

To act, why?¹

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I

The title I originally gave to my presentation was the immediate reaction produced in me when I read the question announcing the topic of this Congress. 'Why to act?' was the question that emerged as a response to that of 'How to act?'

Because the discourse in which I inscribe my practice is that of psychoanalysis, I assumed there were reasons why such an idea responded in me, and it is precisely this 'not knowing', not knowing 'why', that I decided to put to work. Almost immediately the issue of the function of the question as such became prevalent, orienting my reading.

This paper is an attempt to transmit the turns, roundabouts and pathways that allowed the transformation of that initial response 'why to act?', into a different formula, which constitutes an inversion of its original terms: "to act, why?"

II

The resonance between the title of the Congress and Lacan's "How to act with one's being?" was the first echo I followed and went back to explore. From there, a certain trilogy guided me in this interrogation: "*Direction of the Treatment*", "*Subversion of the Subject*" and "*Position of the Unconscious*".

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I read this writings from the following perspective: The direction of the treatment depends on the subversion of the subject brought about by the position of the unconscious, where position of the unconscious refers to the position the analyst takes up with regards to it. In all three texts, Lacan introduces the question of the subject of the unconscious by means of explicit references to the analyst's formation and the analytic community. I asked myself why; and I made the hypothesis that, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, the subversion of the subject that is at stake does not coincide with a subversion only on the side of the analysand.

"Direction of the treatment..." is organised around four questions: Who (analyses today)?; What (is the place of interpretation)?; Where (do we stand regarding transference)? and How (to act with one's being)? It is by referring the question 'how to act' to the analyst's being and to the community of analysts (that is, to the problem of the analyst's formation) that Lacan makes of it an ethical problem and not merely a technical one.

From the moment the being of the analyst is implicated in this question, only singular responses will be possible. That is why Lacan could suggest, for instance, that the papers presented at the Bonneval Colloquium, bore witness to each analyst's relationship with his lack-of-being.

In "Direction of the treatment Lacan continues: "An ethics must be formulated that integrates Freud's conquests concerning desire: one that would place at the forefront the question of the analyst's desire" (*Ecrits*, p 514). Thus, it is the analyst who becomes 'the subject who is finally in question' (*Ecrits*, p 189).

An interrogation about the ethics proper to psychoanalysis accompanies the question about the act, and it addresses especially the so-called analytic act, namely, the analyst's relationship to the unconscious and its cause, putting him -the analyst- 'in the dock'.

III

It could be considered that throughout Lacan's teaching, the notions of desire, subject and the unconscious are homologous, insofar as they all account for the kernel of Freud's discovery: the individual is never such, he is always, by definition -structurally- divided. The subject of the unconscious is not the subject of will power or reason. This radically opposes the ethics of psychoanalysis and that of the Supreme Good or of the Categorical Imperative (Aristotle and Kant). The subject of psychoanalysis is not a given but an effect: the effect of the encounter between the body and language, always split between what he says and what he knows, what he wants and what he does, what he owns and what he longs for, the subject finds its place elsewhere than in his self.

Lacan demonstrated how two moments are to be taken into consideration when formalising the operation of the constitution of the subject: on the one hand, desire emerges as a 'beyond demand' (although never 'outside' of it); this determines the infinite sliding of the subject in the metonymy which constitutes his lack-of-being; on the other hand, and this is crucial to understand the analytic act and the position of the analyst-, desire is a remainder, and its cause has to be localised in the being of object that the speaking subject is, now considered not as being subjected to the signifier but as being the object which, extracted from the field of the Other, and

because of that forever lost, introduces him in a dialectic whose absence psychoses testify to.

“The effect of language is to introduce the cause into the subject. Through this effect, he is not the cause of himself; he bears within himself the worm of the cause that splits him. (...) One therefore does not speak to the subject. It speaks of him (...) This is “what the subject of desire is in being but the Other's desire” (*Ecrits*, p 709).

Returning to the function of the question, one could say that it is this notion of the unconscious (symbolic, 'transferential') that leads Lacan to affirm, in his early teaching that “neurosis has the structure of a question” (*Seminar 3*, p 249), and to give hysteria as an example: in his Seminar 3 he says: “To become a woman and to ask oneself what a woman is, are two different things (...) the question is posed precisely because she or he is not it” (*Seminar 3*, p 254). We could read it as an opposition between being and question. Clinically it presents itself as an indicator of the subject's position in the enunciation: obsession sometimes shows, structured as it often is, around a 'strong ego'- how the more being there is, the less questions emerge. The other extreme of this is illustrated by the endless interrogation that leaves the subject feeling lost and aimless, victim of the lack of answers for a question that is posed not to 'hear' the silent *jouissance* lodged in its blah blah.

It is precisely the consideration of the subject as being of *jouissance* that leads Lacan towards a clinic of the Real, and to propose a solution to the interminability of analysis.

For if the subject's being was nothing but the Other's desire, “what would authorise an analyst to put his position into question once

again in the analysis? If the subject had not a choice to make nothing could authorize his entering into the analytic experience"². Suggesting that 'while desire remains a question, *jouissance* is always a response', would perhaps allow us to better circumscribe the act, both on the side of the analyst and on the side of the analysand. It is because there is a choice to be made with regards to this object that condenses for the subject the lost *jouissance*, it is because it is possible to take a decision regarding the impossibility from which the subject is born, it is because of this that the analyst can operate by emptying this locus of the cause, revealing the unconscious as 'a foolish knowledge', which ignores the impossibility that beats in its core.

IV

If every ethics 'essentially consists in a judgement of our action' (*Seminar VII*, p 311), every ethics implies a choice that takes place within a field already structured.

The ethics of psychoanalysis is relative to the function of speech in the field of language, and was defined by Lacan as an ethics of "well-saying". Psychoanalysis does not propose hedonism, it sustains an ethics, says Lacan, 'converted to silence' (*Ecrits* p 573), which means not so much that the analyst is silent, but that he does not align himself neither with the series of values or ideals (in whose suspension psychoanalysis is founded) nor with the series of pleasure or well-being (since Freud their 'beyond' was indicated to us). The ethics of psychoanalysis leaves the place of the Ideal empty, the analyst's desire being the operator of the separation between capital I and small a, between knowledge and *jouissance*.

2 Jaques-Alain Miller, "No hay clinica sin etica"

That void will be the point at which desire aims, unspeakable as such, but logically localizable, if the act engendered by the analyst's desire knows-how to, allusively, indicate its place.

V

I would like to consider now Lacan's proposition in his Seminar on Ethics: "the only thing of which one can be guilty is having given ground relative to one's desire" (*Seminar VII*, p 319). What does he say immediately before introducing it? That he is experimenting, and that what he is about to formulate is a paradox. My impression is that he wanted to see what analysts would make of it. I found Jacques-Alain Miller's reading of this proposition to be a possible way out of the impasse introduced earlier: he points out that Lacan never formulated a 'maxim' or an 'imperative' by which the ethics of psychoanalysis could be defined; he never said 'do not give up on your desire', as this is precisely the misrecognition the neurotic is trapped in. His proposition is not a 'positive precept': how could it be since desire is structurally the Other's desire?

'This is why the ethics of psychoanalysis takes up an interrogative and not a normative form': "Have you acted in conformity with the desire that inhabits you?" (*Seminar VII*, p 314)

If Lacan invites us to give this question the 'force of a Last Judgement', it is because the temporal dialectics between act and knowledge is not a lineal one.

Our practice shows us a myriad of subjective strategies put in place in order to refuse it, postpone it, ignore it, avoid it. And the trap carries the mask of repetition and goes on under the form of a wilful search for answers: "Once I know what I want I will be able to act".

But Freud's and Lacan's work demonstrate how, when the subject is confronted with his act, with the gap the desire that inhabits him is, it is never pleasant or reasonable. The pleasure principle and the reality principle are already failed responses to treat the Real at stake. Anguish on the side of the analysand, horror on that of the analyst, they both bear the mark from which the act will extract its certitude. An act requires, by definition, a suspension of knowledge. And in this sense, the act precedes the question. It is only afterwards that one can pose it: why?

VI

The question that the subject embodies is, in the end, what to do with this 'why?', "what to do with the lack that makes us human"? If Freud reopened the wound of the cause to place it at the very centre of the analytic experience, one can deduce that the ethics of psychoanalysis is an ethics of consequences and not of intentions.

On the side of the analyst this is embodied by his holding up a position, not just of not-knowing, but of not-thinking. On the side of the analysand, the adherence to the fundamental rule will allow him to make the experience of "the incompatibility between desire and speech", of the "half-saying of truth". If the subject is not he who speaks and the object is not ahead but irremediable lost, it will be the consequences of our actions that tell us what our relationship with the cause is.

To consent to lose the loss, to assume the insensate contingency from which we were born, to open up the possibility of gaining access to a love for chance, a margin of freedom with regards to that which determines us...