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Prelude 5

The ethics of psychoanalysis

With the discovery of the unconscious and the invention of the psychoanalytic dispositive, Freud initially introduced an epistemic subversion, the one that Lacan called the «subversion of the subject»¹. Among its consequences, this implies a change in ethics: «An ethics arises, which is converted to silence, not by way of fear, but of desire»². It certainly includes the analyst's desire, but it is mainly enactment [*mise-en-acte*] by the analysand. This entails a conversion, then, from the ethics of the superego, from the fear of the «loud voice»³, to the silence of desire, which traces its path under the articulated demand that carries it. After having announced an ethics of desire made to counter the adaptive alienations, which are, at bottom, ethics of the demand of the Other, Lacan introduces something new with the notion of demand articulated so as to distinguish it from desire. The desire is placed in-between the chains (of the graph), between the enunciated and the enunciation of the demand. The demand supposes an incarnated Other who is not only the place of signifiers but who also holds a discourse.

The ethics of (benevolent) neutrality

By recalling the gateway to the unconscious in Freud's horizon, Lacan thus introduces the «analyst's desire» as that which can only be articulated from the relationship of the desire to the desire, with a causal function in the analytical process. Although the formulation of this thesis was unprecedented before 1964, its dimension was already present, implicitly, in Freud himself, with his notion of «(benevolent) neutrality». Against the grain of the norms to other discourses, welcoming what comes, treating each case as if it were the first, this is a matter of desire. «Neutrality» has nothing of a passivity; it is, on the contrary,

¹ J. Lacan, «The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious» [1960], *Écrits*, English edition by W. W. Norton & Company, 2002, p. 671.

² J. Lacan, «Remarks on Daniel Lagache's Presentation» [1960], § IV. Toward an Ethics, *Écrits*, English edition, op. cit., p. 573.

³ *Ibidem*.

very active and, above all, goes against the grain, suspending the common or phantasmatic norms at play in all other social bonds. This dimension introduced, for Freud, implicitly, *another discursive option*, different from that of common discourse, a subversive option of suspension of norms. It is this option of neutrality that has made possible to seize that underlying the demand addressed to the analyst, what is at work is the bond of desire to desire, the desire of the analysand to the desire of the analyst, which is in fact the operator of the cure. «The “desire of the psychoanalyst” is the absolute point from where the attention is triangulated on what, although expected, mustn’t be put off until tomorrow.»⁴

...another ethic, an ethic of desire

Another discursive option, it means another ethic, and that is why Lacan says that must be formulated an «ethic of desire» that integrates Freud’s conquests concerning desire: one that would place at the forefront the question of the analyst’s desire.⁵ But we know that he then introduces the analytical act, a concept that is utterly unprecedented. There is no trace of this notion in Freud, even if we cannot doubt that the act was there; already at the beginning, an act of «position of the unconscious». Subsequently, notably from the supposed unconscious, when is posed to conclude the preliminaries; and afterwards, to ensure that there is analysis and that it advances, therefore, when it is done, it is through its consequences that the act is attested. The act designates the analyst’s doing insofar as he operates. Only Lacan sought what lies at the fundament of its effectiveness. He responds that it is the structure of language, elucidated by the set logic, that obliges him to situate the analytical act as «that which doesn’t think» that is, to situate it starting from object *a*.⁶ «But be careful, that the act doesn’t think doesn’t mean that it isn’t driven by a desire. In what, then, the act, the concept of the act, overdetermines what has until now been called the psychoanalyst’s desire? In any case, it overdetermines what has been called the ethics of the desire.»⁷

The ethics of the psychoanalysis, a position on towards the real

Beyond the discovery of the unconscious, which finds its preformed matter in the symbolic, Freud also «created the dispositif through which the real touches the real, that’s what I have articulated as the analytical discourse», says Lacan⁸. It’s not by mere coincidence if, in the same «Remarks», introduces what he calls «the ethics that is inaugurated by the act»⁹. Inaugurate suggests that she is new, not only in her formula but in what she is, that is, in what she aims at, because to speak of ethics is to speak of goals. The psychoanalyst’s desire operator in the cure has Socrates as its model, his pure, indeterminate desire, whose object remains enigma, an enigma that has crossed the centuries. Lacan returns once again to this in «*Radiophonie*», saying of his pure desire that «Socrates as with me, takes to barring it without remedy»¹⁰, which means that it remains uninterpretable. It’s a desire anticipated by Freudian neutrality, against the grain of the norms, but something lacks in this neutrality. Colette Soler points out that what lacks is a compass. The object of desire, in its difference with the cause of desire, is the compass of desire, even if it is unstable and episodic. So, the pure desire of the analyst would be without compass?

The ethics of the analytical act

The ethics that is inaugurated by the analytical act answers the question of what can be the compass of the psychoanalyst’s desire. Lacan poses that in default of the object, in default therefore of the compass of phantasma, suspended by neutrality: «in the ethics of the act, the logic commands [...]»¹¹. The ethics of the act is therefore an ethics that aims towards the real, the real of language. This is the compass that can orient the analyst, whereas there is no the fantasy [*fantasme*] as in any other relationship. What logic commands, are impossibilities that preside in the experience at the elusive, or else they are necessities

⁴ J. Lacan, «*Discours à l’École freudienne de Paris*» [1967-70], *Autres écrits*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 2001, p. 272.

⁵ Cf. J. Lacan, «The direction of the treatment and the principles of its power» [1958], *Écrits*, English edition, op. cit., p. 514.

⁶ C. Soler, *Traumatismes*, Éditions Nouvelles du Champ lacanien, Paris 2025, p. 116-7.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ J. Lacan, «...ou pire», Compte-rendu du Séminaire 1971-1972, dans *Autres écrits*, op. cit., p. 548.

⁹ J. Lacan, «L’acte psychanalytique», Compte-rendu du Séminaire 1967-1968, dans *Autres écrits*, op. cit., p. 380.

¹⁰ J. Lacan, «*Radiophonie*» [1970], in *Scilicet* 2/3, Paris, Seuil, 1970. Translated by Jack W. Stone. *Autres écrits*, op. cit., p. 411.

¹¹ J. Lacan, «L’acte psychanalytique», *Ibid.*

that preside at the inevitable. Or, Lacan continues: «[...] the logic commands, it is certain that we find its paradoxes there.»¹² It is therefore by always finding its paradoxes that logic also opens the way to the contingent and the possible, which make place for change. Taking up the perspective provided by the Presentation of the Argument of the XIII RV, “Logic indeed presides over the direction towards which each analysis, through an interpretation which, in the singularity of each case, distinguishes between what depends on the subject’s options and what depends on the real of the structure, unavoidable, yet precisely where everyone «has their chance of insurrection»”¹³.

Diego Mautino,
Rome, January 26th 2026.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Cf. C. Soler, «Ethics», Argument, XIII International *Rendez-vous* of IF-EPFCL, July 23rd to 26th, 2026, São Paulo, Brazil.