What I could hear from the sixth lesson of Éric Laurent's seminar:

*Speaking Lalangue of the Body*

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At the end of the sixth lesson of *Speaking Lalangue of the body*, Éric Laurent comes up with two questions related to a theme, which, to my opinion, crosses his elaborations in that occasion, and likewise pervades other lessons of his seminar aimed at the preparations for the next Congress of the World Association of Psychoanalysis (*The speaking body: the unconscious in the 21st century*). I consider “could one speak with one’s body without speaking of castration?” to be the main question of the two. Guided by what proceeds from James Joyce’s enigmatic writing, this question follows, in fact, the other question: “could one go beyond phallic *jouissance* and beyond castration? I underline these two questions because they seem to clarify the beginning of the sixth lesson with the reference to the *fort/da* that Freud located in his grandson’s game, as well as the reason why Jacques-Alain Miller takes it up in *Scilet*. Éric Laurent thematises the *fort/da* as the filling of the “void of libido by a satisfaction of the symbolic order and which could be universal”, in as much as it is the reduction of the drive to a “pure game of signifiers”: *...fort... da...* or *...going...coming...* To put it in other words, in the void of libido, the signifier’s game interferes, not without satisfaction. I would situate this game of signifiers as a kind of metonymy of the symbolic order, and from this vantage point, to speak with the body is articulated to castration and to phallic *jouissance*, given that both are tributaries of what the signifier imposes on the “speaking body”.
Moreover, another reference to the void is presented at the beginning of this lesson: guided by Lacan’s Seminar VI and by Freud’s “A Child is Being Beaten”, Éric Laurent situates the subject as such as “void” in its “pure form”. Here I consider the adjective “pure” to be fundamental, because, on the one hand, the fort/da is in fact a game of signifiers (and thus made of words), and on the other hand, we see that in the cases that allowed Freud to write “A Child is Being Beaten”, the scenes processed silently, the beaten child is embodied by each of the analysands taken by this fantasy, which means that it is a scene of which they say nothing. What makes this scene appear and effectively pass to the sphere of speech is its construction by the analyst. Thus, the silence which falls on this scene of beating takes the “pure form” of a “void”, because the one who is affected by it (that is, each analysand who does not include it in his memories) literally, appears without words, without having anything to say. However, this absence of signifiers is still situated with the signifier because this scene is (also literally) inserted between two other scenes of which the analysands do speak, and its construction by the analyst is not made without recourse to words. Concerning this last aspect, the beaten subject who “did not have the right to speak” (Éric Laurent’s term) will find, in the construction of the analyst, I would say, a path to a word and a kind of localisation of “his” body: from the “void” in its “pure form” emerges a subject implicated in the beating which strikes his body. Thus, this reference to the “empty place of the subject” in its “pure form” still involves, following Laurent’s lesson here commented, a presentation of the subject as a “thing”, an “abused” body, a waste object, which, without the construction of the analyst, would tend to eternalise itself.

Such a turning into a thing that reduces the beaten body ($) to a waste (a), presented in the Lacanian matheme of the fantasy ($ << a), is the messenger of a jouissance that Freud himself had already designated as masochist. In this process, the beaten subject, or as Lacan reminds us, stricken, hit by the signifier (literally the $, the barred subject), could be related to what is considered “his realisation as a subject of the signifier”. I would say, that through this realisation, in which the subject also turns into a thing, he endeavours to be involved with his body, because, following Éric Laurent,
masochism is still a form of “resistance of the body to pain”, in so far as one tries to find pleasure in this resistance. However, as the masochism at play in the fantasy still seems to me to situate the “speaking with your body” merely in terms of castration, of “phallic jouissance”, and the question is precisely if it is possible to “speak with your body” beyond “castration” and this type of jouissance, Éric Laurent is interested in another scene of beating. It is the one experienced by Joyce as a child, and which, in contrast to what happened with Freud’s patients, Joyce remembered perfectly, to the extent that he re-wrought it into the beating with which he hits the body of Stephen Dedalus, so that soon after, the rage provoked by the strikes, detaches from the body, as we can read in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, “he had felt that some power was divesting him of that sudden-woven anger as easily as a fruit is divested of its soft ripe peel.”

When Éric Laurent explains Lacan’s reading of this scene, in the last lesson of Seminar XXIII, he underlines that we do not find in that scene the proper “disappearing of the subject” (decisive to what is at play in masochism), instead there is “the disappearing of the body”, of “the ego”, and an ego which is “contrary to the Mirror Stage”. After all, continues Éric Laurent, the body or the ego divested in the Joycean beating like a ripe and soft peel of a fruit, is not that of the “assumption of an image”, instead, it is that which relates to “the disappearing, the sliding of the solidity (tenue) of the body” and, thus, it is a body or an ego “separated from the image”. Instead of masochism, what Joyce displays is what the sixth lesson, here commented, situates as a “detachment of the ego”. Thematising the “Joycean solution of the epopee of the body”, we find in this lesson other evocations of masochism that the Irish author makes, though in these, the body that slides, falls away, detaches itself, is always highlighted. These evocations are extracted from his letters to Nora (Joyce’s lifelong companion) and from the corresponding episode in the *Odyssey*, in the encounter of the Greek hero with the witch Circe that in Ulysses is transposed to what happens to Leopold Bloom in a brothel in Dublin.

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Such a trajectory that goes through masochism includes the elaborations Lacan makes on this mode of satisfaction in the seminars on the “Ethics of Psychoanalysis” and the “Logic of the Fantasy”, as well as the “mass masochism” of the contemporary world, that initially was more circumscribed by the prominence of S&M (“sadomasochist”) practices in the neighbourhood of Castro in San Francisco, in the USA, and which are now even more widespread, and sweetened, for example, with the success of Fifty Shades of Grey. Éric Laurent thinks that Lacan, in his Seminar The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, even though he confers to masochism a more “marginal”, not very ample, aspect, anticipates this process of its contemporary “democratization” by showing how the masochist’s pain participates in the “economy of the good”. Following Éric Laurent, the Seminar The Logic of the Fantasy, presents a novelty in relation to Lacan’s previous elaborations: the conception of the body as the site of the Other in which, taken by masochist satisfaction, jouissance could be inscribed in the form of “scarification”, “tattoos”, “bondage”, etc. Following Éric Laurent’s point of view, masochism, more than the “site of the pain”, is the “monstration” of a “place where jouissance is written beyond the phallus and the sexual relation, and is articulated to the empty place of the subject”.

Thus, returning to the two questions presented at the end of the sixth lesson of Speaking La langue of the Body, masochism as a disavowal of castration in perversion, and in its more structural perspective concerning a specific mode of satisfaction of certain subjects, as in the more “democratic” dimension which it seems to gain increasingly nowadays, I venture to say that masochism presents itself as an attempt to “speak with your body” beyond the phallic jouissance and without speaking of castration. Thus, my view is that the sixth lesson, here commented, helps us to clarify the importance the fantasies still has for the analytic experience – even if we do not take it exclusively from the point of view of its crossing, its importance resides above all in the masochistic dimension - the fantasy is still a kind of construction, though quite fixed and rigid, with which one attempts to speak with the body, short circuiting phallic jouissance and castration too. Apart from this fixity and this rigidity, what makes the fantasy not viable as an exit for the analytic experience is that – even in this short circuit – castration and the phallicisation of jouissance end
up imposing themselves in a manner that scorches the body, going as far as reducing it to ashes, even in this growingly massified form that Éric Laurent evokes when he mentions *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and which Jacques-Alain Miller had already presented as the terrible, if not always very evident, form the superego assumes in the contemporary tendency towards the “feminisation of the world”.

Éric Laurent’s interest in the “Joycean solution of the epopee of the body” is thus clarified, in so far as, even though this solution is pervaded by masochism or evoking it, it leaves room to another mode of dealing with the body as “unfamiliar” or “a stranger”, and a mode thoroughly different from the mode of the fantasy. After all, the writing of *Ulysses* as this epopee, responds to (and at the same time intensifies), the detachment, the sliding dimension of the body that in the famous beating scene of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, turns the body into a kind of “ripe and soft peel”, divested from a fruit. In this context, it is not purely and simply the subject that fades away leaving his place to a void related to his “want of being”, but the body itself – without any assumption of an image – is shelled, detached, emptied, in order to give its place to another mode of corporal satisfaction. According to Éric Laurent, in contrast to what happens in perversion and the perverse fantasy, what is processed is beyond the reference to the father and hence, the “void” is not merely the “place of the subject”, but the body itself, which Lacan, in Seminar XXIII, starts to designate in the “reverse of the mirror stage” and the “assumption of an image” as an “empty bag”.

In the trajectory of the sixth lesson of *Speaking Lalangue of the Body*, concerning Joyce, it is thus affirmed to what extent this emptied ego, this “ego of jouissance” realises “an operation of darning (raboutage) in relation to the Name of the Father”, which the author lacked. Thanks to this trajectory, I would say that, for Joyce, the void of his ego in his writings responds to the void of the fundamental signifier in his life. In the case of the analytic experience, considering that the reference to the father is not sufficient to deal with what Lacan in Seminar XXIII designates as “real without law”, I would say that what is at play is how the analysand realises this emptying of the ego, how he supports the body in its weirdness as an “empty bag” and, at the same
time, make himself affected – in a different way to masochism – by the weirdness of the jouissance that overtakes his body, not without obscurity. The “infinite straight line”, which Lacan mentions in the Seminar on Joyce, is also a “hole” and, in my view, this hole leaves room for the “void”. Thus I underline the way in which Éric Laurent, mentioning the “infinite straight line”, marks, in relation to us, the specificity of this Irish author in his handling of the “hole” and the “void”: Joyce supports the relation with a straight line “much better than us common mortals, because we hang on to the image, the imaginary, as narcissistic adherents, which make us immersed in meaning, while Joyce is more at ease in relation to his body with the infinite straight line”. We can see this in the relation “with his writing situated outside meaning”.

What Lacan in Seminar XXIII calls Joyce’s unsubscribing from the unconscious, is, for Éric Laurent similar to the dimension of outside meaning in the work of this author, although he also underlines to what extent Lacan presents the outside of meaning in the Joycean writings as “a passion for enigma”, and an “enigma which makes a hole in language”. This passion, according to Éric Laurent, makes Joyce set out to hunt for meaning as if it were the proper Snark of the no less enigmatic poem by Lewis Carroll. In the Joycean hunt, the enigma ends up attaining the proper function of the ego because, as the ego constructs itself in the manner of a hole, its function is of a repairer, it rectifies the lapsus of the knot, as Lacan says in Seminar XXIII. Such a rectification is enigmatic, given that it is processed with the ego-body as an “empty bag”, that is, through a very different path from the self-image, of the corporal unity. Instead of trying to cover up castration, it finds another use for it – not without jouissance. In this context, taking as reference the Joycean writing, to the question if it is possible for the speaking-being to speak with his body without speaking of castration, Éric Laurent answers it with a decisive “no, without any doubt”.

Relying on the distinction elucidated by Jacques-Alain Miller, that for the speaking body there is “jouissance of speech which includes meaning” and

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3 CARROLL, Lewis. The hunting of the snark.
“jouissance of the sinthom” which excludes meaning”, the conclusion of the sixth lesson of Speaking Lalangue of the Body is that Lacan equates “with audacity and logic” jouissance of speech with “phallic jouissance”, to the extent that the latter “is disharmonic with the body”. However, in Joyce’s writings, phallic jouissance is articulated to the “jouissance of the hole, pure jouissance of the sinthome”, showing us to what extent, “the speaking body would be unified as to its jouissance”. This possible articulation, that in my view, the analytic experience also strives to achieve through a path different from Joyce’s, does not cancel out the difference between these two modes of jouissance which take over the body of the speaking being. Consequently, Éric Laurent concludes the sixth lesson of his seminar affirming that “precisely, there is jouissance of writing outside meaning, which is the writing of object a, and there is a jouissance of speech, phallic” allowing us to separate “the speaking body which speaks in terms of drive from the speech which is sustained by castration and by phallic jouissance”. However, in Joyce’s writing, and through another path, in the analytic experience, we have “reformulated castration” as “jouissance of speech” thanks to a transformation which operates in the sublimation and in the relation body-speech-satisfaction which, taking Joyce as reference, Lacan names “stepladder” (escabeau).

With this transformation – which Éric Laurent plans to approach in the seventh lesson of his seminar – it seems possible to affirm that to speak lalangue of the body is the mode in which, in the analytic experience, the speaking body would encounter a conjugation of the two modes of jouissance that divide it even beyond the signifier’s mortification, beyond its facet as barred subject($) and of its masochist “objectisation” as waste. To accept not only the subjective division, but further, the division between two types of jouissance, and at the same time, to conjugate the difference between these two modes of satisfaction, is what one attains when an analysis – thanks to an elucidation of the partnership that each speaking being maintains with

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4 MILLER, J.-A. The unconscious and the speaking body. 
the *sinthome* which pulsates in his body (or which drives his body) – gives room to another mode of living that satisfies it.

*Translated by Noga Wine*