systems are awash in lethal mismanagement^[2]—but our predominant response of distancing and staying home is an unprecedented ordering. The rule of the COVID-19 letter puts us in our place. Natural life re-asserts itself. We learn the air is clearing. Arial views of normally gridlocked freeways reveal untouched pavement shrinking to their pointal horizons. Nevertheless, still bodies must move. Urban parks are teeming and people traveling afoot now populate unfrequented suburban spaces that until recently were void of life.

Perhaps there has not been another time in history when the reality of a crisis was so pertinent to the radical singularity our practice demonstrates. Sexual non-rapport is no longer only a social impossibility, but manifest as an invisible viral barrier between bodies. The technological means we use to connect imaginize this barrier while making the continuation of analyses possible. In my practice, analysands' lives either remain fixated on their symptomatic ex-sistences without mention of this new context or concerns are newly cast in high definition, sensitized by pandemic anxiety.

Between fear for colleagues and loved ones on the front lines or stricken ill and a brief encounter with the sun, the coronavirus brings a profound ordering to life in its incredible range and diversity, as singularity. One subject's proximity to death, as patient, practitioner, or postal worker, does not negate the safe distancing enacted by others. In fact the link between these positions and the impossibility of establishing an absolute barrier between organisms dispels safety for the semblance that it is. In our practice that essentializes the meeting of two bodies, we persist in connecting through cables and satellites, refusing to back away from a reckoning with the real that remains as necessary as it is vital.

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[1] <https://www.lacanquotidien.fr/blog/2012/05/the-real-in-the-21st-century-by-jacques-alain-miller/>

[2] <https://medium.com/@CynicalXennial/unmasking-the-truth-cdc-and-hospital-administrators-are-endangering-us-all-b601012f81be>

The Analyst-Object and Psychoanalysis as a Mobile -Virtual-Installation

By *Marta Goldenberg* (Argentina)

The time for understanding has arrived. The CIEC (Center for Research and Clinical Studies), associated with the Freudian Field since 1998, has come out with its offer to the social. We know that a practitioner of psychoanalysis cannot function if he is not in contact with the social. Jacques-Alain Miller says at PIPOL 4: "...the effects of psychoanalysis do not depend on the frame but on the discourse, they depend on the analyst, on the experience he has committed himself to."

One reads that this irruption of COVID-19 is a war. We know that psychoanalysis is not occupied with



the war itself, since war is a confrontation of the politics that identifications promote. Politics is the way, says Miller, of making the real work in a discourse, while the real in the clinic emerges as that which doesn't work.

It is the irruption of the social in emergency and the response of the Lacanian Action in the virtual that has allowed the practitioner of psychoanalysis to offer the link that the transference maintains, trying to locate "the deadlock" of each situation that the analysand poses. This point becomes the driving force each time, in the day-to-day encounters, in which the analyst offers his listening and his body, either with the voice and the gaze, or simply the invocation, so that anxiety, fears, anguish can be dealt with in a singular way, thus "endowing desire with resources, given that this situation implies loss – although not total loss, because it brings with it invention" in the treatment of the drive, being advised on the side of the practitioner that the silent path of the drive does not take a self-absorbed direction.

In virtual consultations I hear where anguish seizes the bodies of different analysands: "I am falling apart... I do not know how to protect myself..."; "This is suffering for a fixed period..."; "I am uncomfortable"; "I feel a trapped energy..."; "I am between breaking up or gathering..."; "I feel terrible anguish when I wake up... what are we going to do this morning? Is there tomorrow?"; "Fear for the loss of loved ones..."; "It is not easy to live with oneself..."; "The uncertainty of the next day..."; "this makes me reflect on how to remove isolation from myself"; "I feel strangely healthy."

These are some of the sayings of patients who are losing all symbolic capture, feeling unprotected, caught up in a sea of enjoyment that is drowning them, leaving them unable to find anything to hold on to as an anchor, as a quilting point, feeling that the most intimate of their life is being compromised.

Faced with trauma, one is never prepared. The real falls on us, it does not speak. Hence our desire as analysts, the one that makes us responsible for being up to the challenges of the times, for being accessible, malleable to the other who calls, situating ourselves as an instrument, given that one's own object has already emerged and been put to work as a cause. The real will persist as long as we have a body and as long as we speak ...

Humanity has collectivized for the first time around a common real. Psychoanalysis and whoever embodies it, the *analyst-object*, has the plasticity to offer the analysand (and also to anyone who has been caught up in contingency without being in an ongoing treatment) the good use of virtual networks. Jacques-Alain Miller once said to us: "Alea jacta est", (the die is cast). I add: knowing how to do with one's own solitude, one's own being, sustaining the solitude of the other.

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