The Speaking Being (Parlêtre) and Corporal Consistency

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There is a passage in Seminar 23: Le sinthome (Le Séminaire, livre XXIII, Édition Seuil, 2005, p. 66)[1], in which Lacan makes a reference to the body of the speaking being as a body which tends “to go away” all the time [“car son corps fout le camp à tout instant”].

It is possible to recognise a dimension of the body “which does not evaporate”, the speaking body, however, is a body marked by inconsistency. We know from the clinic, that this inconsistency can, inclusively, take the form of the body “left abandoned”, as it is signalled in Schreber’s accounts, in a few passages of the Wolf Man and in certain places in James Joyce’s works.

If the speaking being is somebody who has to give consistency – “mental consistency”, Lacan would say – to his body, what kind of consistency it is?

In the argument for the 10th WAP Congress, Jacques-Alain Miller traces the outlines of this question, which could be found already since the Cartesian meditations on “the body of the ‘I think’” and until the philosophical and even theological considerations, on “the forms of the union of the soul and the body”. It is worth adding that even psychology is presented by Lacan as not being more than “a confused image that we have of our own body”[2].

In the same passage of Seminar XXIII, Lacan points out that this search for a corporal consistency is established on the grounds of a belief, essentially the belief of the speaking being in having a body. As of this belief, continues Lacan, takes place the “adoration of this body”– this adoration would be “the only relation that the speaking being has with his body.”[3] That is where the root of the imaginary would be, and, consequently, the
foundation of the “mental consistency” of the body of the speaking being.

If the body of the speaking being is a body which tends to go away, to fade away, and to show itself inconsistent, it is due to the fact that this body has to constitute itself on the grounds of a trauma. In other words, the incidence of the signifier on the body sets up, for the speaking being, the question of his corporal consistency. Following Miller’s arguments in “The unconscious and the speaking body”, we can infer that it is not as flesh that the corporal consistency is put in question. This consistency only becomes “a mystery” as of the moment in which “the sign cuts the flesh”, when “the body shows itself capable of figuring, as a surface of inscriptions, the place of the Other of the signifier.”

In this sense, it seems to be pertinent to add that the analysis of the speaking being has to aim, not only at that which, through his speech, he intends to constitute as a being, but also the modes, how, by the means of his speech, he seeks to construct a body and to confer to it consistency.

Since Lacan, we know that one manner to confer consistency to the body is done by sustaining it with the image. We deal with the body as a unification of fragmented, heterogeneous experiences, whose consistency would be guaranteed by its form.

Nevertheless, if we take into account the analysis of the episode of the beating Stephen Dedalus goes through in A portrait of the artist as a young man, we could infer that Lacan invokes there a different manner to confer mental consistency to the body, in that case, it is being sustained by the fantasy. This calls for Lacan’s attention, given that such an alternative did not operate in that episode. Here, the fantasy was not put into action through the masochistic bias, which could be a manner to confer consistency to the body.

Another question that seems to be pertinent for our discussion is considering the sinthome as a mode of conferring consistency to the body on the grounds of the marks and the inscriptions of the trauma. This means, considering the body beyond its imaginary support, or to aim at conferring to it consistency on the grounds of the fantasy. What would it be to consider the consistency of the body by the means of the sinthome? Would such consistency be different from a mental consistency? I would think that such consistency does not dismiss the “mental” aspect at play, if we consider the mental to be an envelope, as that which seeks to trace a border referred to the real. We can consider that the consistency of the body measured through the bias of the sinthome does not aim to eliminate its inconsistency – such inconsistency which manifests itself, most of the times, as that which in the body is without law – but to include it in a new arrangement. Such arrangement implies reconsidering the imaginary. In my view, it is indicated in Seminar XXIII, in Lacan’s consideration on the empty set and on the relations between the sac and the rope, for example.

In this sense, it seems to me suggestive to approach the adoration of the body – “the only relation the speaking being has with his body” – and the consideration Miller makes on the step ladder (escabelo), as a pedestal of the speaking being, as “that which allows him to elevate himself to the dignity of the Thing”.

Would it not be one of the manners of savoir faire with the sinthome, a manner to be able to make of the sinthome a step ladder and derive from this a new modality of satisfaction? It seems to me interesting that our congress could bring few examples of how this happens in the analytic experience of a speaking being.