

A READING OF *THE PSYCHOANALYTIC ACT* (1967-1968)

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Introduction

Our chronological working-through of Jacques Lacan¹'s seminars brought us this year to his 'meditation' on the psychoanalytic act - a meditation which was interrupted by the strikes and street violence in Paris in May 1968. Interrupted to such an extent that Lacan tells us that we have heard less than half of what he had planned to say.¹ The seminar then came to a premature end and with only fifteen recorded sessions is the shortest to date in the Lacanian canon. However it does not stand alone and has to be read against the background of other documents - also relating to the position and action of the psychoanalyst - produced by Lacan around this time.

Five of these are of particular note:

- Proposition of 9th October 1967 on the *Psychoanalyst of the School*
- Lecture on *Psychoanalysis and the formation of the psychiatrist* (10th November 1967)
- Speech at the *Ecole Freudienne de Paris* (6th December 1967)
- Talks during the strikes and street demonstrations of May 1968
- Summary of *The Psychoanalytic Act* (10th June 1969)

The *Proposition* with which Lacan opened the year exploded like a bomb, says Roudinesco, among the members of the *Ecole Freudienne*. The 'unreadability' of which Lacan is so proud and which he 'maintains

¹ J. Lacan. *Seminar XV. The Psychoanalytic Act* (1967-8). Trans. C. Gallagher. Unpublished. Annex I.

unspoilt' in this text does not make it all that clear why the *Proposition* should have proved so disturbing. This lack of clarity is deliberate:

To be too easy to comprehend is to give a way out to avoidance and make oneself its accomplice. Because in the same package that sends someone to his ruin, you provide a supplement from Elsewhere so that he may all the quicker precipitate himself into it.²

But the issues at stake become somewhat clearer in the reply to his critics delivered in early December. His main target in this address are those in his School who think they can trust clinical experience and common sense to maintain their position as analysts and justify their role in the supervision and training of the next generation. He reminds them that *the desire to be a psychoanalyst*, in the sense of being a competent professional, has nothing to do with what he is trying to evoke in his followers: *the desire of the analyst*.³

The seminar on the *Psychoanalytic Act* is a commentary on the *Proposition* and Lacan's preoccupation in both, as well as in the other texts, continues to be: '*What is it to be a psychoanalyst?*'.⁴ Despite all his years of teaching he still feels that 'psychoanalysts do not want at any price to be worthy of what they have charge of'.⁵ There is a vital step that they have still to be persuaded to take if they are to assume their role as 'instruments of revelation'⁶ rather than subjects of knowledge. This step is not simply a crude matter of putting one foot in front of the other, but of mastering an intricate choreography that can take place only at the end of an analysis when the analysand passes over to the state of being an analyst. The

² J. Lacan. *Summary of the seminar of 1967-8 for the year book of the Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes*. Trans. C. Gallagher.

³ Scilicet, 2/3, p. 19.

⁴ Session XIII, 13th March 1968, p. 1.

⁵ Meeting of 15th May 1968.

⁶ Session XV, 27th March 1967, p. 17.

crucial movement here consists in putting in question the *subject supposed to know* and the concomitant formulation of a logic that makes it possible to approach a dimension that must always predominate in psychoanalysis. This dimension, as Lacan sees more and more clearly in these years, is not scientific knowledge but rather subjective truth.⁷

To set out my stall right away, I would say that my understanding is that what Lacan is trying to do is to tip the balance away from psychoanalysis as science towards psychoanalysis as logic. Broadly speaking, he characterises scientists as being concerned with knowledge while the search for truth has been the perennial quest of logicians. It is the relevance of this distinction for psychoanalysts that he tries to advance here. It will lead him first to a critique of the scientific knowledge psychoanalysts think they possess in virtue of the structures involved in the Oedipus complex. Then to an articulation of the way in which they need to take a leap of faith, away from the securities of the *subject supposed to know* to the shifting ground of quantification theory.

The pseudo-science of the Oedipal clinic

One forum in which we at St Vincent's Hospital put the Lacanian clinic to the test is the weekly case conference at which patients are presented with a view to clarifying their diagnosis and considering their treatment plan.

A forty-three-year-old woman who has suffered from connective tissue disorder for almost twenty years has now become suicidal because of a nausea that has persisted for eighteen months. On first appearance she is a weak, pathetic figure who has suffered from a disfiguring illness for most of her adult life and has now the added torment of continuously wanting to vomit. But as her story unfolds there emerges a picture of a woman of steely determination who has challenged numerous medical experts over the years and has always found a way of defeating their best efforts. This uncovering of the elements of a hysterical structure confirms

⁷ Session X, 21st February 1968, p. 8.

the psychiatrists' hunch that the nausea is a conversion phenomenon and allows a different view to be taken about how she may be helped, reigning back the *furor sanandi* initially evoked in her listeners.

This type of analysis is based on an Oedipal clinic. It allows a whole range of illnesses to be understood on the basis of a failure on the part of the subject to assume his/her sexual identity by successfully negotiating the rocks and narrows of the relationships with parents and siblings as experienced in childhood. Assuming one's desire involves a sexual dimension in which one takes on a male or female ego ideal and the distortion of this desire is the fundamental root of pathology. This is not to invoke a naturalist reference:

... desire must be constructed upon a whole order of sources in which the unconscious is absolutely dominant and in which consequently there intervenes a whole dialectic of the subject.⁸

This is Lacan from the 30's to the mid-60's and this approach allowed us, we thought, a systematic, even scientific, approach to the concrete problems of clinical diagnosis and treatment.

So it was hard for us to realise, especially in the light of its practical effectiveness, that from the seminar on *Crucial Problems in Psychoanalysis* (1964-65) on, Lacan had begun a radical critique of this approach. His statements in the current seminar are particularly trenchant:

There is no Oedipal experience in psychoanalysis⁹ ... Let us not forget the Oedipus complex, nor what the Oedipus complex is, nor the degree to which it is the burial, integrally linked to the structure, of all our experience.¹⁰

⁸ Session XV, 27th March 1968, p. 13.

⁹ Session X, 21st February 1968, p. 14.

¹⁰ Session XIV, 20th March 1968, p. 7.

Why this change of tack? A major source appears to be his deepening meditation on the relationship between the sexes. Lacan had always been sceptical about the complementarity of men and women. The models of imaginary unification - the thread to the needle, the key to the lock - based in modern psychoanalysis on the illusion of mother-child symbiosis, are radically flawed in the case of speaking beings. But now he takes things much further and attempts to give a logical foundation for what he believes to be a radical incommensurability between the sexes. His criticism of the Oedipus complex is that it is inescapably bound to the myth of complementarity. Despite his rejection of a natural model of sexual maturation and his insistence on the requirement of castration in order to assume sexual desire, Lacan appears to be realising that his espousal of the Oedipal clinic implies the following unstated axiom: *'it is possible to reach one's appropriate ego ideal and, once this position has been reached, to accomplish the sexual act with a partner of the opposite sex'*

The unconscious, we are told, is that: the Oedipus complex and the relation of man and woman for which it is a metaphor. This is what we are supposed to find in the unconscious, in the relations between mother and child. The Oedipus complex is first of all that, it is this metaphor.¹¹

Lacan illustrates the practical consequences of this position:

'What does the clinician think 'instinctively' - you may well imagine that a word like that never comes from my mouth by chance - in the name of his clinical instinct - what a clinical instinct is remains to be defined - about the story of the mountain chalet?¹²

¹¹ Session XI, 28th February 1968, p. 8.

¹² Session XV, 17 March 1968, p. 13.

You have all just to refer not only to your experience but also to your innermost intuition. The chap who comes to tell you that he was with a pretty girl in a mountain chalet, that there was no reason not to have a go, simply he did not feel like it. You say 'Oh! There is something ... something is not working'¹. You first of all try to find out if he often has little blockages like that. In short, you launch yourselves into a whole speculation which implies that it ought to work.

This simply in order to show you that what is at stake is the coherence, the consistency of things in the mind of the analyst. For if the analyst reacts like that, instinctively, there is no need even to bring into play the clinical instinct. Behind, there is the naturalist resonance, namely, that man and woman are made to *go* together'.¹³

So the unstated axiom mentioned above can be reformulated as '*all men love women*. We will come back to this. For the moment Lacan is content to emphasise that current psychoanalytic practice - even that within his own School - works on the hypothesis that unless mistakes have been made in the course of the individual's development this is the way things should be.

Intimately linked to the structure of the Oedipus complex is the Name of the Father, a term that up to now could be regarded as the shibboleth of Lacanian theory and practice. This also Lacan now disowns, quite suddenly it seems, after years of seeing it as the cornerstone of his return to Freud's teaching. Having stated that analytic experience was buried by the Oedipus complex he goes on to say:

This indeed is why, moreover, I do not consider that I am wronging anyone by having sworn to myself never to take up again the theme of the Name of the Father, upon which, seized by some vertigo or other which has happily abated, I once said I would engage myself in the circuit of one of my years of seminars. Things taken at this level are *hopeless*

¹³ *ibid*, pp. 13-14.

[English in the original], while we have a much surer way, that of logic, of tracing the subject effect.¹⁴

This contradicts what Lacan had been saying for a number of years, namely, that many of the things he was teaching would have been much clearer if he had not been forced to abort his seminar on the Names of the Father after its opening session. Now he abandons this position as 'hopeless'. This puzzling stance appears to be related to his rejection of psychoanalysis as a science and his desire to seek its foundations rather in logic. This is intimately linked to the different ways in which science and logic deal with the *subject supposed to know*.

Science and the subject supposed to know

In considering the relation between science and the *subject supposed to know* it will be useful to keep in mind the other translation that has been proposed for the *sujet suppose savoir*, the supposed subject of knowledge. Lacan's contention is that with the discovery of the unconscious, psychoanalysis has introduced the notion of 'a knowledge without a subject'.¹⁵ This discovery also requires psychoanalysis to take up a quite different approach to knowledge than that adopted by science.

Here again we seem to have a fundamental turn-about. The project of establishing the conditions through which psychoanalysis could take its place among the sciences - admittedly not the experimental sciences and certainly not the so-called human sciences - could have been seen up to now as the core of Lacan's mission. As recently as the seminar on the *Four Fundamental Concepts* and the essay on *Science and Truth* it still seemed to be his ideal. Now we learn that 'far from psychoanalysis being able to be established as has been done up to now from the statements of a science',¹⁶ there is a basic incompatibility between the two approaches.

¹⁴ Session XIV, 20th March 1968, p. 7.

¹⁵ Lacan's Summary of Seminar XV, op.cit, p. 2.

¹⁶ Session X, 21st February 1968, p. 4.

The root of the problem, as Lacan now sees it, is that science, which is in principle atheistic, is in fact firmly theist. It depends on the notion of a subject - God, Nature, Spirit - that has laid out the plan of the Cosmos and possesses a pre-existent knowledge which it is the task of the scientist to reveal. Lacan will first justify this assertion, and then *go* on to show how it is based on an illusion that psychoanalysis has exposed.

His first appeal is to a distinguished historian of science:

It is a little surprising that it did not emerge in a way that is now current, admitted into common consciousness, that there is a certain relation between the break produced in the evolution of science at the beginning of the 17th century and the realisation, the advent of the true import of this myth of creation which thus took sixteen centuries to have its true impact on what one can call throughout this epoch, Christian consciousness. I cannot come back too often to this remark which, I underline, is not mine but that of Alexandre Koyre.¹⁷

For the scientist then it is a matter of discovering the plan of the universe already existing in the mind of the creator. Lacan frequently refers to the way that 'even Descartes made use of this Other to guarantee at least the truth of his scientific starting point'.¹⁸ Later he recalls the fact that:

Newton also, who had other things on his mind, produced a big book - my hobby being bibliophile, it happens that I have it, it is superb - which is a commentary on the Apocalypse and of Daniel's prophecy. He gave just as much care - I mean in the calculation, in the manipulation of numbers that are nevertheless extremely problematic, like

¹⁷ Session V, 10th January 1968, p. 2.

¹⁸ Lacan's Summary, op.cit, p. 2.

those at stake in situating the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, for example - as in his study on the laws of gravity.¹⁹

The material world, no less than Sacred Scripture, is a book in which God's design can be read.

Einstein's theism and his declarations about the coherence of God's plan are well known but even the work-a-day scientist - I recall a recent conversation with a Newman Scholar in the Department of Psychiatry - will often talk about his task as being to uncover the secrets of Nature that are already there in the structure of the material world.

The *subject supposed to know* has other manifestations. For the Marxist it is proletarian consciousness, which offers a sure guide to dialectical materialism; for capitalist democracies it is the will of the majority expressed in the ballot box; for the Catholic Church it is the Holy Spirit - 'a notion that is infinitely less stupid than the *subject supposed to know*'.²⁰

Wherever it appears, Lacan argues, this Other, this subject who anticipates our knowing, is based on an illusion that has also taken its place at the heart of contemporary psychoanalysis as a basic theoretical axiom which has major consequences for practice. But here for the first time it can be critically analysed and shown for what it is. What is involved is the fantasy of a Paradise before birth, of an intra-uterine fusion with the Mother later continued at her breast. For today's psychoanalyst there is no unconscious without the Mother and because of his experience of union with her, man has had an experience of the One, of the All. It is the inadequacies in this experience that give rise to frustration, aggression, regression which forms the template for the understanding of neurosis in a model that focuses on need and demand to the exclusion of desire.

This fantasy is at variance with the biological facts. The foetus is only linked to the mother through the placenta, which is developed by it

¹⁹ J. Lacan. *D'un autre a l'Autre 1968-69, Seminar XVI*, Session 12th February 1969. Trans. C. Gallagher, unpublished, p. 5.

²⁰ Session X, 21st February 1968, p. 5.

rather than by the mother, and it is from this placenta and not from the mother that is separated with the cutting of the umbilical cord. But more importantly from an analytic point of view, the fantasy is an attempt to maintain untouched the notion of the omnipotent, uncastrated, phallic mother which it is the role of analysis to dissipate.²¹

The hold of the omnipotent mother on the imagination of men is the ultimate root of the notion of an all-knowing Other, a *subject supposed to know*. An essential element of the complex step that Lacan is trying to get psychoanalysts to take to make them worthy of what they have responsibility for is the surrendering of this fantasy. Their crucial task is 'the mastery or the getting rid of (it is sometimes the same thing) what here we pinpoint in our practice as analysts, as the *subject supposed to know*' and the construction of 'a field of science that would have precisely as an end ... to exclude, as such, the *subject supposed to know*'.¹²

These arguments are necessary to help analysts to become aware of;

... the only core point, the only knot, the only difficulty, the point which at once distinguishes psychoanalysis and puts it profoundly in question as science. It is precisely this thing which, moreover, has never properly speaking been criticised, grappled with, as such. Namely, that what knowledge constructs - this is not self-evident - someone knew beforehand.²³

So psychoanalysis is profoundly questionable as a science. But this offers no comfort to those who would like to conceive of it as an intuitive, empathic form of interpersonal psychotherapy. Because what Lacan now wants to guide us towards is an even more rigorous and demanding

²¹ J. Lacan. *Anxiety, Seminar X*, Session 23rd January 1963, p. 7; *The Logic of Phantasy, Seminar XIV*, Session 1st March 1967, p. 8; *The Psychoanalytic Act, Seminar XV*, Session 13th March 1968, pp. 9-12. (All Trans. C. Gallagher, unpublished).

²² Session XI, 28th February 1968, p. 2.

²³ *ibid.*

model. What psychoanalysts must come to realise is that the theory and practice of their discipline requires that it should be conceptualised in terms of logic.

Logic in psychoanalysis and psychoanalysis in logic

When Lacan talks about the importance of logic for psychoanalysis he is not simply referring to the need for logical consistency in the justifications that analysts give for their theories and the practices that derive from them. What he is indicating is the specific discipline that was first formally introduced into the history of thought by Aristotle, flourished in the Middle Ages and reached its most developed form in the work of Boole, Pierce, Frege and their successors. The curious thing is that although the mathematical logic that was discovered in the 19th century was welcomed by science as an indispensable support in its efforts at formalisation, its subsequent progress led to the re-emergence of a questioning about the subject that science had successfully put to one side from its inception in the 17th century.

Lacan's plea for a greater attention to modern logic is based on the fact that he now sees it as having carried to its most advanced point the very task that he has proposed as crucial for psychoanalysts: the exclusion from its premises of the *subject supposed to know*. This definition of the project of modern logic is a uniquely psychoanalytic one. Hence it is not simply the case that psychoanalysis needs logic. Logic in its turn also needs psychoanalysis to resolve the *aporias* with which it has been confronted throughout the centuries because of a failure to analyse the desire of the logician.

This theme of the interaction of the two disciplines had already been developed in the seminar of the previous year on *The Logic of Phantasy*. Here Lacan will take things further and in particular introduces the notion of quantification that he believes to be central in the formulation of an adequate notion of the psychoanalytic subject.

Lacan does not claim to be a professional logician but he is willing to submit his theses to the criticism of the sophisticated students of the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* and the occasional specialist attending his seminar.

Usually, there is an eminent logician here in the front row. I always keep the corner of my eye on him to see when he is going to start shouting. He is not there today, I do not believe I see him. On the one hand that reassures me, on the other hand it annoys me. I would like to have known what he would say to me about it at the end. Normally he shakes my hand and tells me that he is in complete agreement, which always does me a lot of good. Not at all because I need him to say it to know where I am going, but everyone knows that when you venture onto a terrain that is not your own, properly speaking, you are always run the risk of being shot down! Now for my part, of course, what is important is not to encroach onto a terrain that is not my own. It is to find, in logic, something that would be for you an example, a thread, an exemplary guide in the difficulties we have to deal with.²⁴

This is what psychoanalysts are urged to find in the work of logicians - an Ariadne's thread to guide them in a praxis that, like logic, concerns the subject. In particular, logic can help to situate what is involved in the psychoanalytic act:

Here is something where we can find an outline of the way that the question about what is involved in the analytic act is posed for us ... We can find help here from logic - this at least is what I thought - in a way that enlightens us at least about the points ... in which we must not let ourselves be

²⁴ Session XII, 6th March 1968, p. 5.

caught by some confusion about the status of the psychoanalyst.²⁵

Lacan makes no pretence at having completed the work that is necessary to make the link between logic and psychoanalysis. His hope is to provoke a vocation' among some of his young listeners to set about this laborious task. But he has one contribution to make and that concerns the particular relevance of quantification theory to the problems that confront analysts.

Quantification and the psychoanalytic subject

Michael Dummet, the Oxford-based philosopher of mathematics, has claimed that Frege's discovery of quantification is 'the deepest single technical advance ever made in logic'.²⁶ It is typical of Lacan that he should have picked out this discovery for his students to show its value in illuminating the nature of the psychoanalytic subject.

For the non-specialist reader what comes across most clearly from Lacan's application of quantification theory is the way in which it allows psychoanalytic axioms to be expressed in a way that respects the notion of the divided subject. For example, instead of saying *All men love women*', which is the way a universal affirmative has been stated since the time of Aristotle, we can now say *'There is no man who does not love women'*. This use of the double negative allows us to stay much closer to psychoanalytic experience and in particular to avoid treating the subject as a substance endowed with measurable qualities. This substantification of the subject is the path taken by the 'human sciences' and the language of traditional logic is, for Lacan, a powerful support to this deviation.

Although Lacan never fails to pay tribute to Winnicott for the help his 'transitional object'¹ provided as a staging post towards the discovery of

²⁵ Session XI, 28th February 1968, pp. 4-5.

²⁶ I.M. Copi and C. Cohen. *Introduction to logic*. 8th Edition. New York, Macmillan, 1990. p. 324.

the *o-object*, he describes his notion of the self as 'a forgery'¹ that leads to 'the ruin of the psychoanalyst'^{1,27} The self, and its predecessor the ego, are prime examples of the way in which contemporary psychoanalysis has abandoned its Freudian roots and forgotten what the discovery of the unconscious implies.

Let us simply select a few points to illustrate the way Lacan presents his case keeping particularly in mind that his programme this year is to induce psychoanalysts to take the step that he considers essential for the realisation of the psychoanalytic act.

In the first place the new emphasis on quantification does not mean a total abandonment of traditional logic and more especially the work of Aristotle:

You have to consult his text, and specifically the *Organon*, when it deals with the categories for example, or the *Prior Analytics*, or the first book of the *Topics*, to notice how close to our problematic is the thematic of the subject, as he states it. For assuredly ... nothing is more strongly affirmed as being distinguished from what has been translated, very insufficiently undoubtedly as 'substance'¹, *ousia*. What is at stake in translating it by substance is clearly seen, in the course of time, to be an excessive slippage in the function of the subject in its first Aristotelian steps.

There is nothing in the *ousia* ... of a nature to be able to be either situated in the subject, or affirmed, attributed to the subject.²⁸

What Lacan is asserting here is basically that Aristotle was quite aware of the danger of describing the subject as a substance, an *ousia*. His preferred word is *upokeimenon*, which is much closer to Lacan's notion of the subject.

²⁷ Lacan's Summary, op.cit, pp. 4-5.

²⁸ Session IX, 7th February 1968, p. 2.

But this subtle distinction between subject and substance - which Aristotle himself found hard enough to hold onto²⁹ - was lost by translators over the centuries. As a result the whole Western tradition was given a powerful impetus to think about the human subject in a way that was biased in the direction of a substantification. Only with Freud and psychoanalysis does the notion of the subject attain its proper status and This is why all the philosophical -logies, onto-, theo-, cosmo-, as well as psycho-, contradict the unconscious.³⁰

But if Aristotle's logic, especially as it was transmitted, contained more ontology than he intended,³¹ a radical break with this tradition at what Lacan describes as 'a truly key, a truly central point in the history of logic ... that allowed the subject to rediscover its path'.³² In this respect the path of modern logic parallels the concern of Freudian analysis for a subject that cannot be reduced to the predicates that can be applied to it. Concretely, this means that while any 'scientific' approach to the subject only considers the subjective through measurable predicates - Lacan in this seminar runs the whole gamut from Pavlov to Winnicott - modern logic offers a way of thinking about the subject as opposed to the predicate.

This is what allows us to advance and to affirm that the distinction of the quantifying operation, when we give it its corrective function, a normal function of logical operation, is distinguished from the logic of Aristotle by the following. It substitutes - in the place where the *ousia*, the essence, the ontological is not eliminated, in the place of the grammatical subject - the subject that interests us *qua* divided subject. Namely, the pure and simple division as such of the subject

²⁰ Lacan's Summary, op.cit, p. 5.

³⁰ ibid. p. 2.

³¹ Session XII, 6th March 1968, p. 4.

³² Session IX, 7th February 1968, pp. 2-5.

in so far as he speaks, of the stating subject *qua* distinct from the subject of the statement.

The unit in which this presence of the divided subject is presented, is nothing other than this conjunction of two negations. The veritable subject of every universal, is essentially the subject in so far as it is essentially and fundamentally this no subject (*pas de sujet*) which is already articulated in our way of introducing it: *There is no man who is not wise*. It is difficult to stay on this cutting edge. The theory, of course, is very exactly constructed to eliminate it. I mean that what interests us, is that the theory of quantifiers, if we articulate it, forces us to uncover in it this relief and this irreducible flight.³³

This is probably enough to give the non-specialist a flavour of the way Lacan hopes that the theory of quantifiers can show up flaws in psychoanalytic theory that traditional logic masks. A specialist in logic, on hearing this paper, objected that the propositions '*All men love women*' and '*There is no man who does not love women*' are strictly equivalent from a logical point of view. Perhaps. But there seems little doubt that quantified form does highlight the presence of the divided subject and even that of the no-subject. This supports Lacan's claim that there is a need to move from the notion of psychoanalysis as science, in the way that word has been understood since Descartes, to that of logic in the sense promoted by Boole, Pierce, Frege and their followers.

The psychoanalytic act

All these preliminaries on science and logic were perhaps necessary to bring Lacan to the point of questioning what is involved in the psychoanalytic act and I have been trying to outline here the elaborate and

³³ Session XII, 7th March 1968, pp. 8-9.

tortuous path he has taken. Unfortunately, outside events are soon going to cut him off in mid-stream and leave us as we have already noted with little more than a third of what he had intended to say. So we will conclude by trying to give some articulation to the points he does manage to make.

When he specifically tackles the psychoanalytic act, the *subject supposed to know* always returns to the forefront of his attention. First a remark from this *Proposition* that caused so much disruption in the School:

Although psychoanalysis consists in maintaining an agreed situation between two partners, who set themselves up as psychoanalysand and psychoanalyst, it can only develop by virtue of a third constituent, the signifier introduced into the discourse it establishes. This has a name: the subject supposed to know, formed not by artifice but by luck, detached as it were from the analysand.³⁴

This is further teased out in the course of the Seminar:

We posit the psychoanalytic act as consisting in the fact of supporting the transference ... This transference would be a pure and simple obscenity, I would say, if we did not restore to it its true core, in the function of the subject supposed to know.³⁵

This highlights a dimension of analysis often eluded in the effort to make it more scientific and democratic. The fact that one of the two partners is addressing the other in a search for the truth in which one is supposed to know or at least know more than the other.³⁶ The psychoanalyst is the one

³⁴ J. Lacan. *Proposition of 9th October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School*.

³⁵ Session VI, 17th January 1968, p. 3.

³⁶ J. Lacan. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. J.-A. Miller, Trans. Alan Sheridan, *Seminar XI*, 1963-64. Middlesex, Penguin, 1979. p. 137.

who establishes the framework and authorises the psychoanalysand to undertake a task that is at the very least curious when it is a search for truth that is at stake. This is to obey the fundamental rule: pay attention to what is on the surface of your consciousness and speak it, without omitting anything, without regard for systematisation.

This is the aim of the rule. By committing himself, at the limit, to the drift of language, he is going to attempt, by a sort of immediate experience of its pure effect, to connect up with its already established effects. Such a subject, a subject defined as effect of discourse, to the point that he undertakes the trial of losing himself in it in order to find himself, such a subject ... in a way puts himself to the test of his own destitution.³⁷

Again the psychoanalysand is ...

... this subject who chooses to make himself, as one might say, more alienated than any other, to dedicate himself to the detours of an unchosen discourse, namely, this something which is most opposed to what is here at the start. ... there is nothing more opposed, in appearance, to how the psychoanalysand constitutes himself, which is all the same by a certain choice, this choice that I earlier called abdication, the choice of testing oneself against the effects of language. It is indeed here that we are going to find our bearings.³⁸

Find our bearings? Not in a very satisfactory way. Perhaps we eventually would have if Lacan had gone on to the end. However he does give us some reference points, in particular the very useful distinction between

³⁷ Session IX, 7th February 1968, p. 6.

³⁸ *ibid.*

the *task* set the psychoanalysand and the *act* that can only be attributed to the psychoanalyst.

Is it an act to begin a psychoanalysis, yes or no? Yes, assuredly. Only who performs this act? We pointed out earlier what it implies for the one who engages himself in psychoanalysis, what it implies precisely in terms of relinquishing the act. It becomes very difficult, in this sense, to attribute the structure of the act to the one who engages in psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is a task, and some people even say that it is a trade. I am not the one who said it, but people all the same who know about it. These people who have to follow the rule or not, however you define them, must be taught their trade.³⁹

But however well they perform their task Lacan seems to argue that it is the psychoanalyst who performs the psychoanalytic act. This however seems to be balanced - or modified - by the assertion that it is the psychoanalysand who performs the psychoanalytic act at the moment when he makes the passage to the state of being a psychoanalyst.

There must be something else, a relation between the task and the act which has perhaps not yet been grasped and which perhaps cannot be. It is necessary perhaps to make a detour. One sees right away where we can find this detour. At another beginning, at this moment of beginning when one becomes a psychoanalyst.⁴⁰

So that while the psychoanalysand does not perform an analytic act when he begins his analysis he can be said to do so when he begins to be a psychoanalyst. But this relation between task and act has not yet been

³⁹ Session V, 10th January 1968, p. 7.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p. 8.

grasped. The merit of Lacan's approach is that he put the question of the end of the analysis and the accession to the position of psychoanalyst at the heart of the work of his School. Here again the key role accorded to the desire of the analyst and his refusal to accept learning and clinical experience as sufficient in order to negotiate the passage to becoming an Analyst of the School are the main characteristics of his position.

Beginning to be a psychoanalyst, as everyone knows, begins at the end of a psychoanalysis. We have only to take that as it is given to us if we want to grasp something. We must start from that, from this point which is accepted by everyone in psychoanalysis.

Now here it is already necessary that what I put forward last year should be of some use. Namely, the way in which there is formulated in this logic the end of psychoanalysis.⁴¹

And so we find ourselves once again with logic. The logic of the end of analysis includes what Lacan has defined as the end of all contemporary logic - the getting rid of the subject supposed to know. This fiction at the core of the transference of the analyst as this subject is essential for the analysis to begin and to progress. The end of the analysis and the step by which analysand becomes analyst involves the dismissal of the analyst from this role and the correlative realisation of the futility of believing that this subject is incarnated in any person, institution or body of knowledge. It is armed with this sense of lack that the beginning analyst can take up his position and act as guide to others along the path whose end he has now reached.

ibid.

Conclusion

Thirty years after Lacan's seminar, Charles Melman proposed that the aim of the famous psychoanalytic act¹ that is supposed to occur at the end of a treatment was to 'break through the limit imposed by the phantasy and thus to call into question our attachment to the symptom'. The psychoanalysand thus begins to be a psychoanalyst when his speech no longer takes his symptom as its point of departure. He went on to lament the fragility of the position thus attained and how it constantly needed to be renewed. In particular, belonging to a psychoanalytic group projects each and every one of us back into a position where the symptom once again comes to ground what we say.

I quote Melman to show how the most sophisticated of Lacan's followers are still wrestling with the questions he brought to the fore by introducing the notion of 'the psychoanalytic'.

Far from discouraging our little group I think that it ought to confirm us in the realisation that it is in each one's striving to bring his or her own analysis to its proper end that there lies the surest guarantee of being an effective analyst.

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