SPEAKING LALANGUE OF THE BODY – Eric Laurent

Seventh class: “The Unconscious as an Elucubration of Knowledge over Lalangue of the Speaking Body”

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During the seventh class, Eric Laurent focuses specifically on pages 566 to 570 in “Joyce, the Symptom” in Lacan’s Autres ecrits. As in the previous classes, the commentary is derived from a “close reading” [English in original], in addition to, what I would say is a “close listening” [English in original], that captures the unprecedented resonances in this text.

It is a complex text that confronts at many moments the “pas à lire” [not to be read] that Lacan opposes to a comprehensive reading of his writings. Nevertheless, aided by the approach that Eric Laurent proposes, we can discern the text’s multiple resonances. With his commentary we recognize Lacan’s different references in this text that are, in most cases, subtle. Laurent’s commentary not only permits us to access what is between the lines, but also
what is inferred in a phrase or an expression. The resonances extracted in this way from the reading are later connected to other elaborations of Lacan’s teaching. This is what Laurent presents to us, associating certain passages of the text to *Seminar VII* and to “Television”. Beyond situating ourselves in Lacan’s careful reading of Joyce’s *œuvre* and the Joycean critique, Eric Laurent refers back to Jacques-Alain Miller’s commentaries on Lacan’s last teaching as well as to precise passages in “The Unconscious and the Speaking Body”, the topic of the next AMP Congress.

We highlight some of the questions that Eric Laurent identifies as the guiding thread of this class: if man (*LOM*) speaks with his body that means he is divided between the consistency of the three registers - real, symbolic and imaginary, as a consistency, that founds the *parlêtre* – and the *sinthome*.

Two corrolaries derive from this perspective: one is of equivalence, indicating that “having a body” is equal to “speaking with the body”; and the other, by deduction, signals *LOM* as “*parlêtre* de nature”.

From this expression “*parlêtre* de nature”, Eric Laurent underlines a subjacent aspect of Lacan’s text, the relationship between art and nature in Joyce.

By means of an overview of the Joycean aesthetic in reference to the relationship between art and nature, Eric Laurent prepares the terrain for a reading of the paragraph in which Lacan presents the artist as the “*tête de l’art*”, or as a portrait, in contrast to the idea of a natural body. In an interesting comparison between *Seminar VII* and *Seminar XXIII*, Laurent demonstrates how the notion of subject, in *Seminar VII*, is situated outside of nature in relation to what is structured in terms of the signifying chain. For Laurent, Lacan comes back to this question in *Seminar XXIII* to the degree that the
parlêtre – in this case Joyce as an artist – is established from the hole in nature, articulating itself, around that hole, as a consistency.

Another discussion proposed in this class is with respect to Lacan’s commentary on Joyce’s possible “sainthood” (as “sain-homme”). Eric Laurent reflects on Lacan’s affirmation that Joyce was not a saint, given his relationship with the unconscious (he enjoys too much his step-ladder to be a saint, that is, he has too much “art-gueil”). To this singular relation with the unconscious, Eric Laurent highlights the relationship between Joyce and toxins (alcohol) as another element that separates him from sainthood. With this commentary we can return to Lacan’s text and localize the opposition between what would be a canonic way towards sainthood, for example, the way of the Mendicant Friars, and the Joycean way. If it is possible to recognize the will to not possess anything in Joyce, this encounters its limit in his desire to construct a name for himself with the resource of the step ladder of masterful sayings.

Eric Laurent distinguishes three paths that are on the horizon for the parlêtre, starting from Joyce’s position. If for Lacan Joyce is a “symptom” (and not a “sain-homme”), it is because he does not take the canonic route to sainthood. As Laurent points out, in the end this route does not exist, given that there is nothing that specifies the saints, that is to say, that makes of them a species. In Joyce another path is discernible, the “way of the farce”, like an enigma to be deciphered (different from the Witz) and its recognizable feminizing effects, for example in Bloom. Finally, there is the way of step-ladderation [escabeaustration] that Laurent recognizes as an original modality of castration, castration of the step ladder that, as Lacan indicates in the text, is only possible by means of an escapade. To a certain degree, it is what Joyce maintains when he presents the exile as one of the means at his disposal to escape the network of religion, of the nation and of the dominant language.
With regards to this point, Laurent returns to the distinction between jouissance of speech (that of the step ladder) and the jouissance of the body, associated with the symptom, as Miller presented it in “The Unconscious and the Speaking Body”. He emphasizes the phallic dimension of the jouissance of the step ladder, experienced as outside of the body, or as disharmonic in relation to the body.

In this sense, if it is possible to detect Joyce’s dislocation in relation to his body image, the possibility to construct his ego from his writing, for Lacan, is only sustainable if the Other pays tribute to it. Laurent takes up Lacan’s expression in the text, in which he claims that to have a body does not mean anything “if it does not make everyone else pay a tithe for it” (Lacan, 1979, p. 563), from the perspective of that which would have permitted Joyce to make himself a body.

The example could be found, again, in the person of Bloom, a publicist, who knows that fundamentally language is in the service of jouissance. Beyond this personage, Laurent glimpses in Joyce an exit route from the capitalist discourse, to the degree that, we too have to pay a tithe to access his work, as a production of waste.

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1. The portuguese translation of Joyce, the Symptom uses the expression falezer por natureza which was translated as parlêtre de nature in the Spanish version.

2. Lacan plays on the words ‘art’ and ‘pride’ (orgueil).