

## Hysteria today, why?<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This theoretical study aims at discussing hysteria nowadays and considers the cultural changes that might have occurred from the foundation of Psychoanalysis until today. The discussion is based on the thoughts of Charles Melman, a psychoanalyst who has studied the position of the subject in the conditions of the current Western culture. We highlighted aspects and consequently elaborated a reflection on how hysterical neurosis arises in the contemporary context, based on the principle that a cultural mutation occurred - a culture prone to neurosis was transformed into one prone to perversion. Owing to this conception, we deal with subjects that function under the order of a new psychic economy. Moreover, we see the expression of a collective hysteria that would be the space for the claims of the subjects, which aim at demanding a place and reinventing a father which is already destituted.

**Keywords:** hysteria, contemporaneity, cultural mutation, new psychic economy, Charles Melman.

### Introduction

Nowadays, in the context of psychoanalytical practice, it is significant that the effects of treating cases of “new symptoms” are questioned. The doubt stems from the description of something which can be considered new: a certain discontent in contemporary culture. How and why does the subject still seem to resort to certain phenomena of interest of Psychoanalysis as a way to express their anguish, abandonment, some sort of claim? With the predominance of deliberately extensive diagnostic descriptions, converted into high statistical rates of incidence of new psychic and/or behavioral diseases, we propose going back and considering hysteria a symptom, but not exactly in its pathological sense. Our aim is to analyze the hysterical expression as a social symptom.

Our proposal also adopts a certain commitment to a sense of rescue, since hysteria has been forgotten in spite of its importance for the foundation of Psychoanalysis. Ramos (2008) refers to this gap between the importance of hysteria for the history of psychoanalysis and its disappearance from diagnostic manuals in the following centuries. For the author, the value of hysteria is incontestable for the beginning of psychoanalysis, and transformed it into a mythical idea. “*Studies on hysteria*” is the founding text on the subject, and as everything that is founding, it acquired mythical characteristics over time.

Our discussion aims at contributing for the analysis of the incidence of hysteria in the present time, considering the vicissitudes of modern culture and how the subject faces them, how they create a bond in the current atmosphere.

We presume that the dominant discourses in culture have gone through some changes since Freud started studying and treating hysteria in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As change is a characteristic of progress and of the advance of times, symptoms may have acquired different meanings or even appear in different manners. Hysteria as a social symptom is possibly not as recognized today as it was in the past. Nevertheless, contrarily to its widely discussed disappearance, it is still present (Melman, 2003; Quinet, 2005).

Charles Melman (2003), a French psychoanalyst and a disciple and collaborator of Lacan, states that hysteria is still a clinical issue that fits the description of what he calls “New clinical forms in the beginning of the third millennium”,<sup>2</sup> such as depression, drug addictions and psychoses. Quinet (2005) confirms that statement by suggesting that, although it was expelled from psychiatry through its *door*, hysteria is coming back to daily life in many different manners, through many *windows*.

Melman affirms that hysteria in its classical form has become rarer, being replaced by phenomena more related to the theatre spectrum, more suitable for the cultural inclination towards spectacle and superficiality. The phenomenon would then be more characterized as a current social symptom.

The social symptom is formed from the dominant discourse of each period of time. According to Vorcaro (2004), the social symptom is a metaphor for a truth of civilization, which is recognized not by statistical incidence but by the inscription of this discursive articulation in the field of the social. It indicates the universal discontent common among subjects, a “shared metaphor of discontent, through

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2 Book originally released in Brazil because it is the transcription of a seminar conducted by Charles Melman in Curitiba in 2002.

a modality of *jouissance* inscribed and stimulated by the dominant discourse of a certain time” (Vorcaro, 2004, p. 42). For Greiser (2008), the social symptom exists when the bond with the Other of the unconscious is somehow annulled.

Based on these statements, we think it is important to associate these characteristics of a symptom of social functioning with the new forms of hysterical manifestations. As a result, it is necessary to identify the points of change, described by psychoanalysts as Jean Pierre Lebrun and Charles Melman, between the discontent of the culture from the time when Freud carried out his “Studies on Hysteria” and the current culture.

At the time Freud was alive, neurosis was justified as the renunciation of the satisfaction of urges in favor of incorruptible, sublimated and substantial ideals. The contemporary discourse alters this proposal, and we currently live in a dream where the impossible not only can but should be realized, without any restrictions. “*Jouir à tout prix*” (Melman, 2008), to enjoy at any cost, is in fact encouraged.

Celes (2007) affirms that the practice currently deals with very unstructured subjectivities, and that the current subjective conditions affected by neurosis are different. In other words, the subjects of today are more impoverished psychically and need a certain subjectivity, a collective identity to take on as subjects. Porge (2009) describes that subjectivity and the subject are two different and mutually exclusive topics. In his opinion, discussing new subjects based on a new psychic economy is not suitable for the psychoanalytical sense, which should not mix subject with subjectivity. Subjectivity is then a more appropriate topic for Psychology, Sociology and Law, while the psychoanalyst specializes on the subject. However, Porge (2009) highlights that the idea of “new subject”, “new symptoms” and “new psychic economy” is a school of thought inspired by the publications of Melman and Lebrun. In addition, in the book “*L’homme sans gravité*” we see the diffusion of the idea that the subject of the Freudian unconscious is unprotected, lost, without any possibility of support, without gravity.

For Arantes (2014), in psychoanalysis nowadays we see the disappearance of the traditional neurosis, which is replaced by borderline states. Every time the symptom exists, it is cured on one hand, but on the other hand it starts being endured (Melman, 2008).

## An invention of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

Now the “invention” of hysteria will be discussed, in which Charcot played an important role with the purpose of covering the path that led Freud to become interested in hysteria, to the point of making it essential for the development of psychoanalysis.

The word “invention” stands out, and its meaning comes from the Latin word “*inventio*”, indicating a “finding, discovery”. The prefix “*in*” gives the idea that something is inside, as if the invention realized something

that already exists, that only needs to arise. Continentino (2006) points out that “invention” may be understood as an opening, which goes beyond the sense of imagination, creation, production and disclosure. The opening comprises the desire of invention that pursues the thought, a desire associated with the desire of talking about the impossible, the unnamable. The author considers that the essence of invention is the opening to the new, which may stem from what is already crystallized and therefore seems transparent or invisible.

Considering the “invention of hysteria” under this perspective seems convenient as hysteria was and still is “this possibility of opening to the unexpected, to the result of long crystallized postures”, as Continentino (2006) says, in spite of its suspected overshadowing.

Hysteria was *invented* by Charcot in the hospital of Salpêtrière in Paris. The institution was considered an asylum, with characteristics of a large hospice. Didi-Huberman (2003) suggests that it was another Bastille, with walls that isolated two nuisances of society, two marginalized topics: woman and madness. We consider Charcot the inventor of hysteria due to of all his work aimed at establishing the nosology and nosography of the little-known and questionable symptomatic manifestations he saw in Salpêtrière, since there was no anatomic correspondent to justify the occurrence of the pathology. Before Charcot, hysteria did not exist in medical manuals and was seen as a mere symptom of other types of diseases, such as epilepsy, or as part of a mystery that occurred since ancient times (Didi-Huberman, 2003).

The first text of Freud on hysteria – Studies on Hysteria – was published in 1905, as one of the first volumes of the complete works of Freud. Written between 1893 and 1905 by Freud and Breuer, the “Studies on Hysteria” present theoretical seeds of the psychoanalytical theory, which still were not very consistent: the notion of the unconscious, repression, transference and others, which appear on the text as mere embryos. The note from the editor presents the interesting assumption that the book can be treated as the narrative of a story – the story of the invention of the “first instrument for the scientific examination of the human mind” (Freud, 2006, p. 20), i.e., Psychoanalysis. Once again, the importance of hysteria for psychoanalysis becomes very clear. Lacan (1992) affirms categorically: “it was from the desire of hysterics that Freud extracted his master-signifiers. It should not be forgotten that in fact Freud started from there” (p. 135).

Between the logical thought disseminated in medical opinion and less solidified ideas, the search for the etiology of hysteria in studies varies between the conception of the trauma (external cause) and the susceptibility of the individual (internal cause) to developing the history of the disease. This susceptibility can be divided into two levels of comprehension: the innate intrapsychic predisposition and the idiosyncrasy of each person. From this point of view, we notice that a subjective approximation, the search for the comprehension of the subject, was necessary to try

and understand hysteria as a symptom. It would become the clinical description of Freud, the type of hysteria he treated, indicating a certain difference from the hysteria of Charcot (Freud, 2006).

Studies on hysteria have the particularity of creating a dimension for hysteria that goes beyond becoming sick. Even if in the *Studies* hysteria was not considered in terms of structure – for, according to Maurano (2010), the structuralist thought attributed to Lévi-Strauss is posterior to Freud –, we assume it was the *pathos* of hysteria that enabled the endeavor of Freud. *Pathos* suggests passion and suffering: etymologically, it provides the meaning of the word pathology.

Denise Maurano (2010) analyzes the time in which hysteria episodes happened in Europe. According to the author, hysteria as a reflection of a certain period is as a paradigm of the condition of its time. Moreover, influences in the time of Freud – relativism, the fall of reason, the emphasis on love and sexuality – seemed to encourage the occurrence of hysteria.

The focal issue of this study is: considering the passage of time and cultural changes, what does hysteria reflect nowadays? What is the paradigm of this time for it to occur? Where and how does it occur?

## Hysteria – the feminine and the history that puts the Father into scene

A characteristic of hysteria has repeated itself throughout history: the link with the feminine, regardless of the many explanations already suggested for the enigma, before and after psychoanalysis. The historical association of hysteria with women goes back to the Hippocratic times, lasting through the Middle Ages and reaching Charcot and his patients of the Salpêtrière. Even Freud contributed theoretically for this link, as the case reports in his *Studies* only portray women. However, in times as the Renaissance, hysteria underwent a certain masculinization and started being correlated with neurological aspects, with both men and women being considered susceptible to such problems (Ramos, 2009). Nevertheless, as Maurano (2010) explains, it is necessary to highlight that “in psychoanalysis, masculine and feminine refer to *positions* that can be frequented by both men and women, going beyond gender distinctions” (p.42). As a result, for psychoanalysis the conception of femininity and the opposition that is inevitably produced regarding masculinity are not explained solely by sociological meanings. Lacan (1992) explains that this exclusivity does not belong to women, for men are not different in the level of discourse required for the analytical process.

This is what is meant by the discourse of the hysteric, industrious as she is. In saying *industriouse*, we are making the hysteric a woman, but this is not her privilege. Many men go into analysis, and by that very fact are also forced to pass by way of

hysterical discourse, because it is the law, the rule of the game. (Lacan, 1992, p. 34)

Melman (1985) discusses the feminine position as a reference of a place, more precisely the enigma of the place which is reserved to the woman, because the woman is essentially the figure of the exiled, as her castration is considered real. Castration represents more than a threat for women, consolidating the loss of the throne which is supported by the primacy of the phallus. Over this territory of exile, the feminine is constituted.

The hysterical symptom is a notable result of the imposition of the psychic reality on material reality. In other words, a subjective truth exists. They are singular expressions constituted of the ghost, of the issue of the trauma that makes the father appear (Melman, 1985). The Real father, which is the agent of castration for Lacan (1992).

For girls, the transformation of the relationship with the father is defined as the *violent scene*, a transformation of a relationship initially “based on love and identity into one characterized by sex and alterity.” (Melman, 1985, p.38). The scene marks the beginning of a fall, in the sense of the loss of the throne, in a script in which, up to a certain moment, the girl develops the same phallic activity as boys and then discovers she is condemned to a different destiny, a destiny which implies a certain subjective abandon, since the father could not guarantee the recognition of her identity anymore. That is possibly the reason why the hysteric seeks a master, as a potential replacement for the father that did not guarantee a subjective sense of security. For Lacan (1992), the hysteric wants a master, and he asks if the invention of the master does not stem from that.

In this period when elaborations were made regarding the hysterical phenomenon, Melman (1985) points out that the hysterical symptomatic expression (this disease which is not a disease) is the same as protecting the father, for even when the ghost presented the triumph of the incestuous relationship, the denunciation of the incest also protected the father from the suspicion of impotence that he may have been under. This formulation will be important to analyze the issue that, if we are currently observing a noticeable destitution of the father from his real function and a supposed weakening or even absence of the master-signifier, hysteria arises as an expression to reaffirm this forgotten power.

At first, we think that the notion of the destituted father is a strong indication of the disappearance of hysteria. However, an analysis indicates exactly the opposite. Melman (1985) seems to suggest that this supposedly dead father is alive while hysteria occurs, because the hysteric protects her father from decline. She promotes a removal of her father from his common place, where he stops being the one who everyone recognizes equally, without the privilege of his symbolic function, which establishes the law (Kehl, 2002). Thus, the goal of the hysteric is to modify the pathetic representation of her father, since it would not

be very interesting to sustain it as a subject that desires – an essential characteristic, for where something is missing a subject exists (Lacan, 1992). This explains, for instance, why the Freudian hysteric made her father a criminal: to provide him a place of emphasis.

Still under the contradictory logic of the issue of the place of the father in the hysterical universe, it seems suitable to consider that hysterics insist in using the father as a foundation for their expression, making him a prince to a kingdom in which the hysteric could be the princess. According to Lacan (1992), the hysteric plays the master, she always wants the other to know more, but not to the point that she is the reward for all their knowledge. She “wants a master over whom she reigns. She reigns, and he does not govern” (p. 136). By doing that, she becomes a subject as well, a subject by law<sup>3</sup>.

From this assumption, we infer that, what before could be an attribute of becoming a woman, in a reference to her position of exiled, is interpreted today as a quality of any person that is lost, without any references, without a Father that provides integration and validation as a subject. Moreover, it also indicates that, in addition to the decline of the father, we are facing the effects of a borderless world, debilitated by the inexistence of frontiers. Considering the suppression of barriers, these effects might as well refer to a place without any ground or sky.

## The emergence of a new psychic economy

The erasing of frontiers, the suspension of limits and the paradoxical mixing of languages in the unconscious are characteristics of the present time according to French psychoanalyst Charles Melman. The contemporary world is under a new order, which assumes that we went through a cultural mutation and face the emergence of a new psychic economy (npe), which would produce new subjects and new pathologies. For Porge (2009), however, this affirmation indicates a radicalization of the first works of Jean-Pierre Lebrun, the text “*Un monde sans limite*”, published in 1997. The radicalization would have occurred for the conception that new pathologies do not mean a new psychic structure, but a new possibility of contravention of the laws of language (Lebrun, 2009, cited by Porge, 2009). This thought and the ideas we highlighted so far are linked by the fact that the vicissitudes and dominant discourses of a certain time and culture are determinant to promote changes. The assumption that an alteration occurred in the

dynamics of the psyche refers to the submission to the logic of repression that is not as powerful today as it seemed in the past. Today, we are at the mercy of the need to freely express one’s desires.

We call a thesis what Melman (2008) defends as cultural mutation and new psychic economy because he continued developing these ideas, which are always present in his spoken and/or written productions, and we consider him a reference in this study. In the book “*L’homme sans gravité – Jouir à tout prix*”, a result of talks with the psychoanalyst Jean-Pierre Lebrun, Melman explains the thesis with more details. The thought of the book can be defined as the endeavor of producing a theory on the contemporary subject that functions under the code of a psychic economy which is different from the one Freud explained.

The comparison between the psychic economy studied by Freud and Melman’s new psychic economy is a crucial point for us, for we aim at understanding the courses of hysterical neurosis within this process of cultural mutation in which we are supposedly living.

The emergence of the new economy basically consists in a new form of relating to the object, the effect and the result of an unprecedented cultural mutation characterized by, among other things, a crisis of references, disappearance of the sacred (that which supports both sex and death), elimination of transferences, excesses, lack of limits. The object cause of desire, which used to be lost and absent by essence, lost its condition and is becoming present, and the possibilities of replacement are endless (Melman, 2008).

Subjective division almost does not occur anymore in the new psychic economy. The divided subject that used to question its existence would be transforming into a whole subject. It is necessary to understand that, from the point of view of Melman (2008), being whole is a paradox since it subtracts the characteristics that make the human being different from other animal species instead of adding them.

The ideal of freedom, which seems to be a reality in this context of cultural mutation, implies the imprisonment of the subject in a limbo, where they are disoriented, lost, in a world where they do not know if they are living or dreaming. Freedom, in these terms, becomes harmful, because if everything is allowed individuals are not required to think too much or choose.

This suspicion refers to what Lacan (1992) says about the atheism of psychoanalysis, when he explains that it is an atheism different from the common “God is dead” atheism. In this case, we could think that without God, without any interdiction, everything would be allowed. However, the understanding is precisely the opposite:

A long time ago, I observed that to the sentence of old father Karamozov, *if God is dead then everything is permitted*, the conclusion required by the text of our experience is that *God is dead* the

3 Maria Rita Kehl (2002) mentions the “subject by law” as the subjectivity molded on the bourgeois point of view that prevailed in Europe in the 19th century, a period in which the suffering of hysterics was expressed and through which a dignified sense of listening was produced. The subject by law also means a “social place” here, leaving the position of the exiled which is equivalent to the place of the woman and the feminine, in the sense that this place can only be thought of as an absence. This movement of the hysteric of producing the master is similar to what occurs in the analyzed interaction, for in the same way the master provides a place of recognition for the hysteric, the analyst has, according to Arantes (2014) the fundamental task of being “a place that gives a place to what did not have a recognized place”. (p. 108).

response is *nothing is permitted anymore*. (Lacan, 1992, p. 126)

As a result, the imperative of *jouissance* is more punishment than joyful freedom. If on one hand it demands less and less of the subject, on the other hand it does not provide any support for their reality, which was previously organized by deception or dissatisfaction.

One of the prerogatives of this new order of whole subjects, free from the weight of guilt and debt, is that entropy is maximum (Melman, 2008). Entropy is a physical property, a quantity used in thermodynamics to measure the degradation level of energy in a system. Maximum entropy occurs when the imbalance is high, when the degree of disorder of a system is high (Dicionário Larousse, 2005). Thus, the higher the entropy, the more likely the system is to return to a considerable balance, almost lifeless from so much balance and similar to a still water that suggests death.

Melman (2008) writes “maximum entropy (p. 60) to talk about this almost deadly comfort that befalls people nowadays, a defense against the tormenting desire, which is tormenting but necessary to life. The impossibility of realizing desires, since realizing them is no longer an accomplishment, makes desires become fluid and uncommon. That which should represent a type of comfort ends up being transformed into a type of sedation.

The book “*L’homme sans gravité – Jouir à tout prix*” invites us to look at the subject as someone who lost their specific dimension, submitted to the impossible, organized in asymmetry. We have discussed what comprises the condition for the neurosis, whether as structure or symptom. Melman (2008) believes that we went from the culture of neurosis to a culture in which the predominant structure is or will be perversion. A generalized perversion is what creates a social bond in the moment where we are and where progress will lead us.

Does this mean we are facing a neurosis that does not reveal itself any longer? From our point of view, the issue goes beyond the contradictions of exist and does not exist, which falls especially on our proposition, on the topic of hysteria. The issue is trying to understand neurosis considering the changes caused by this progress.

If desire is fundamentally perverse, neurosis would keep functioning as a defense against perversion. As such, since it was suggested that we live in a society of perverts, the neurotic stops being the rule and starts being the exception. Neurotics are the ones who somehow denounce the loss of the whereabouts, who complain through symptoms favored or promoted by contemporary conditions.

From the observation of current symptoms, neurosis is still active, especially in a culture prone to perversion, because it is precisely due to this situation that defense increases, and as a result we reach the climax of announcing that we live in a “society of symptoms” (Laurent, 2007). Nowadays, symptoms represent a path of recognition, similarly to what was produced with the hysteria of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Zanotti, Abellhauser, Gaspard, & Besset, 2013).

Discontent nowadays is different from the one indicated by Freud, and we can possibly state that, as neurosis

represents a defense against the lack of the present time, it offers a defense against excesses. This may be an explanation for the outbreak of some symptoms observed today, whether they are classified as organic or psychic.

The subjects, under this new psychic economy, are still organized around an impossible. “After all, they need to find discomfort for themselves, to systematically seek, to institute what does not work, which creates a conflict or creates a difficulty” (Melman, 2008, p. 92). In this case, the considerable alteration occurs in the level of demand, because among the main changes in contemporary expressions of suffering, the most remarkable one is that symptoms are not reformulated anymore in the field of claims or demands (Melman, 2008).

Suddenly, we find one of the pieces that justify the increasingly frequent visits of these carriers of “new symptoms” to psychiatrist offices and psychotherapists promising a quick cure, or even immediate in some cases. Melman (2008) mentions examples which reach his office that corroborate this reflection. From our own experience, we can state that at the university clinic<sup>4</sup>, a good part of the patients can hardly move past the complaint. Their demand is scattered, lacks implication, and people that seek psychotherapy almost never reach the level of communicating their desire. We can assume this also indicates the need of changing the clinic regarding the position of the analyst, for the risk of atopy exists as well.

## Considering an atopy<sup>5</sup> for everyone

Laurent (2007) affirms that in the contemporary context, “the psychoanalyst should remain atopic regarding the main school of civilization that drags him” (p. 171) and listen as someone proposing to “see” beyond the relief of the subject, the weight of their relationship with *jouissance*. Thus, we realize that atopy is the great condition that affects everyone.

The topic of atopy is always present in discussions carried out by Charles Melman. However, we notice a subtle difference in the link he makes for subjective atopy, from the way it appears on the “New Studies on Hysteria” and how it appears in “*L’homme sans gravité*”. In the first text, atopy is described as a privilege, first of the subject in a feminine position, then more incisively, referring to the hysteric. In the most recent text, atopy stops being a privilege of some to become a condition of all. Based on this small distinction, we may assume that the sacrifice made by the hysteric to reconstitute the world of the father so that he provides her support is nowadays a sacrifice made by all subjects that are “naturally” lost and without shelter.

Considering this analyzed condition, hysteria is an alternative to the project of subjective support. Similarly to how the alternative for the impossible of the subject in the

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5 Absence of place.

feminine came to be, now it becomes a more common way out, affecting everyone indiscriminately. When Lebrun expresses his less pessimistic opinion concerning the fact that a reasonable amount of people still come to realize the process of subjectivization, Melman (2008) answers: “certainly, we deal with subjectivities which are more organized by their participation in a collective hysteria than by singular determination” (p. 64).

Collective hysteria, as defined by the text itself, is an expression of the hysterical neurosis manifested collectively, producing the effect of an outbreak. We may assume that collective hysteria as defined by Melman (2008) has more a sense of structure than the reproduction of hysterical symptoms by identification. Nevertheless, we may say that it is exactly a phenomenon like this that is being discussed, since the identified subjects are identified by a deficiency, i.e., a subjective and generalized lack, subjects which lack *being* (Kehl, 2002). It means as well that the subject does not seem capable of taking on his own self. Responsibility and identity started being acquired collectively. “The subject is not responsible anymore, since his subjective determination does not stem any longer from what would be a singular adventure, an intimate choice, but from a participation in collective hysteria” (Melman, 2008, p. 65).

This phenomenon makes us think about the symptomatic expressions, especially the diseases in evidence nowadays, which at least for us update the denunciation of contemporary discontent, as depression and panic, for instance. Moreover, diseases classified as being part of the hysterical spectrum (anorexia, bulimia, all sorts of body dysmorphic disorders, etc.) and those identified as chronic pain syndrome, such as fibromyalgia (Zanotti et al., 2013), exist as well. Melman (2003) presents three current clinical issues of the cultural mutation process: depression, drug addictions and hysteria (this last one in a collective dimension).

In the present cultural moment, hysteria reveals itself more clearly in two ways: by encouraging spectacle and by what Melman (2003) calls communitarianism. In the end, both are ways for the subject to become noticed, recognized.

Spectacle is related to a state prone to exhibiting everything, from the most superfluous to what would generally be considered more valued in life, such as personal exchange – which accounts for the success of reality shows, as they do not contradict us. This tendency toward the spectacle is increasingly dominant and growing in society, as if it were the ideal path to enter the world. The other path, communitarianism, occurs through the union of separated voices with the purpose of transforming themselves into some sort of claim, which generally demand an identity, as the voices from subjects ignored in the field of representation are mute (Arantes, 2014; Melman, 2003).

It is understood that these foreclosed subjects, which are suffering, can find a certain historical

argument that makes them claim the recognition of a communal belonging which so far would have been neglected, i.e., communitarianism is one of the manifestations of these collective hysterias. (Melman, 2003, p. 104)

This context comprises virtual groups and/or communities, which are widespread and easily accessed nowadays. Through them, people seek authorization as subjects. Internet enabled this encounter which produces a very strong communitarianism by providing voice and presence for subjects that alone are practically inaudible and invisible. These subjects do not speak for themselves, but for the community in which they participate. The phenomenon is paradoxical in the sense that, while these communities provide collective support, they intensify individual speechlessness and anonymization. However, it is not possible to deny that it is an alternative in terms of requiring support.

It is a contemporary way to claim a location, an affiliation. It is a similar posture to the one of the hysterical subject, when associated to the figure of the exiled foreigner, with the aggravation that it is a claim without duplicity, i.e., there is no more the I and the community, as the community today is entirely assumed. In other words, it is not only a represented part of their addressing to the Other (Melman, 2008). In the best hypothesis, to not be radical and say that the addressing no longer exists, it is said that it became self-referential or gaseous, with self-referential having a very close meaning to how Laurent (2007) explains his opinion about the taste for easy submission to risk observed nowadays. For the author, “in this entire lethal bacchanal, such a strong characteristic of our time, we find manifestations of the search for a presence of the Other in us” (p. 170).

## The problem of a whole subject

In “*L’homme sans gravité*”, the subjects are also characterized as being stateless. For us, it relates to the perception that we deal with the absence of this Other, of the paternal reference. The correlation extends to the figure of the migrated, which inhabits many places, but does not find their own place. Kehl (2002) reports that contemporary societies are producing a subject which is increasingly centered on the *I* and lacking of *being*, which in other words means that affiliation does not completely restore the field of the symbolic in which the subject is situated. A second meaning for the expression “lacking of *being*”, according to the author, is that what is missing for these lacking subjects is being the phallus of the Other. However, at the same time, Kehl adds “this position of *jouissance* which was lost, or never had ” (p. 40).

Then we ask ourselves: was there ever any whereabouts? Is it possible that in some time someone benefited from this feeling of being fully integrated, of having found a place in the Other that favored them as a feeling of total security?

The nostalgia born from this type of analysis of the present time causes the impression that one day that was possible. However, the psychoanalytic prerogative, in spite of pointing out the aggravation of the situation, does not mean defending this perspective or the promise of integration and plenitude. On the contrary, it emphasizes the division of the subject, their incompleteness, as a specific condition. Nevertheless, considering the vicissitudes of the current subjective processes, this characteristic stopped being something that already exists to become something that needs to be sought (Figueiredo, 2008).

Figueiredo (2008) states as well that the ideal of completeness, of full integration, is an ideal of the Romantics and of Enlightenment, defended by each in a different way. Both Romanticism and Enlightenment pretended to fight division and dichotomies, but Romanticism tried to overcome dichotomies through harmony and unity, while Enlightenment tried to overcome them through one force beating the other in games of dichotomy, for instance, conscious/unconscious, body/mind. Through this explanation, the author summarizes the problematic of today: the search for integration within this logic of “making sense” left behind the insertion of the subject in the experience. He proposes replacing the importance of *making sense* for *giving way*, i.e., the permission to remain in the *between* spaces, which in our opinion characterizes a rejection to wholeness.

In this stage of the elaborations, we find the possible motive why Melman considers a problem the fact that the contemporary subject seems whole. Figueiredo (2008) helps us understand when he says: “The more the aspects of the experience – particularly the more intense emotional experiences – are invalidated for not finding a social context of legitimization, the more the strength of the invalidated unconscious grows and weighs”. (p.37).

This reference to the invalidated unconscious contributed to a better visualization of the mutation that Melman (2008) assumes occurred in the unconscious, especially when he singles out that the unconscious of Freud does not exist anymore. Additionally, Figueiredo (2008) also helps us understand that division is important, as it is a specific condition of the subject. The hypothesis is that there is a subjacent schizoidism<sup>6</sup> in the subjects, which is necessary for them to be constituted as such. It is a supposition that was developed from the conception of Fairbairn, author that Figueiredo uses as reference to elaborate his thought, which says that all subjectivization comprises an schizoidism, from the initial phase and as basic structure of the psyche, to the exits through symptoms<sup>7</sup>, especially in limit situations and as a way to restructure after a series of “existential disasters” (Figueiredo, 2008, p. 46).

In our opinion, it is through contemporary symptoms that the subjects still defend this “division” that is

supposedly disappearing. It is important to say it is not an apology for suffering, neither for falling ill, but a way of noticing that human suffering has an actual intent which is to gain recognition, especially when the specific dimension of the subject seems almost inanimate.

Figueiredo (2008) affirms that the neurotic, psychotic and perverse symptoms are strategies to deal with the subjacent schizoidism. Nowadays, it could also be a strategy to make it stand out as a subjective peculiarity that should not be forgotten. Maybe this is why psychoanalysis does not define cure as its main purpose, especially since a cure seems unreachable in these conditions, considering that “no one can be cured from their schizoidism, because no one can be cured from their own self” (Figueiredo, 2008, p. 50).

According to Figueiredo (2008), hysteria is the first station in the trip where the marks of schizoidism are visible. It may be considered a great resistance to the “*closed system*”<sup>8</sup>, which implies that the subject struggles to remain divided in some way. We think that this notion is in accordance with Melman’s idea that we are immersed in a process which induces collective hysteria, which is a path for support and recognition for subjects that are “still” divided. What changes between the hysteria of the first station of Figueiredo and the collective hysteria of Melman is possibly its expression, its symptomatic manifestation, its sense when taking into account what we understand as a social symptom.

Laurent (2007) says that one of the faces of contemporary subjectivity is the “search for a symptom in which it is worth believing” (p. 170). In the present time, hysteria is not widely discussed, especially since it has been converted into other diagnosis such as depression and panic. The invested symptoms or diagnoses are the ones with value. For Figueiredo (2008), these symptoms are formed to function as a defense against trauma. Trauma returns, as Freud analyzed it in association with hysteria, in the beginning. The symptomatic transmutation stems from cultural changes, and according to Laurent (2007), “there are new symptoms every time the master signifiers dislocate in the Other” (p. 175).

The father needed to decline for parricide to stop being interesting and for the mistreated child to go to the front of the scene. The consumerist society was necessary for the outbreaks of bulimia and anorexia to become widespread, and for addictions to disseminate globally. A crisis was needed in the issue of the Real so that depression as the “weariness from being what it is” prevailed. . . . The analytical opposite of the contemporary civilization is the inconsistent set of interpretations given to these symptoms. (Laurent, 2007, p. 175)

6 Not in the sense of the definition of the psychopathology (it is not the personality disorder), but in the sense of “schizo” as division, segregation.

7 As Zanotti et al. (2013) defend in the study on chronic pain.

8 Fairbairn calls a closed system the sick endopsychic structure, which limits at the most the contact with the world and which psychoanalytic therapy should break (Figueiredo, 2008, p. 50).

Hence, as it can be seen, cultural mutation does not indicate the disappearance of neurosis as a whole, neither of hysteria. The expressions have changed, and perhaps the function of the symptom. Since “*As novas formas clínicas...*”, Melman considers hysteria a clinical issue of high incidence in the present time, and his analytical ethics mentions that it is a path to resignification, resulting from a claim that arises to remind us that the specific dimension of the subject is not completely lost, that there is still an attempt to reconstitute the Other. Among the challenges, the practice of psychoanalysis, also transformed, shows that neurosis is not totally extinguished, in spite of progress and cultural transformations.

## Final considerations

Both Freud and Melman, each in their own time and through different paths, seem to have arrived at the idea that hysteria is an expression of the subject. While in his *Studies* Freud conceived that hysteria was a pathology of the sense, Melman leads us to the discussion that hysteria results from the attempt of a subjective repositioning, a (re)structure.

Melman’s texts adopt a point of view that becomes a questioning and the center of our initial intuition: the thought that hysteria relies almost exclusively on repression, as an external force that functions to block internal forces. The idea was that if the pretext of free expression exists today, repression, which is so necessary for the occurrence of the hysterical manifestation, would have lost its repressive function, and as a result hysteria would have disappeared. However, the function of repression is not limited to the suppression of desires; it also constitutes the functioning of the psychic apparatus. As a result, Melman thinks of hysteria as an expression of what is explained by the need to restructure and resignify the subjective position.

Melman’s text constantly shows his way of thinking of hysteria from the perspective of subjective atopy. In addition to this perception, we single out a second idea that is proposed: the anguish generated by that condition – an anguish that should no longer be recognized as an effect of repression – starts being recognized also as an artifact that encourages creation, which enables the restitution of the supposedly lost place.

We assume that Melman thinks of hysteria from the side of drive, and not as an effect of repression. We develop our own speculation by pursuing the idea that hysteria is the algorithm of a special subjective condition characterized by atopy – not having a place. Nevertheless, in the present time the condition became popular and generalized.

Our study led us to think of the present time as an atmosphere which favors the expansion of the number of subjects without a place. The progress of contemporary culture also puts at stake the specific dimension of the subject, which used to be characterized by division. The subjective division understood as a peculiarity capable of demonstrating that the subjects organize themselves

around an impossible is what makes them spend their lives questioning the limits of their existence.

However, if in hysteria the divided subject takes over the place of the agent (Lacan, 1992) and this subject is disappearing, then it is only natural that hysteria disappears as well. Nevertheless, it is precisely there that Melman presents “collective” hysteria as one of the effects of this new subjective disposition.

We are invited to consider the collective hysteria not as a group outbreak, but as an expression of the masses. When Melman states that the subjects affirm themselves more through a collective outbreak of hysteria than by an individual aspiration, it means that they no longer take on their own selves. In this case, we understand that the hysteria of the masses is a resource to try and ensure a place where the voices of the subjects are heard as such, possibly indicating that nowadays it is too hard to sustain oneself in a different way.

While we reflect on how Melman considers the manifestation of hysteria in the present time, a definition of hysteria that surrounded our conjectures was the one that considers hysteria an “expression of sensitivity”, a term mentioned by Elaine Showalter (2004).

Considering this definition seemed appropriate for us since it can be applied to any time in which the phenomenon is analyzed, taking into account that hysteria, in terms of functionality or sense, keeps denouncing that the existence of a certain flaw, or as Melman affirmed in this *Novos Estudos*: something in the Other is not well. As a result, the claim is a particularity of the hysterical expression.

The neurotic symptom showed us the subject of psychoanalysis, the divided subject. Kehl (2002) points out that it has occurred since the modern age owing to the fragmentation of references, generating instability and abandonment for men. For Kehl (2002), the modern man unlearned to suffer and “the rejected suffering casts a shadow over the *I* that is much larger than its true dimension” (p. 60).

Nowadays, this issue is not very different from the time of Freud. Owing to these mutations, psychic economy might have changed, the unconscious might have become invalidated and the subjective arrangements might be others. However, our analysis allowed us to see that the neurosis never ceases to exist and that hysteria, as a stronger version of it, will always be an expression that arises to indicate that the specific condition of the subject – of a divided being – is not entirely lost.

Hysteria is the expression of sensitivity because it presents itself as a path through which subjective division can still be recognized. In Freud, this characteristic of the subject was “discovered” through the study of hysteria; in Melman, the study on hysteria indicates that it should be recuperated.

The manifestation of a collective hysteria may be the expression of the common unhappiness Freud mentions in his studies, which nowadays is so common that it may be mistaken for non-existence. Melman’s texts renew the conceptions developed about hysteria so far,



indicating that in addition to denunciation, for many subjects it functions as an attempt to reconstitute the impossibles and the necessary absences for support, to reconstitute a place where subjects search integration once again, even though its unattainable, and hence to provide voice and authority to the Father/Master when it seemed silenced. By taking a

closer look at the ways hysteria manifests itself in the present time, whether through communitarianism, propensity for exhibitionism, everyday spectacle or symptoms, it is possible to notice that they occur through the expression of subjects that are sensitive to the changes progress usually brings to human life.

### **Histeria ainda hoje, por quê?**

**Resumo:** Estudo teórico que teve o propósito de discutir a histeria na contemporaneidade, considerando as mudanças culturais que podem ter ocorrido desde a fundação da Psicanálise até hoje. A discussão tem como cerne os apontamentos de Charles Melman, posto que seja um psicanalista que vem pensando a posição do sujeito nas condições da cultura ocidental atual. Foram destacados aspectos que nos conduziram a elaborar um pensamento em torno de como a neurose histérica aparece no contexto contemporâneo. Partimos do princípio de sofremos uma mutação cultural, na qual passamos de uma cultura propensa à neurose para uma propensa à perversão. Tal concepção determina que lidamos com sujeitos que funcionam sob a ordem de uma nova economia psíquica e que em decorrência assistimos a expressão de uma histeria coletiva que, por sua vez, seria espaço de reivindicação dos sujeitos, a fim de requisitar um paradeiro e reinventar um pai que já esteja destituído.

**Palavras-chave:** histeria, contemporaneidade, mutação cultural, nova economia psíquica, Charles Melman.

### **L'hystérie aujourd'hui, pourquoi?**

**Résumé:** Ce travail a pour objectif d'analyser l'hystérie dans la contemporanéité, en tenant compte des changements qui ont afflué depuis la fondation de la Psychanalyse jusqu'à présent. Notre discussion est centrée sur les notes de Charles Melman, psychiatre-psychanalyste qui sous l'égide de la psychanalyse réfléchit à ce qui concerne la position du sujet dans la culture occidentale actuelle. Nous trouvons des éléments qui mettent en évidence la construction d'une pensée autour de la névrose hystérique et de comment celle-ci se construit dans la contemporanéité. Nous supposons que nous sommes soumis à une mutation culturelle, dans laquelle nous passons d'une culture fondée sur la névrose à une culture qui promeut plutôt la perversion. Cette conception nous conduit à penser que nous sommes face à des sujets qui fonctionnent sous l'ordre d'une nouvelle économie psychique et, en conséquence, on voit l'expression d'une hystérie collective, dans laquelle le sujet se place dans un rôle revendicatif, afin de demander le sujet et réinventer un père qui a été déjà destitué.

**Mots-clés:** hystérie, contemporanéité, changement culturel, nouvelle économie psychique, Charles Melman.

### **La histeria de hoy, ¿por qué?**

**Resumen:** Este trabajo es un estudio teórico que tuvo como objetivo discutir la histeria en la época contemporánea, teniendo en cuenta los cambios culturales que han ocurrido desde la fundación del psicoanálisis hasta hoy. La discusión tuvo como base las notas de Charles Melman, por ser un psicoanalista que ha considerado el lugar del sujeto en los contextos de la cultura actual. Se pusieron de relieve los aspectos que nos han llevado a desarrollar una reflexión acerca de cómo la neurosis histérica surge en el contexto contemporáneo. Partimos del supuesto de que nos enfrentamos a un cambio cultural en el que pasamos de cultura propensa a la neurosis a la perversión. Este concepto determina que nos ocupamos de sujetos que funcionan a partir del orden de una nueva economía psíquica, y como resultado vemos una expresión de la histeria colectiva que, a su vez, es un espacio de demanda de los sujetos con el fin de requerir un descanso y de reinventar un padre que ya está depuesto.

**Palabras clave:** histeria, contemporaneidad, cambio cultural, nueva economía psíquica, Charles Melman.

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