

PEDRO ALMODÓVAR AND LOUISE BOURGEOIS: THE BODY AND SEXUATION

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ABSTRACT. This text proposes to take the film 'The skin I live in' and the work of the plastic artist Louise Bourgeois to think with Freud and Lacan questions concerning the body. If, on the one hand, Almodóvar invites us to the debate on the imperatives of the contemporary discourse regarding the sexual position, the choice of object and the anatomy; the art of Bourgeois is opposed to the dictatorship of perfection imposed by the same discourse.

Key-words: Psychoanalysis; body; gender; sexuality.

PEDRO ALMODÓVAR E LOUISE BOURGEOIS: O CORPO E A SEXUAÇÃO

RESUMO. Este texto se propõe a tomar o filme 'A pele que habito' e a obra da artista plástica Louise Bourgeois para pensar com Freud e Lacan - questões referentes ao corpo. Se por um lado, Almodóvar nos convoca ao debate sobre os imperativos do discurso contemporâneo no que se refere à posição sexuada, à escolha de objeto e à anatomia; a arte de Bourgeois vem se contrapor à ditadura da perfeição imposta pelo mesmo discurso.

Palavras-chave: Psicanálise; corpo; gênero; sexualidade.

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RESUMEN. En este texto se propone a tomar la película 'La piel que habito' y la obra de la artista plástica Louise Bourgeois para pensar con Freud y Lacan cuestiones referentes al cuerpo. Por un lado, Almodóvar nos convoca al debate sobre los imperativos del discurso contemporáneo en lo que se refiere a la posición sexuada, a la elección de objeto ya la anatomía; el arte de Bourgeois viene a contraponerse a la dictadura de la perfección impuesta por el mismo discurso.

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Palabras clave: Psicoanálisis; cuerpo; género; sexualidad.

Introduction

This text proposes to take a film by the Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar, 'The skin I live in' (2011), and the work of the plastic artist Louise Bourgeois, to think with Freud and Lacan issues related to body and sexuation. On the one hand, the art of Almodóvar invites us to the debate on the imperatives of the discourse of science and the capitalist in the contemporaneity, when emphasizing the place of God of prosthesis that the protagonist of the film, Robert, a plastic surgeon, occupies by transforming, without his consent, the body of a man in that of a woman, carving with his scalpel the perfect body, the perfect skin, the ideal woman, all, uncastrated, in a vain attempt to make 'The Woman' exist. On the other hand, the art of Louise Bourgeois, which Almodóvar exhibits in the film, opposes the dictatorship of perfection, of completeness, imposed by the discourse of science and the capitalist. The art of Bourgeois reveals the reality of castration, shattered, shredded, misshapen bodies, pointing to the impossibility of sexual intercourse, to the failure of knowledge on which the subject is constituted.

The skin I live in

'The skin I live in' (2011), directed by Pedro Almodóvar, was inspired by the book *Tarantula*, by Thierry Jonquet. Robert, the protagonist of the film, is a plastic surgeon who researches human skin to save his wife, Gal, who had his body burned in a car accident. Gal survives, but does not regain her beauty. When she sees her deformed image through the glass of a window, she kills herself, throwing herself out the window. Years after watching her mother's suicide, Robert's young daughter, at the turning point of copulation, opens a psychotic outbreak. She is hospitalized, but, like her mother, she cannot stand the encounter with the real either and throws herself out the window. When faced with the fall of countenances, the woman and the daughter of Robert throw themselves to the death.

Robert believes his daughter has been freaked out after a supposed rape. With thirst for revenge, he goes out in search of the man who allegedly raped his daughter. This man is named Vicente, a twenty-seven-year-old man who worked with his mother in an atelier wearing straw mannequins to decorate shop windows. Robert kidnaps and imprisons Vicente, subjecting him, later, to a transsexual surgery. Vicente changes sex, undergoes a vaginoplasty, wins breasts, a new face, becomes the image and likeness of Gal, Robert's dead wife. To recreate this woman who does not exist, Robert invents a super resistant skin, composing it from a transgenic process. This skin, which resists all pain, disease and stings, receives the name of Gal, in honor of the lost woman, and is sewn, retail by retail, in Vicente, who is christened by Robert under a new name, Vera. Vicente incarnates in Vera the female castration.

This is how, in the name of science, of the place of a God of prosthesis, Robert, in the fashion of Frankstein, creates his creature. He tries to make 'The Woman' exist, to build the ideal woman, denying the impossibility of sexual intercourse. Vincent who lived in the body of a man, becomes Vera, and begins to live in the body of a woman. Robert, the creator, falls in love with the object of his creation. Caused by his gaze as object *a*, he imprisons Vera in a room of his house and looks at her through a canvas. Vera can be seen

without seeing who looks at her, but the same screen through which Robert looks at her prevents him from touching her. Vera suffers the pursuit of Robert's gaze, but she tries to defend herself from the look that invades her.

The art of Louise Bourgeois⁴, her imperfect bodies, exhibited by Almodóvar in this film, contrasts with the perfect body, skin and scenery constructed by Robert. Vincent, now Vera, does not glimpse in the face of perfection, but rather with the art of Louise Bourgeois, which she discovers in a documentary screened on television in her clean, antiseptic white cell. Vera identifies herself with the shredded, misshapen bodies that the art of Bourgeois reveals. From there, the plastic arts and the writing begin to function for Vera as points of support, of mooring, ways in which she defends herself from the psychic and physical torture suffered in the real of the body. With the scraps she ripped from the dresses she receives from Robert, she creates her sculptures. With the makeup that Robert offers, she does not make up herself, but writes on the walls, in an attempt to overcome the overwhelming real with words.

At the end of the film, Vera tries to get out of her torturer Other, and seeks to find her own resources. In order to separate from Robert, Vera resorts to feminine countenances, for it is precisely from the feminine position, from the place that she occupies as object *a* to Robert, that she seduces and kills him. The creature (object-object) kills the creator (God of prosthesis) and manages to regain her freedom.

Louise Bourgeois: the fragmented body

The central theme of Louise Bourgeois' work has always been the body. Unlike the sculptural tradition that represented the body in perfect figuration, a stable and evident image, and also in the primacy of the aesthetics of the beautiful - body to be contemplated -, Bourgeois problematized the body, disarticulating it and deforming it, making its atelier a true laboratory where, in her creations - or experiments she performed with the body - the anatomical patterns were challenged and subverted. Bourgeois does not seem to seek a wholeness or centralizing unity; on the contrary, bodies are made in strange joints, taking the form of a puzzle, with disarticulated limbs, disorderly embedded parts, and trunks cut into slices and filled with the most disparate fillings.

Curiously, the artist states: "For me, sculpture is my body. My body is my sculpture" (Bourgeois, 2000, p. 228). Louise, in several interviews, tells us about her maladjustment to the image of the body and body schema. For her, the mirror is an enemy, a deformer. And she says, "It does not reflect me, it reflects another person. It reflects a sort of monstrous image of myself" (Bourgeois 2000, p. 260). For this very reason, she lived for many years in a house without mirrors. In a note written in 1958, she reports: "I turn off all the lights I cannot bear to look at myself" (Bourgeois, 2011, p. 13).

Louise's difficulties with the image of the body are also related to the feminine position: "It seems that I am going to cry - my clothes, especially the underwear, have always been a source of intolerable suffering because they hide an intolerable wound" (Bourgeois, 2011, p. 104). "Refuse to be a woman, why? [...] being a woman is dangerous is expressed in my sculpture by the penis, by the spear, by the knife, by the sword - to be a woman is to have no defense" (Bourgeois, 2011, p. 86). "What is being a woman? Been robbed for being a woman. Be cheated. Have you lost the game, the big game?" (Bourgeois, 2000, p. 122).

⁴ Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), famous plastic artist who dedicated her whole life to art, was born in Paris and died in New York.

But to the questions about her feminine position and the strangeness of her own body, Louise Bourgeois responds with art, dissociating the bodies, transgressing the sexual limits and inventing incongruous approximations. The artist presents in her works a constant attempt to sculpt the unrepresentable, a body beyond what can be imagined of it.

Almodóvar alludes to Bourgeois' work from the beginning to the end of this film: the phrases and drawings that the Vera character shows on the wall of the room where she is isolated are practically all extracted from the work of Louise Bourgeois; the small sculptures lined with scraps of fabrics, which make up the room-prison setting where Vera finds herself, also allude to the artist's work; the documentary on television that exhibits misshapen bodies, arousing Vera's interest, presents precisely the work of Bourgeois; Almodóvar uses not only the sculptures and drawings, but also the literature about the artist, he creates a scene in which Vera is dedicated to reading a book about Louise.

The body

The title of Almodóvar's film, 'The Skin I Live in', is eloquent, states, as Lacan teaches us, that the body offers itself as a bed for the intrusion of the Other. This brings us to the understanding that there is no body without symbolic, without language, the body is constituted of signifiers, mapped by the signifiers.

In 'Radiofonia' (2003a), Lacan theorizes about the body. He defends the thesis that the human has two bodies: the 'symbolic body' and the 'body in the naive sense'; and the proposition that the body enters language suffering the effects of the sayings of the Other, offering itself as a bed for the intrusion of the Other.

I return first to the symbolic body, which should be understood as no metaphor. Proof of this is that nothing else than it isolates the body, to be taken in the naive sense, that is, on which the being on which it rests does not know that it is the language that confers it, to the point that it would not exist, if could not speak (Lacan, 2003a, p. 406).

The first, the 'symbolic body' - made of the sound materiality of the signifier - is made up of language. The second, the "[...] body in the naive sense, is taken as a corporeal, narcissistic self" (Quinet, 2004, p. 59). Lacan points out that one can only have one body, 'in the naive sense', if it was granted by language. The first body, that of language, is what makes the second, "[...] the body in the naive sense [...]", precisely, "[...] by incorporating into it" (Lacan, 2003a, p. 406).

Lacan observes that the body of the speaking beings has three dimensions: real, symbolic and imaginary. At the beginning of his teaching, by retaking the Freudian notion of narcissism, he clarifies the register of the imaginary, by the emphasis given to the alienation of the *infans* in the image of the similar and by that which precipitates from an anticipatory *Gestalt* of the subject's own body. It also emphasizes that in this experience of the mirror lived by the subject, the function of the law of the Other of language points to the registration of the symbolic and jubilation (jouissance) points to the registration of the real. It can be seen that from the beginning of his teaching⁵, Lacan shows us that there is no body without symbolic, without language.

In Almodóvar's film, it can be observed that it is his place in the discourse of science, based on a pre-established knowledge, and his place in the capitalist discourse, in an

⁵ In the text 'De nossos antecedentes', 1966, Lacan says that "[...] the stage of the mirror [...]", produced by him in 1936, "[...] anticipated our insertion of the unconscious into language" (Lacan, 1998c, p. 75).

attempt to *forclusion* castration, which Robert operates in the real of his victim's body, placing it in the place of his object of jouissance, making it inhabit another skin.

The film leads us to ask: what exit for this subject, with a transformed body, in the enclosure, object of the Other? To alienate himself to the only Other that remained, his executioner, the one who removed him from the place of subject, transforming it into an object of jouissance, making its body a piece of flesh, inhabited by another skin?

Vicente/Vera, a subject *foraclude* by the scientific discourse, returns, even without being recognized, tries to escape, chooses the life, and kills the other that reduced him/her to the object of torture and scientific manipulation. But although he/she fails in all these attempts, he/she manages to emerge as a subject, once again he/she survives the complete loss of all his/her references and is reconstructed in the three registers: real, symbolic and imaginary.

In the register of the imaginary, the subject builds a body, dedicating itself to the yoga classes, that happens to watch in a closed TV channel. Vera is dedicated to the exercises of posture, elasticity and stretching. In the register of the symbolic, the subject constructs a new knowledge, marks on the smooth wall of her room significant traits, S1, from which may arise the articulation with other signifiers, in an attempt to reconstruct a new subject, a new history. Vera writes on the wall: 'I breathe', 'opium helps me to forget'.

In the real register, the subject uses the fragmented bodies, broken into pieces, shredded, divided, drawn from the art of Louise Bourgeois. And with this know-how, he builds a body with the scraps of ripped, shattered woman's dresses. The libido that emanates from the orifices of the body, makes its presentation in the real, and becomes a letter, writings that locate in the language a jouissance, condensing it.

The construction of a new subject demands a constant work, that of covering the real of the body, embodying new images (reconstructing the register of the imaginary) and producing new ideals (reconstructing the register of the symbolic).

Sexuation: what is it to be a man? What is to be a woman?

In 'Posição do inconsciente' (1998a), Lacan elaborated his theory of the drive (Trieb) in a passage in which he summarizes the thesis discovered by Freud of how sexuality is ordered in relation to the unconscious. In this passage, Lacan formulates how sexuality implies the sexual partner, how sexuality is placed in its relation with the unconscious. Lacan says that sexuality is divided on two sides: the side of the Other and the side of the living.

On the side of the Other (Other of speeches, place of word), what regulates sexuality is the exchange of signifiers, ideals, the function of the father, primary alienation, and it is thanks to all this that "[...] order and norm must be established, which tell the subject what it has to do as a man or a woman" (Lacan, 1998a, p. 864). Here Lacan reaffirms with Freud that 'norm' designates the norms of discourse. Therefore, man and woman are products of the Other of the discourse. Later, Lacan says "[...] it is not true that God made them male and female" (Lacan, 1998a, p. 864), because the space of order and norm is the space of the countenances of man and woman, of phallic semblant, of the paternal semblant.

The side of the living is not the side of the subject (the subject is on the side of the Other), the side of the living is that of an incarnate subject, who has a body with all its potentialities of jouissance. It is the side of the hand-to-hand of the act, the sexual relation of bodies. Lacan says: "On the side of the living, there is no access to the Other of the opposite sex except by means of the so-called partial drives from which the subject seeks an object that replaces the loss of life of its own, because it is sexed" (Lacan, 1998a, p. 863).

There is no single response to these questions. "The sexual being is empowered by itself", states Lacan in *O Seminário, livro 21: os não-tolos erram, 1973-1974*, lesson of 09/04/1974), thus showing that the subject is responsible for the choice of its sexual and jouissance position - in the whole phallic or in the not-whole phallic. Lacan's thesis that bases the sexual choice is solidary to the thesis 'the sexual relation does not exist'.

For Lacan, the choice of sex has two aspects: the choice of the sexual position in the sharing of the sexes and the choice of sexual object. From the quantum formulas of sexualisation, forged by Lacan, it can be seen that the choice of the position in the sharing of the sexes, being male or female, is a forced choice for beyond anatomy, it is the choice between the whole phallic and the not-whole phallic. And the choice of object is made from two registers: a symbolic choice, determined by the significant traits that come from the Other - father, mother, grandmother, grandfather; and a real choice - which is *tykhé* bound, at random, to the indeterminate that characterizes the place of Das Ding.

Both in relation to the sexual choice and the choice of object, we can affirm that the anatomy is not destiny, insofar as it does not define these choices. Thus, we can also affirm that by anatomically changing the sex of Vincent (a man) to Vera (a woman), Robert did not necessarily shift the sexual position of this subject, nor did he change his choice of object. The quantum formulas of Lacan's sexualisation propose that the sharing of the sexes is given in a far beyond the anatomical difference, the determination of the culture of genres and of sexual identities, it presents itself in the whole phallic and the not-whole phallic. Psychoanalysis teaches us that sexuality is translated from sexual dispositions, from random encounters (*Tykhé*), from identifications, from fundamental fantasy. Thus, the way Vera will be placed in the sharing of the sexes after the surgery can only be verified in what is unique in her case.

It is worth remembering that already in *O Seminário, livro 18: de um discurso que não fosse semblante* (2009), Lacan presented us the gender identity as opposition of man and woman, showing that these terms are significant - which will insist on the two seminars. Lacan notes that every signifier carries with it an opacity, and therefore we cannot propose that there is a male or female subject, the subject is what one signifier represents to another signifier.

In the following seminar, *O Seminário, livro 19: ...ou pior, 1971-1972*, when he refers to the anatomical difference, Lacan states: "It is not that I deny the difference that exists from an early age between what we call a girl and a boy. It is even from this that I start" (Lacan, 2012, p. 13). And keeps going:

[...] this difference which is imposed as innate is, in fact, very natural. It corresponds to what is real in the fact that [...] the sexes appear to be divided into two more or less equal numbers of individuals. Early on, sooner than expected, these individuals are distinguished, that's right (Lacan, 2012, p. 15).

In fact, it is not a question of denying anatomical differences, but of considering that, as Freud (1992a) emphasized, they produce psychic consequences. Language promotes the 'denaturation' of the body, insofar as it makes the difference between the sexes only have effects if significantized. It is only by recognizing the phallus that the unconscious does not point to sexual difference (Lacan, 1998b).

Let us take a more detailed account here of the quantum formulas of sexualisation - forged by Lacan in *O Seminário, livro 20: mais, ainda, 1972-1973* (1985), in 'O aturdido' (2003b) and in 'Televisão' (1993) - to verify that the choice of the sexual position is not

made by the anatomy. Being a man or a woman is a forced choice, beyond anatomy, it is the choice between the whole phallic and the not-whole phallic.

Consider the Lacanian formulas:

Graph 1 - Quantum formulas of sexuation.

Man Whole phallic	Woman Not-whole phallic
$\exists x \quad \overline{\Phi x}$ $\forall x \quad \Phi x$	$\overline{\exists x} \quad \overline{\Phi x}$ $\overline{\forall x} \quad \Phi x$

Source: Lacan (1985, p. 105).

On the *man's side* Lacan writes:

$$\exists x \quad \overline{\Phi x}$$

There is an x , not Φ of x , that is, there is at least one that says no to the phallic function, which is outside the universal of castration.

$$\forall x \quad \Phi x$$

For every x , Φ of x , that is, all men are in the phallic function.

On the man's side, we find the universal function of the phallus, all men are in the phallic function, but for this universal proposition to be true, an exception is required which confirms the rule: at least one is not castrated. This exception is supported by the function of the Father, found in the figure of the father of the primeval horde of 'Totem e tabu' (1991a), who, as a jouissance father, forbade phallic jouissance to all children. Once dead, the father is replaced by the totem that represents him, denoting the symbolic function of the law. This function of the exception - the least One not castrated - allows to make the set of all men referred to the phallus exist.

On the woman's side, Lacan writes:

$$\overline{\exists x} \quad \overline{\Phi x}$$

There is no x , not fi of x , that is, there is not at least one that says no to the phallic function.

$$\overline{\forall x} \quad \Phi x$$

Not-whole x , fi of x , that is, women are not all in phallic function.

On the woman's side there is no set, since there is not at least one that is not castrated, there is no exception to found the universal of all women. Therefore, 'The Woman' does not exist, the women tell one by one. But this does not mean that they have no relation to the phallus, because there is no woman who is not related to the phallus. However, women are not fully enrolled in the phallic function. The woman is not-whole phallic. It is precisely the not-whole phallic that defines the feminine position.

In the lower part of the formulas of sexualtion, Lacan represents the male and female sides and, using arrows, indicates what they are looking for on the side of the partner:

On the man's side:

$\$$ (divided subject) and Φ (Phallus)

The arrow from $\$$ to a shows that the subject's desire is to find in the place of its partner the object a , the cause of its desire. "This $\$$ only has to do, as a partner, with the object a inscribed on the other side of the bar. It is only possible for it to reach its sexual partner, who is the Other, by means of this, that it is the cause of its desire [...] The conjunction of this $\$$ and a is the fantasy" (Lacan, 1985, p. 108).

On the man's side, "[...] the object 'a' is put in the place of that which, from the Other, could not be perceived. To the extent that the object a does it somewhere - and with a starting point, only one, that of the male - the role of what comes in the place of the missing partner, is that what we usually see arise also in the place of the real, that is, the fantasy" (Lacan, 1985, p. 85, emphasis added).

Man, says Lacan, believes that he approaches the woman, but what he approaches is the cause of his desire (a). "There is the act of love. Making love is poetry. But there is a world between poetry and the act. The act of love is the polymorphous perversion of the male" (Lacan, 1985, p. 98).

In *O seminário, livro 22: R.S.I., 1974-1975*, Lacan points out that 'the non-existence of the sexual relation' is correlated with the fact that 'The woman does not exist', in the sense of constituting a universal. In place of this woman who does not exist, the man will put 'a woman' as a symptom.

What is a woman? It is a symptom [...] To make her a symptom, this 'a woman', is to situate her in that articulation in the point where the phallic jouissance as such is also her business [...] She is on the side of what she is treated as a symptom, at exactly the same point as her man (Lacan, 1975, lesson of January 21, 1975, author's emphasis).

On the woman side:

$\overline{\$}$ (Barred woman), $S(\overline{\$})$ (the signifier of the lack in the Other) and a (object a).

In place of the feminine, there are two arrows, each one going in one direction: the arrow that goes from \mathcal{L}/\mathcal{A} up to Φ , describes all the phallic problematic of the relation with the man. "Man is no more than a signifier" (Lacan, 1985, p. 49) for women. The woman aims to find the phallus in her partner. For a woman the value of man is to carry the phallus, the one who represents the signifier, either in the form of the organ of the partner or in the form of the children, which he may possibly give her, or both.

The other arrow, that goes from \mathcal{L}/\mathcal{A} up to $S(\mathcal{A})$ designates the part of the feminine being that does not concern the phallic function, that is, a jouissance beyond the phallus, an additional jouissance, also called feminine jouissance and Other jouissance. "It is precisely by the fact that, because it is not-whole, she has, in relation to what it designates as jouissance the phallic function, an additional jouissance" (Lacan, 1985, p. 108). This jouissance which she experiences and of which she knows nothing is on the path of existence. We also find in the indication of this arrow, precisely in this opaque place of the Other jouissance, the mystical jouissance. "It is to the extent that her jouissance is radically Other than that the woman has more relationship with God" (Lacan, 1985, p. 111).

Lacan clarifies that 'there is no sexual relation' because the jouissance of the Other, taken as body, is always inadequate, "[...] perverse on the one hand, in that the Other is reduced to the object 'a'; and on the other, I will say mad, enigmatic" (Lacan, 1972-1973/1985, p. 108, author's emphasis).

It should be pointed out that, according to Lacan, the analytic discourse puts at stake that:

The woman will never be taken but *quoad matrem*. The woman only comes into play in sexual intercourse as a mother [...]. She will make no objection to this first approach, for this is how she will prove to be a substitute for this not-whole on which rests the woman's jouissance. For that jouissance which she is, not-whole, that is to say, which makes her somewhere absent from herself, absent as subject, she will find, as cork, that a which will be her child [...]. On the side of man, man is no more than a signifier, because, where he comes into play as signifier, he only enters *quoad castrationem*, that is to say, having relation to phallic jouissance (Lacan, 1985, p. 49).

Lacan observes that if the libido is masculine, the woman, where she is whole, "[...] that is to say, where the man sees her, it is only from there that the woman can have an unconscious. And this serves to make the speaking being speak, here reduced to man, that is to say [...] to exist only as a mother" (Lacan, 1985, p. 133).

How could we locate the character of Almodóvar, Vicente/Vera, from the formulas of sexuation?

It may be said that before going through the surgical change, Vicente was, with reference to anatomy and marital status, a man; as to his sexual position, he placed himself on the whole-phallic side in the sharing of the sexes; as far as his choice of object was concerned, he was heterosexual, he wanted women.

After the surgical and hormonal interventions, Vicente is anatomically transformed into a woman, his marital status also changes, he ceases to be Vicente and becomes Vera. What about his sexual position? Although Robert himself had placed Vera on the side of the not-whole phallic, as object of his desire, Vera remained, as before the exchange of sex, on the side of the whole phallic. At the end of the film, there is an indication that Vera also maintained the choice of previous object, she continued wishing a woman, Cristina.

In 'Sobre la psicogénesis de um caso de homossexualidad feminina' (1992b), Freud already criticized the prevailing thinking in his day, that man could have a 'female mind' and

woman a 'male mind' - which would attempt to justify homosexuality, for example. In fact, in 'Tres ensayos de teoría da sexual' (2005, p. 130, our translation)⁶, Freud had already argued against the idea of the female or male brain: "The substitution of the psychological problem for the anatomical is as useless as unjustified". And later, in his 'Conferência XXXIII', on femininity, he said: "[...] that which constitutes masculinity or femininity is an unknown trait beyond the reach of anatomy" (Freud, 1991b, p. 106, our translation)⁷. According to Freud (1992b), the physical sexual characteristics (anatomy), psychic sexual characters (subjective position) and the type of object choice (homo, hetero or bisexual) are three sets of characteristics that are independent of each other.

Freud (1991b) also shows us that women do not subscribe in the same way to all, and therefore both men and women have to deal with the question of what it is to be a woman. The feminine is always an enigma and, therefore, is a frequent theme in philosophical essays and artistic works.

In medieval society we find, in the field of literature, the Lady of Courteous Love. By the way of sublimation, the idealized woman was created, desired while inaccessible. Lacan (2008, p. 172) reminds us that the "[...] relation of the artist to the time in which he manifests himself is always contradictory". The Lady arises precisely at a time when historical coordinates show that nothing seemed to respond to what might be called a woman's promotion.

In this respect all historians are unequivocal - **courteous love was, in short, a poetic exercise, a way of playing with a number of idealizing themes of convention, which cannot have any concrete correspondence in the real.** Notwithstanding these ideals, in the first plane is the Lady, they are in later times and until ours. Their incidences are totally concrete in the sentimental organization of contemporary man, and there perpetuate their march (Lacan, 2008, p. 180, emphasis added).

What Lacan called the feminine object, referring to the Lady, had been emptied of substance, depersonalized - was even frequently invoked by a masculinized term, *Mi Dom* [My Lord] – "[...] a maddening object [...]", says Lacan, "[...] an inhuman partner" (Lacan, 2008, p. 182).

However, it was a poetic exercise, different from the woman-sculpture - or Frankenstein woman - created by Robert. To make 'The Woman' exist would imply a jouissance without limits, which, after all, is what the surgeon expresses from the beginning. Freud (1991a) had already indicated that sex/death is the binomial of castration, there is no representation of the signifiers of man and woman in the unconscious. Resuscitating the dead wife, making her immortal with an ultra-tough skin, and doing all this in another's body, is nothing more than trying to circumvent castration.

But Almodóvar shows us that this fails. It was not enough to change Vicente's body, nor to call him Vera. It was necessary to clothe him with the skin bearing the name of his dead wife, Gal, or, in other words, to give symbolic support to the image created to support it in the fantasy of resuscitating his wife. Still, his attempts failed. In the final tragedy of *The Skin I Live In*, Robert ends up being killed by Vera. The creator is killed by his creation, 'The Woman' that does not exist.

⁶ "La sustitución del problema psicológico por el anatómico es tan inútil como injustificada".

⁷ "[...] lo que constituye la masculinidad o la feminidad es una característica desconocida que escapa del alcance de la anatomía".

The sublimation

Like Louise, Vera also has difficulty with the body image. She does not recognize herself in the mirror, her image in the mirror also causes her horror.

It is interesting to note that Vera identifies the art of Louise Bourgeois. Vera seeks to find a way out of her storm through the shattered, shredded, misshapen bodies with coarse, agonizing expressions, from Bourgeois. Almodóvar's art reveals the contrast between the idealized, meticulously detailed body designed by Robert and the sculpted bodies of Louise Bourgeois. It is precisely when confronted with the shredded, misshapen bodies produced by Bourgeois that Vera seeks to reinvent herself.

For Robert, Vera's image caused him desire, but for Vera, on the contrary, her image was of the order of horror. It symbolized the destruction of his condition as a man. His body was strange to him, not decoded, just a piece of flesh that did not define itself as a self. The mirror, by giving it back an image that has no identifiable meaning, imposes on her the arduous task of searching for identifiable references that give it some sort of imaginary identity, which would place it in the symbolic. Robert imposes signifiers on Vera as if they were an obligation she should follow to define herself. But this has no effect. And it is in art that Vera seeks to find the possibility of some kind of symbolization.

Could the exit Vera try to find through art be considered a sublimation?

Before responding to this question, let us briefly look here at the concept of sublimation. It is interesting to note that before Freud made sublimation a very particular process, this term had three connotations: alchemical, chemical, and moral. In the alchemical sense, sublimation consists of the transformation of the metal into gold. In the chemical sense, sublimation describes the transition from a solid state to a gaseous state, without passing through a liquid state. It is a purification process. In the moral sense, sublimation is a purification of the soul. One can find its foundation in Aristotle: the soul purifies itself through the spectacle of the tragic hero. Tragedy, through fear and pity, impels the human being, the spectator, to rise, to raise its soul.

In his 'Três ensaios sobre a teoria da sexualidade' (2005), Freud used the term sublimation, introducing a genuine rupture as far as the first meanings of the term are concerned. In the first essay, 'As aberrações sexuais', when he presents 'deviations from the sexual goal', more specifically, in 'fixations of provisional sexual goals', Freud remarks that when the drive encounters obstacles to its satisfaction, it forms new targets, such as touching and looking at the sexual object, or "[...] can be diverted ('sublimated') in the realm of art, when interest is no longer solely concentrated in the genital parts, but is directed at the body as a whole" (Freud, 2005, p. 142, our translation)⁸. Five years later, in *Uma recordação de infância de Leonardo da Vinci*, 1910, Freud will find that Leonardo da Vinci's inhibited sexual interest has turned into art.

Here we are at the heart of the concept of sublimation as Freud will explain it from there on. Briefly, Freud's main theses on sublimation can be highlighted: sublimation is one of the destinies of the drive; sublimation is a satisfaction of the drive; in sublimation there is object displacement; the sublimation will be based on a desexualization⁹. Unfortunately, we

⁸ "[...] puede ser desviada ('sublimada') en el ámbito del arte, cuando el interés no está más concentrado en las partes genitales, sino que se dirige al cuerpo como un todo".

⁹ "If the displacement energy is desexualized libido, it is licit to call it also 'sublimated'" (Freud, 2006, p. 46, emphasis added).

do not have the metapsychological article on sublimation¹⁰. The disappearance of this article means a pitiful loss, but Freud did not neglect throughout his work to refer to this particular destiny of the drive which is sublimation.

In 'Introducción del narcisismo' (1992c), Freud draws a conceptual distinction between idealization and sublimation: sublimation "[...] is a process concerning the object libido and consists in the fact that the drive is thrown to another goal, far from sexual satisfaction; the emphasis then falls on sexual deviance [...]"; idealization "[...] is a process that involves the object [...] is possible both in the field of the libido of the self and in the libido of object" (Freud, 1992c, p. 91, our translation)¹¹. It is thus seen that for Freud, the sublimation describes something that happens with the drive, and the idealization something that happens with the object. Idealization is a fixation to an object. Idealization is a process of the (imaginary) self, while sublimation is basically symbolic. In this sense, the idealization can increase the demands of the self and act in favor of the repression, since the sublimation directly concerns the drive, it "[...] constitutes that escape route that allows to fulfill this demand without giving rise to the repression (*Verdrängung*)" (Freud, 1992c, p. 91, our translation)¹². So, what characterizes the sublimation is that it is based on a part of the libido not repressed. To the extent that sexual satisfaction is inhibited, "[...] drive is a drift" (Lacan, 2008, p. 139).

At the time of concluding, Vera was saved. What would have led Vera to save herself? It would be possible to propose that Robert's annihilating gaze on Vera and his sayings that attempt to define her, and consequently to mortify her, presenting itself as a cause of anguish, could sublimate itself in art with its pacified incidence, even if momentarily, by the artistic doing? Almodóvar attributes to the art of Bourgeois the salvation of Vera. He states: "Thanks to Louise Bourgeois, whose work not only thrilled me, but also served as a salvation for the character Vera".

Final considerations

Lacan observes that "[...] it is always against the prevailing norms, political norms, for example, or even schemes of thought, it is always against the current that art tries to operate its miracle again" (Lacan, 2008, p. 172). Almodóvar's cinematographic work and the creations of Louise Bourgeois provide valuable and attractive elements for thinking about the psychoanalytic clinic, allowing us to better understand what psychoanalysis has to say about the body and questions about sexual position.

It can be said that Almodóvar maintains with the film 'The Skin I live in' a critique on the violent paths of science, which, in conjunction with the capitalist discourse, imposes itself as a solution to register malaise in relation to the body and sexuality, opposing the possibilities of the subject to move between binary categories, create and affirm deviations from the norm. With Bourgeois, Almodóvar demonstrates the non-naturalness of the subject's relation to the body and teaches us that art can be an outlet, both because it is

¹⁰ It would be added to Freud's series of metapsychological texts - the first three published in 1915 and the last two published in 1917 - plus seven articles. However, Freud never published them. We know the themes of five of the seven articles: consciousness, anguish, conversion hysteria, obsessional neurosis and transference neuroses in general, sublimation and projection.

¹¹ "[...] es un proceso concerniente a la libido de objeto y consiste en el hecho de que la pulsión se lanza a otra meta, distante de la satisfacción sexual; el énfasis recae entonces en la desviación sexual [...] "; a idealização "[...] es un proceso que envuelve el objeto [...] es posible tanto en el campo de la libido del yo como en la libido de objeto"

¹² "[...] constituye aquella vía de escape que permite cumplir esa exigencia sin dar lugar al recalque".

situated against the current discourse, and because of the sublimatory effects it produces on the subject

In the writings and interviews of Louise Bourgeois, we often find reports of how her artistic practices functioned as a sort of restraint for anguish and gave her the strength to continue living. The artist states, “[...] sculpture is an exorcism and when you are really depressed and have no escape but suicide, sculpture can save you and wash you back into a kind of harmony” (Bourgeois, 2000, p. 256). And was not that, after all, what Almodóvar also showed us in his film?

Freud, however, warns that although art may induce the subject to a 'mild narcosis', it merely “[...] causes a temporary withdrawal from the pressures of vital needs, and is not strong enough to cause us to forget real affliction” (Freud, 1979, p. 82). Still, as Bourgeois points out, art can “[...] keep us on the level” and prevent us “from going to extremes or out of context” (Bourgeois, 2000, p. 250). It is, says the artist, a means of salvation, a guarantee of sanity (Bourgeois, 2000).

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