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## A new imaginary



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# THE CONSISTENCY OF THE IMAGINARY IN CURRENT CLINICAL PRACTICE<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

The course of this research locates, in the last Lacan's teaching and the Borromean knot perspective, the statute of the Imaginary unavoidably linked to the consistency of the body. Four hypotheses are proposed in order to interrogate from the clinical practice the artifices that are brought into play to produce a possible relationship to the body.

## KEYWORDS

Imaginary | Body | Consistency | Mental | Knot | *Jouissance* | Time | *Lalangue*

## INTRODUCTION

The research we carried out within the context of the Seventh American Meeting of Lacanian Orientation Psychoanalysis (ENAPOL)<sup>2</sup> started with the aim of revisiting the concepts of psychoanalysis and the foundations of clinical practice. Over the past few years, the psychoanalytic community as a whole has made steady progress along a line of elaboration supported by the determined encouragement of Lacan's late teaching and its readjustments, between routine and invention, between continuity and discontinuity. Therefore, having scrutinized the statute of the symbolic in our century—which has become neither an order nor a regulation, but a “system of semblants that do not govern the real, but rather are subordinate to the real” (Miller, *The Unconscious and the Speaking Body*, 31)—and having scrutinized this real—as a real without law—, it is our turn to re-situate the imaginary according to our times, in an attempt not to read it simply as the sovereignty of images today, and purposely start from its quality in the Borromean knot and its inescapable closeness to the other two registers. Only from there can we locate the ways in which the topology of these fields of experience—R.S.I.—has been affected. In other words, it is our turn to move forward and look into how those close neighbors, those three properties of the strings, get along with one another in order for us to be able to derive the points of clinical elaboration that we are trying to arrive at.

Consequently, locating what we mean by “the consistency of the imaginary,” which is the formula that the title of this paper is already pointing to, demands that we should make the necessary turns in the broad perspective that Lacan left open for us, from the initial fact of the paths of the experience of identification in the Mirror Stage, the joy of the body, the pregnancy of its image and its putting *into shape*; including the operation imposed by the symbolic on the body, making the signifiers leaven in it and leave their furrows; all of this, not without the trimming of objects as pieces, nooks and crannies, refuges of *jouissance* at the edges of the body, plugged into the body-like flowers in a vase—via the unifying image; clues that will culminate in the question

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about the affectation of the body, its imaginary consistency, its stumbling upon *lalangue*, and the mystery of the real that lives in it.

Therefore, in order for us to be able to refer to the statute of the imaginary, it is essential to locate how the “real” power of images, their “power of realization” (Brousse, *Lacanian Bodies*) has always been at play for Lacan from his earliest intuition in the mirror. That is, the imaginary has never been there to designate any kind of imagery, but to account for its real consequence, or to “call them what they are called, affects” (Lacan, *The Sinthome*, 147) designating the relationship that everyone can establish with their body.

This is the context in which we seek to place the coordinates of our discussion, under the hypothesis of the following first statement: the imaginary is the body. Referring the imaginary, as such, to the body and its economy of *jouissance*<sup>3</sup> will allow us—following Jacques-Alain Miller’s invitation—to draw the consequences from the cases we are faced with today, as they impose giving the body a more and more relevant function. Thus, we have a duty to formalize the way in which we deal with that which constitutes the original relationship to one’s own body with every *parlêtre*, the way in which everybody becomes the “owner of One-body” (*The Latest Lacan*, 107). What can we situate today of everybody’s unceasing effort to give consistency to the body, there where we verify ways of *jouir* that are no longer indexed to the Other? How do we have a body today, beyond the “symbolic virtues shown by the love for the father” (107)? What statute can be given to the forms of “contemporary corporeization when we say that the Other does not exist” (Miller, *The Experience of the Real...*, 397)?

Based on these first questions, we propose four discussion points. Each of this, in its own way, delimits beacons that emerge from our reading path. These four points, far from being conclusive, are ready to be used, to be disaggregated with each other:

### **FIRST CONJECTURE: THERE IS THE BODY RELATIONSHIP VERSUS THERE IS NO SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP**

If we have to say how *one* relationship to the body is possible for a subject, the “body relationship” can be thought of, as a first conjecture, as “that which there is”. In order to refer to “that which there is,” Lacan places his fundamental syntagma “There is something of the One” (*...Or Worse*, 126), understanding that what comes to the foreground with the primacy of the One is *jouissance*, *jouissance* of the body. We can state that these ways of saying: “that which there is”, “there is something of the One”, or “there is the body relationship” (Miller, *Spare Parts*, 416), come to the place of “there is no sexual relationship.” However, we know that there is no possible relationship to the body that does not support itself but on the structural error of the sexual, that there is no proportion or written harmony in the body, that is, that which “there is” of the relationship to the body does not suppress the verification of that which there is not. In this sense, it is necessary to point out that the consistency of the body dimension is not precisely “that which is compact,” as there will always be a holed toric body. This determines the fact that “the ownership of the body” always lies against a background of inescapable *extimacy*. Otherwise, the subject’s effort to “have” a body, to invent a possible relationship with it, would not be found in our clinical practice. Already in his Seminar *Encore*, Lacan stated, “There is no sexual relationship, there is *jouissance*” (90). In addition, his expression “There is something of the One, the One all alone” (82) will be the formula that enthrones the face of a non-dialecticizable *jouissance*. Although his endeavor to insert the One of *jouissance* in the experience can be found in the Seminar *...Or Worse*, we can already situate an antecedent in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* in the light of his thoughts on the holophrase. Back then, Lacan had already envisaged a special body relationship, which does not call for any sense, which resists all dialectic openness, and mysteriously places there the soundness of the psychosomatic phenomenon, almost as an anticipation of the field of the One. Regarding this point, the following question should be asked:

are we still using the clinical element of psychosomatic disorders?, how do we make use of that clinical category today? It is interesting to trace in Lacan's teaching that which takes us from one context of elaboration to another, in order to later articulate absorption—or the indexation of that which is psychosomatic—with this to the field of the One, opposed to the Other. The issue will be then how to influence, from the analytic operation, the cases where this condition of porosity and openness to the Other is not at stake. There are examples at hand when we speak of the scope that we can give this clinical field today, rarely mentioned by Lacan. Among others, we can mention the growing phenomena of celiac disease or early-onset diabetes in adolescents, who only find a livable edge in the body, a quilting point via a diet, a device, an insulin pump, a small ritual, an injection, etc.

## SECOND CONJECTURE: ONE HAS ONE'S BODY, ONE IS NOT IT TO ANY DEGREE

In order to name this second conjecture, we used Lacan's expression in *The Sinthome* (147), which is useful to locate the fact that having a body is not something natural at all, but rather an operation is required to give it consistency. What is the nature of this consistency? Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines consistency as the "degree of firmness, density, viscosity, or resistance to movement or separation of constituent particles," articulating it with cohesion and the body. Along this line, Lacan states that consistency "means what holds together," adding—almost like a Witz—"God help us, the only idea we have of consistency is a sack or a floor cloth. Even the body the way we feel it is like skin, retaining in its sack a pile of organs" (63). However, the sack is empty, and "is only imaginable from the ex-sistence and the consistency that the body has, that the body has by being a pot" (18).

Now, how can we differentiate this reference which places "what holds together" with "what knots together" typical of the sinthome? According to Lacan, one's relationship to one's own body, at this point, becomes suspicious for the analyst, as the body tends to "clear off" (64), or it may become something that "asks for nothing than to go away, to be shed like the skin of a fruit" (147). The analyst finds his or her chances there, making a bet—in the acrobatics of transference—between, on the one hand, the suspicion of the imaginary consistency and, on the other, the confidence in the symptom as that which occurs in the body, noticing that its nature is that of invention and knot.

Then, it is fundamental to maintain this ethical distinction between body and being. We mean ethics in the sense of the implications that the contemporary disquisitions on the being have at present, there where the market offers a range of identitary possibilities, which seem to dress the body but which say little about its acceptance, about its possession. Following the line of Jacques-Alain Miller's approach in his course *Spare Parts*, it is "the Borromean perspective that introduces the *having*, [and does it precisely] to separate the being from the body. The Borromean knot separates the body from the symbolic" (65). Here, symbolic dependence as the host of subjective advent yields its place to the affectation of the body with the *trou* that language introduces, which introduces the subtlety of the effort involved—for the *parlêtre*—in producing a livable arrangement with the effects of that rattling, with the devices that he or she must lay hands on in order to remain bound to the experience of imaginary unity in the strict sense in which we have been thinking of it. In our times, these devices teach us, just like that, about the status of this new imaginary.

## THIRD CONJECTURE: THE CONSISTENCY OF THE BODY IS MENTAL

For this conjecture, we started from an unsettling expression by Lacan in *The Sinthome*: "The *sentimentality* of the *parlêtre*, (...) in so far as, since he senses it, he senses the burden of it" (63). He also articulates mentality—"the *ment-ality* in so far as he lies (*ment*)" (64)—with self love and adoration of the body. What does he mean by mental? What is the relationship of the mental to thinking, which—as Lacan points out in *The Third*—does not exist without the body, the reason

why we “get bogged down in confusion”? Again in the course *Spare Parts*, Jacques-Alain Miller works, however, on the distinction between these two planes of the mental and thinking and states that “whereas mentality is linked to the body itself, thinking involves a reference, a gravitation toward sexual intercourse, and this means that the adoration of the other body is brought into play” (418). Following the line of this argument, in the Seminar *The Sinthome*, Lacan does not say that subjects *think* they have a body; he says they *believe* they have it. It is worth highlighting the statute of belief here, which is not assigned to the transcendental fact of the relationship to the Other, but assumed—in some kind of immanence—as an adoration of *oneself*. Therefore, we have the mental consistency of the body, defined as an imaginary support, belief, and wrapping. According to Lacan, mentality somehow concerns an imaginary edge and its inertia, which subtracts the body as a “text” of signs for each speaking being.

On the other hand, it is not the first time Lacan has used the adjective “mental” to refer to certain clinical and bodily phenomena. For example, what is the relevance, in light of these ideas, of “mental anorexia” as a way of having a body and providing it with a wrapping? When Lacan shares his elaborations on these kinds of cases, he shows the presence of a real and opaque nucleus that is irreducible to the field of the Other.

#### **FOURTH CONJECTURE: HAVING A BODY, NOT WITHOUT THE REAL OF TIME**

We are especially interested in this fourth conjecture in order to situate how “the mental consistency of the body is really affected by the time that passes before the eternity of the verbal” (*The Latest Lacan*, 13). Today, it is about the experience of carrying the body linked to the passing of time, life and body confronted with the unforeseen event. This means that “having a body” does not exist without the real of time, different from the eternity of the Signifier. In this regard, how do topology and time play their game in the cases we work on in our clinical practice? This becomes an absolutely relevant clinical crux which translates, for example, into children’s fear of their own death or that of the Other, which is testimony to the fact that there is no body that can rest on any kind of reassurance under “the feeling that arises as a result of this suspicion that comes to us, of being reduced to our body (*The Third*, 27). Other examples serve to represent tyranny and the surplus *jouissance* in the body-time knot: the nightmare and the infinite chicanery of thoughts; the unstoppable in the agitation of the act; the addictive performance of the symptom and the deadly blade of mania, or its reverse in the exhaustion of the bodies and their devitalization. On the other hand, the promise of eternal youth, which does not imply a novelty but which dwells in the most varied fictions since immemorial times, has come across the market’s and technology’s yearning, on a global scale, for intervening in the real, sweeping the subject effect away in that very same act, with the singular treatment of a *jouissance*, always disharmonious to the body. All in all, if the ownership of a body and the “being alive” are verified there where “something [that] enjoys itself (*cela se jouit*)” (*Encore*, 32), that *cela se jouit* requires more and more devices to carry the body in the face of the drift and the temporal dimension at play. The erotics of time thus influences the bodies and acquires new characteristics. We thus situate the clinical value of this three-word expression: body-time-superego. All its consequences will have to be drawn from it.

To conclude, it is our turn in every case to locate how the analyst, through his or her presence, can become a *partenaire* of One-body to accompany its “suturing and splicing” (*The Sinthome*, 71) along the path of analysis, aware of the edge of radical exile on which they rest. On some occasions, the analyst—ready and sensitive to contingency—is there to introduce a surplus of life in the relationship to the body; on others, to find together with the subject the S1 that works as a cobble in the swamp, so that everyone can find their particular way of tracing and retracing the knot.

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<sup>2</sup> 7th ENAPOL “The Empire of Images”, Sao Paulo, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Lacan said it very clearly in *The Third*: “the body enters into the economy of jouissance through the image of the body” (Revista Lacaniana N° 18, p. 20)..

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