

How Psychoanalysis Works

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Argument

“How Psychoanalysis Works”. This is not a question, this is an assertion. Because psychoanalysis indeed works, contrary to what some noisily object to nowadays. Still, we need to account for it. The word ‘work’ (opérer), used in an intransitive way, is a strong word. Coming from the Latin ‘operari’, which means ‘to work’, ‘to operate’ or ‘operation’, it involves an action that produces an effect, an “ordered sequence of acts that effect a transformation” (according to ‘Le Robert’). To say it in a matter of fact way: psychoanalysis changes something, it yields results. By what means and with what aim is what we will show. At the end of his teaching, Lacan said that for all these years he did not stop questioning his ‘co-practitioners’ “on the subject of knowing how they could possibly operate with words – I don’t say cure, one does not cure everybody. There are operations that are effective and that only happen with words.”[1] The

power of the word was also what Freud, inventor of psychoanalysis, patiently gave account of to the supposed 'impartial person' who did not know anything of the 'peculiarities of an analytic treatment', whom he addressed in 1926 on *Lay Analysis*. The specific use of words in the meeting of a psychoanalyst with his patient is neither suggestion nor magic. The way words are used cannot be captured by other practices or any previous knowledge. Freud says: "analysis is a procedure *sui generis*, something novel and special, which can only be understood with the help of new insights – or hypotheses, if that sounds better."^[2] Freud considered that the hypothesis of the unconscious and the importance of sexuality in the determination of neurosis were the two 'cornerstones' of psychoanalytic theory, deduced from the experience.^[3] To give our own account of how psychoanalysis works today, let us start from what our daily practice teaches us. Let us not hesitate to take things from the level of the phenomena. Let us ask ourselves what in a given case took place and what was at work. By doing this we will prove that this 'how' neither goes back to, nor culminates in a practical guide that prescribes procedures to follow for foreseeable and generalisable results. We verify again, as at the Congress of the WAP in 2004, that Lacanian practice is without standards, but that it is for all that not without principles. In order to orient ourselves, let us return to the 'fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis', as Lacan chose them from Freud in 1964, to revive them. Seminar XI is a very particular moment in his teaching, a rupture and a new departure, the stakes of which have often been illuminated by Jacques-Alain Miller. Lacan puts a series of four concepts in order: the unconscious, repetition, transference and the drive, with which he responds to the question of what founds psychoanalysis as 'praxis' ^[4], by speaking to an extended audience beyond the psychoanalysts who followed his teaching at that point.

For the unconscious to speak it needs someone who listens to it, said Jacques-Alain Miller in London, at the 'Rally of the Impossible Professions'. A psychoanalyst distances himself from the dominant contemporary ideologies who do not believe in the unconscious.^[5] He is interested in the things that are wrong, that fail, that defy mastery, and of which Lacan made the manifestation of the truth of a subject. This unconscious that 'opens and closes', that presents itself as hindrance and failure, how is it gotten hold of? How do we offer the possibility of surprise by proposing this special mode of speaking that is free association? What is our responsibility in an interpretation?

Repetition, in its insistence, is the missed encounter with the real, with what is inassimilable in the signifier, with what Freud called trauma. How do we bear it?

This real is at play in transference, in as much as it is defined as 'enactment of the reality of the unconscious', which is sexual. What place do we occupy in transference? What function do we have in it?

The drive circles the lost object, the object *a*, and yields in this same circuit its satisfaction; this is in no way equivalent to the good of the subject. The analytic operation allows the subject to detach himself from the identifications he was subjected to, and to recognise the *jouissance* that is his own. Under which conditions is this possible?

These basic concepts, says Lacan, are "what makes us certain of our practice".^[6] But there is something more. The whole seminar is traversed by the initial question: "What must there be in the analyst's desire for it to operate in a correct way?" Contrary to the discourse of science, where the desire of the physician is not questioned, "the analyst's desire can in no way be left outside our question".^[7] This desire is the spring of the operation. Lacan will respond in 1967 with the formalisation of the end of analysis and his concept of the act of the psychoanalyst.

Thus, to the question of what could put someone in the position to support the analytic act he responded that a psychoanalyst is the product of his analysis, taken to its end.^[8]

This question remains at the horizon of our next congress where we will give an account of the operativity of psychoanalysis starting from our practice in its multiple, but each time singular forms.

Anne Lysy

(Translated by Natalie Wulfinfing)

Notes

1 Lacan, J.; « Le phénomène lacanien », conférence à Nice (30.11.1974), in *Cahiers cliniques de Nice*, 1 June 1998, p. 14. (not translated/published in English)

2 Freud, S.; *The Question of Lay Analysis* [1926], *Standard Edition (SE) vol 20*, tr: Strachey, J., Hogarth Press, London, p.189/190

3 Freud, S.; *On The History of the Psychoanalytic Movement* [1914], SE 14, p.16

4 Lacan, J.; *The Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, tr. Sheridan, A., Penguin, London 1994, p. 6

5 Miller, J.-A.; 'Closing Remarks at the Rally of the Impossible Professions, Against the False Promises of Security', in *Hurly-Burly*, issue 1, 2009, p. 211

6 *Op.cit.*, p. 263

7 *Ibid.*; p. 9 + 10

8 Lacan, J.; *Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School (Autres écrits, Paris, Seuil, 2001, pp. 243-259)*

* published in English on the website of the London Society, tr. Grigg, R.:

<http://www.londonsociety-nls.org.uk/pdfs/Propositionof9October1967.pdf>

Source: NLS Website www.amp-nls.org

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After the Geneva Congress

The 8th NLS Congress “Daughter, Mother, Woman in the 21st Century” took place last weekend in Geneva in an atmosphere both studious and cordial. A large audience of nearly 350 people, who came from all over Europe and beyond, were able to appreciate the quality of the papers presented. The presentations were rewarded with illuminating comments from the session’s chairs.

We would like to thank in particular Jacques-Alain Miller for his participation. We would also like to thank Leonardo Gorostiza, president of the WAP, whose AS testimony on Sunday was an exceptional moment for us. Thanks to the participation of the Presidents of other Schools, the NLS is resolutely inscribed in the European movement of the Lacanian orientation. Lucia D’Angelo (ELP), Paola Francesconi (SLP), Jean-Daniel Matet (ECF), Vicente Palomera’s successor Gil Caroz (for the FEPP, newly named Euro-Federation of Psychoanalysis), are our partners in this movement.

This Congress, to which Pierre-Gilles Guéguen gave a firm outline a year ago, crowned his mandate as president of the NLS. We congratulate him for the work he has achieved. During this period I have appreciated our close collaboration, for which I wish to thank him warmly.

We would also like to thank Christiane Ruffieux and her colleagues of the ASREEP who organised this event and all that went with it. Not only was it flawless, it was also aesthetically pleasing and welcoming. According to its participants this always makes an NLS Congress particularly appealing.

Our next Congress will take place in London on the 2nd and 3rd April 2011, with the title “How Psychoanalysis Works”. The argument, presented last Sunday, will soon circulate on our lists. The organisation will be entrusted to Natalie Wülfing and our colleagues of the London Society. In all the groups of the NLS the preparation of the Congress will start in September through, amongst other things, the NLS Seminars and the Cartels. The preparatory documents will regularly be circulated on NLS-Messenger. Don’t forget to check the NLS website, where information will also be available.

Until then, we would like to wish all of you a pleasant summer

For the Executive Committee,

Anne Lysy – Presiden