

Interview on the current situation

Jacques-Alain Miller

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The bread anecdote² reminds me of one of Ray Bradbury's tales; I am sure that Vicente Palomera knows which one I am talking about.

The story is set in the future; everyone uses computers, machines and has completely forgotten how to calculate in the traditional way. If I remember correctly, one day, at the European Ministry of Defense, or at the Pentagon, one of these, someone turns up with the news of an extraordinary discovery: it is possible to do calculations with pen and paper! And it costs nothing!

The bread story is similar: it is about the feeling that a very old and fundamental knowledge has been lost, sacrificed to automatism, the machines, technology. If this story rings a bell with us, it's because we realise that we too are in the process of standardising our method; we are the instruments of this standardisation.

The early psychoanalysts looked like unsettling witch-doctors, the only ones who possessed the knowledge. Then, this knowledge spread, until Lacan arrived on the scene and unlocked its meaning. All his colleagues said, "We shouldn't tell the public; let's keep this knowledge amongst us". But Lacan sold the stuff at a discount; actually, he gave it away to everyone who came to his Seminar. Since then, it has been up to us to tidy all this up. Myself, and others of the same generation- some of them are here today- we have re-organised the tools Lacan gave us.

What he invented, step by step, we came to apprehend as a whole; then we hung each tool in its correct place, a bit like a handyman would display each tool on the wall of his shed- the electric drill, the saw, the hammer... Now, we find ourselves at another historical threshold, that of the mass standardisation of these tools. And the CPCT are

¹ The CPCTs (Centres for psychoanalytic consultation and treatment) offer free psychoanalytical consultations and treatment to socially disadvantaged patients. Treatment is usually limited to 4 months or 16 sessions.

Initially founded in 2003 by Jacques-Alain Miller as a temporary "experiment", the Paris CPCT was directly linked to, and at first financed by, the Ecole de la Cause freudienne. Its purpose was to study whether it was possible to make the therapeutic application of psychoanalysis broadly available. It was also to provide training for psychoanalysts by the School.

The past few years have seen a proliferation of CPCTs in the whole of France and in other countries. They now receive subventions from local municipalities and regional councils.

²A reference to the address from a previous speaker, Mercedes de Francisco: "In the same way as Richard Sennett explains in *'The corrosion of character'*, we can contrast Greek bread-makers, who knew how to make bread, with those who only know how to switch on the bread-making machine. In both situations, the relation of the subject to knowledge and craft is degraded."

This reference does not appear in the French version.

the vehicles of this standardisation and of quick fixes with these tools. We must reflect on what is currently happening.

The theme of insertion/dis-insertion is appropriate. I think that the desire for insertion is universal in speaking beings. Speaking beings want to belong. What Lacan called “the Other’s discourse”, terminology which immediately entered psychoanalysis in terms of patterns of communication, of exchanges of messages, of inversions of the message.... , points out the *radical* nature of the social; it is the *radix*, the root. This is the meaning of Freud’s title *Mass psychology and analysis of the Ego*, which indicates that the social is already present in the analytical relation. And we do know that desire for dis-insertion can lead to social suicide, or suicide full-stop.

In his Seminar XVII, where Lacan discusses the Master, he says “The subject finds itself linked to the master signifier, with all the illusions that it implies; meanwhile insertion in jouissance prevents knowledge”.

Two facets of insertion are manifest in Lacan’s sentence.

On the one hand, insertion means identification; the subject identifies with S_1 , the Master. In a way, this identification kills him; he seeks representation by a rigid signifier, and the trade-off is death. The word “is the death of the thing”.

On the other hand, insertion means a new life, when S_2 (knowledge) emerges; the subject is re-born and the object emerges. In my opinion, in this phrase Lacan distinguishes between alienation and separation. Alienation is identification. On the other hand, S_2 , the signifier of knowledge, is necessary for the subject to be reborn. And in this way, the famous object *a* detaches itself from the body. In “Position of the Unconscious”, Lacan comments on the term *separation*: the Subject desires being *part of* and this desire to be part of, to belong (“appartenir” in French) to a whole has to do with the Object.

To be part of, to belong—our clinical work shows us how important this is for everyone. As soon as a subject ceases to belong to a group, an association, a hierarchy, work colleagues, an enterprise, pathological effects regularly manifest, and this even if the subject previously used to complain of his working conditions. This goes much deeper than the impact of losing a job, money, status, prestige. It has to do with Being, with the object *a*. This effect is visible in other contexts. Thus, in Paris, young people tell me how happy they are to attend the CPCT, which is like a family for them, such a comfortable group, etc. I can understand this pleasure. It is nevertheless a problem, because in psychoanalysis one must confront one’s solitude, misery and needs.

This is why one needs the comfort of a group. The big question is: should we install instruments of counter-solitude, of belonging? Lacan didn’t think so.

The École Freudienne de Paris was dysfunctional; it didn’t have a core. The General Assembly lasted 15 minutes; the Secretary’s speech was incomprehensible; no one took minutes. When Lacan asked: “Are there any questions?” there were only one or two hysterical subjects who asked for a belt over the ears, and it would be all over. Complaints were not an option. It was a good time for psychoanalysis; it was the time when Lacan was building up his teaching; many people worked on Freud. Like today, they worked in institutions, but raising the question of institutions at the École was considered bad form. Within the institutions, the Mandarin system reigned. To come to the École was like a breath of fresh air; it was also, and this was important, the place

where one learned to become an analyst, where one immersed oneself into the analytic discourse. There, one healed oneself of institutions.

Ourselves, we have done it differently; times have changed. But, if, under the pretext of making psychoanalysis accessible to the outside world, we allow the external world to penetrate into psychoanalysis; if we start believing what we tell the outside world – that our treatment is effective, that we are the top, outstanding professionals, that our therapeutic results are so rapid that they are absolutely stupefying, even to ourselves - if we take the road of such an extreme form of narcissism, we may, while continuing to call ourselves psychoanalysts, have already morphed into something else; like in *Rhinoceros*, the play by Ionesco. Well, it is a danger, and I think that we must take it into consideration

Regarding the theme of dis-insertion, we must reflect on the question of *space*, place, position. In his lecture he gave on his teaching, Lacan starts with the concept of place, geometric space. Our position relative to others is very important, and changes in these relative positions can wreak havoc in an individual; if, for instance, someone sees that his contemporaries progress faster than he in a hierarchy. It sounds very banal, but with a fundamental meaning, nevertheless.

At the [PIPOL] Congress in Barcelona this July, we must address the dis-insertion of the analyst, namely: to what extent must an analyst insert or dis-insert himself in the Other's discourse, and how can he do so?

Although Lacan never was favourable to the illusion of *extra-territoriality*, he regarded the École as a launching pad for the fight against the malaise of our civilisation. In other words, how is it possible to go against the grain of dominant values and not be crushed by them? We must make our position clear; the pressure which society exerts today on psychoanalysis is much stronger than in the past.

In the past, the political sphere did not concern itself with psychoanalysis, except for their family or for their own personal disturbances; it was not a political issue. Now, the psychoanalyst is a political, administrative and social problem; we are in a new historical framework, which makes it harder for us to define our position; in a way, we are exiles in our own domain, condemned to manoeuvre with the powers that be. They call themselves, or suggest we call them, our *partners*. Us, we see them as agents of the master's discourse, even though we cannot call them so to their face. But when we are amongst ourselves, it is very important to remember this.

The diffusion of psychoanalysis to the outside world can very rapidly lead to a breach in our protocol by the agents of the master's discourse. It shouldn't happen. These contacts must take place on the outside; they must not be internalised.

How are we to elaborate on analytic extimacy in contemporary society? I don't believe it is impossible. Criteria exist to decide what will do and what won't. But we will need to take initiatives; the solutions won't be found in books; Freud didn't offer recipes and neither did Lacan, because it wasn't a problem of their times. It is a contemporary problem, a recent one; it wasn't a problem in 1980, it is one in 2008. It is fascinating, and it requires courage, the kind of courage Mercedes de Francisco alluded to: the courage of strong positions, of not sweeping things under the carpet. That's what we must do.

We are no longer talking about the old socio-political issue that we all know so well; with the making of Europe and the regulation of the psychoanalytical profession, we

have turned a corner. This is only the beginning, and the road will be long. We are free to debate the question energetically amongst ourselves and produce an *Aufhebung* of our position. I believe that's what PIPOL 4 is about—applied psychoanalysis, yes, but psychoanalysis applied to itself.

I will be blunt; bluntness is necessary for the debate to be productive.

My intervention, I am pleased to say, had a depressing impact on the Freudian field; I had noticed a CPCT-mania there, as though the whole Freudian field was destined to regroup around the concepts, ideology and practice of the CPCTs. I was stupefied, I admit it; I hadn't realised it was the case, or, maybe, I had perceived certain things without wanting to know—to the extent of symptomatically forgetting; I did say that I would share that analysis with you, but not now, it would be unpleasant to the people concerned.

If I hadn't made an intervention at the recent study days of the Ecole Freudienne, and it was entirely contingent, if I hadn't started writing the *Entretiens d'actualité*, if I hadn't come today to Barcelona, I think that the CPCT-mania would have continued. If we want to preserve the core of our experience, we must abandon the CPCT-mania, without falling into CPCT-depression.

My original idea was that the (Paris) CPCT (I chose the acronym myself, for poetic reasons of assonance) was only going to be a short experience; because there was danger; an experience with some toxicity. It was meant to be an injection of poison in a homoeopathic dose. But people liked it so much that Freudians the world over are now drinking litres and litres of it: "an excellent, first-rate poison". The CPCT experience is five or six years old in Paris, four in Barcelona and two years old elsewhere. What is this, compared to the twenty-first century? A baby's first steps. We are preparing the future.

Everywhere, the experience has been conducted on a large scale. Ideally the scale should have been modest; then, the problems would have been identified and tentative solutions developed. It didn't happen this way, and there is a good reason for it. The experience represented the beginning of the reconciliation between the psychoanalytic discourse, and the discourse of society, the master's discourse. The result was spectacular. This excess is part and parcel of the experience; the experience consisted in exceeding itself.

Andres Borderias rightly referred to what Lacan said in "The Direction of the Treatment", supply created demand. Okay, but then what? The psychoanalyst's supply creates a demand which it does not fulfil. The whole point is to not fulfil the demand, the demand of the social Other. Because not to satisfy the subject's demand is, I believe, not to satisfy the demand of the social Other either. We must only satisfy this demand indirectly, otherwise, as we can see, the CPCTs grow uncontrollably. At the moment, the CPCTs are manned by members of the *École* and its trainees. But soon we will have to start fast-tracking staff to respond to the growing demand; it's logical.

The reasonable attitude to adopt is to reject the demand from the social Other, or to respond to it indirectly; otherwise we won't be practicing therapeutic psychoanalysis but Lacan-like social work; and since Lacan-like social work doesn't exist, it'll be social work with Lacanian pretensions.

We must stop growing; it is a matter of urgency. We are totally in the oral paradigm: should we eat the Other, or is the Other going to devour us? I don't know. I have the feeling that it is the same thing. As Esthela Solano was saying during the last

institutional conference of the École de la Cause Freudienne, “We devour the subventions which it (the Other) feeds to us, while, simultaneously being devoured by it”. She has been involved in this experience since the beginning and she thinks that in the Paris CPCT something is growing out of control and devours us. In Spain we haven’t yet reached that stage, yet there are indications that it is where we are headed if we don’t take the time to reflect.

What I am saying is not final; I am open to debate and to contradiction; I am not yet sufficiently familiar with the details of the situation; I need to look at the figures. I have made mistakes in the past, and, no doubt, I can be mistaken now on certain aspects of the question; and I will make mistakes again. I am not proud. I wish for a debate; but I cannot hide that I have a feeling of urgency.

The CPCTs have been not only a social experiment but also a test of the strength of the analyst’s desire: is it strong enough to see clearly what is and what isn’t acceptable in a psychoanalytic school and its satellites? I believe that analyst’s desire is currently enfeebled.

I can’t stand this word “partner” amongst ourselves. After years of Lacan’s teaching, and all he has told us about the master’s discourse, here we are on intimate terms with the town councils, the regional assemblies, ministers; we keep saying “thank you”. I agree, we must defend ourselves; but then, to introduce the master’s discourse amongst ourselves, after all these years... I don’t understand. And you are going to help me understand.

Maybe it is a generational shift? I belong to an old generation, which used to be *leftist*. I am prepared to consider that today’s world thinks differently. But this won’t make the problem go away.

Translated by Corinne Border. Not reviewed by the author.