

THE LENGTH OF THE SESSION - Rose-Paule Vinciguerra

The variable length session, the short session, was a point of rupture in the analytic field, but Lacan didn't set it up as a standard. He did formalise it however, and did so at different steps in his teaching.

l) The dissipation of narcissistic mirages and the search for the *effect de sensé*.

In order to denounce the fixed length session, Lacan began with the idea that it was necessary to disturb the subject's imaginary certainties and look for the effect of sense. Indeed, in the fixed length session, the temporal limit induces the subject to manoeuvre with the time: 'We know' says Lacan, 'how he calculates its coming-to-term..., how he anticipates its end by weighing it like a weapon, by watching out for it as he would for a place of shelter.' (1). This is how the scansion of the session has the function of countering the resistances proper to the imaginary of the ego: indeed the ego ought not to be supported in its capacity of sustaining frustration for it is frustration of essence. The scansion in the session is thus explicitly linked to the dissipation of narcissistic mirages, to the suspension of the subject's certainty, and to the scansion of their resolution in discourse. In this respect, the analyst 'symbolises the super-ego' (2).

This scansion that punctuates, is that of a *kairos*, of an occasion, of an opportune moment. It is Protagoras, according to Diogenes Laertius who is said to have initiated the use of this term: *dunamis tou kairou*, the power of the opportune moment: it is a resource of time defined by the presentation of a meaning and made concrete by an act or event of resolution or comprehension (3). Thus, in the session, the signifying scansion on 'a word, a phoneme, a locution' is *kairos*; in being repeated, it brings about a signifying chain from which it will be possible to decipher the symptom as message. Its function is to reintegrate the subject in the register of meaning by way of the analyst's 'gift of speech'. The dynamic conception of the scansion, by privileging the articulation of desire over the statements of the signified of the demand, will follow the subject closely in its very movement of realisation; it enables a punctuation of the subject itself in the movement of its progress.

Objections: Let's consider a few objections that have been made to the session as scanned, for we're told that this is the 'bone of contention' between analysts. These objections consist in considering that the good of the patient would be threatened by the analyst's impudence.

a) We're told that only the long session allows for the 'buttressing of regression', as if temporal, topographical or formal regression was a real regression and would necessitate the real time for the subject to effectuate it. Thus one forgets that regression draws on signifiers, the signifiers of demand and that if it concerns the corresponding drive, it's only by way of these signifiers.

b) We're also told that analysands demand time to speak. But what are they really asking for? To pursue their 'I don't want to know anything about it'? To relieve themselves of all responsibility in the 'duty of well-saying'? To find *jouissance* in their tongue-wagging? We have to ask ourselves whether, in the presence of empty speech, the standardised session does not delay the emergence of the unconscious. In this respect, the ending of the session such as Lacan practiced it, sometimes with a resounding sigh, is worth more than any statement about resistance and its interpretation. And when resistance within speech is turned towards the presence of the listener, only a correct punctuation can manage to bring the subject an awareness of the imaginary place in which he is situated.

There is no need to interpret the implicit reference made by the analysand to the analyst: this only «cements» the resistance by fixing it onto the person of the analyst, his 'persona', his mask. Using a commentary to bring into the open the sexualised point of the transference for example, or the patient's aggressiveness, in no way allows for the understanding of what the patient places as the libidinal stake of the transference. Certainly this is contrary to what Freud said, but equally the Lacanian conception of the transference no longer situates it as the reviviscence of forgotten situations or infantile turmoil in direction of the person of the analyst, but as a love that is addressed to the unconscious knowledge that encloses the object. In this respect, it's the *agalma* or the *kakon* residing in the analyst which are really at stake in

the cure. The object is the locus of the analyst, and it is precisely what must fall at the end of the cure; 'I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you, I mutilate you.' (4)

Furthermore, the analyst's strategy and tactics have to take into account what Freud states regarding analysis: that it is 'a directed paranoia' and by wanting to force the patient's resistance by interpreting it, we can lead him into a register which risks turning out to be persecutory, if not ineffective. Certainly, in Freud's time, his constructions could have the value of truth, and haunted by the question of sex, Freud was impatient for truth to pass over into knowledge; 'Freud himself' says Lacan, 'annulls the time for comprehending in favour of moments of concluding which precipitate the mediation of the subject towards deciding the meaning to attach to the original event' (5).

But what about today? Today analytic theory itself is a barrier, a wall against any surprise from truth, and the address to the subject supposed to know represented by the analyst excludes the possibility that he try to fill in the gaps in knowledge, thus presenting himself as the master of truth.

c) Masters, a word that our colleagues in the IPA come out with as a charge against Lacanian analysts. Lacan was certainly demanding. He demanded that the analysand apply himself to the duty of well-saying prescribed by the analytic rule, but who among those who knew him as analyst will say that, in their sessions, he was not within the analytic discourse? This is nevertheless what is claimed by a certain French author by the name of J.-L. Donnet, whose work on what he calls 'the analytic setting' is much appreciated within the SPP, the principal group of the IPA in France. In a study published in 1995, *Le divan bien tempéré* ('The Well-tempered Couch'), he assures us that the short session is supposed to satisfy 'the patient's masochistic desires, which find their pasture in the analyst's deeds or in his 'identification with the aggressor-seducer.' An operation of 'magical contempt' on the part of the analyst, 'seduction', 'suggestion', 'power', 'violence', 'maniac heroic autonomisation of analysts', this is what the short session would authorise. Heroic, yes... Lacan's effort to rethink psychoanalysis was indeed heroic, but he never prescribed to anyone to put on the cloak. Rather his advice to analysts starting out was 'Don't think you're God's gift to the world'. We might rather ask what the subjective function of the fixed setting is for these IPA analysts that it should stir up this imaginary ubris? Donnet compares the setting to the ropes that tether Ulysses to the mast to prevent him from giving in to the song of the sirens! For Donnet, the scansion of the short session would be merely the effect of the analyst's powerlessness to support the transference, the pure effect of the analyst's *jouissance*. Should we not rather think that it is to guard against his own powerlessness and the fear of some *jouissance* he is himself ignorant of that he comes to prescribe the tethering of the analyst to the mast?

Indeed this polemic takes on meaning in the consideration of the counter-transference as a given of the analytic situation. We know that Lacan stigmatised the counter-transference as the sum of prejudices, as the analyst's resistance and, in this respect, one ought to recall that supervision always has an operative function. But the accusation is also mistaken as regards the nature of the analytic act, which, in its instant doesn't entail the presence of the subject; it supposes on the contrary that the personal equation of the analyst has been reduced and that he doesn't believe he exceeds his act. Far from being a subjective intervention of the analyst, the act is for him a displeasure, an enigma as to the effects of this act, this act which provokes 'horror' as Lacan said. In the act, the psychoanalyst is only authorised by himself, that is to say, not by any fantasy. The analytic act has as its responsibility to put the transference to work.

Thus, isn't the true mastery on the contrary the one that refers to a fixed duration where time doesn't demand an account, where time imposes like that of salaried work where, as we know, 'time is money', where there is an arithmetical equality (so many hours of analysis plus so many hours of supervision to be accepted as analyst)? In direct opposition to this, with the scanned session, it's rather a case of: to each session its fortune. And the fortune of the unconscious is not predictable. The analyst doesn't know in advance; he waits for something from the analysand's words, a speech event that will produce *kairos*, an occasion. He makes himself the locus of reception of what Lacan calls, 'the lasting word'. 'Witness..., depository..., reference..., guarantor..., custodian..., scrivener..., the analyst', says Lacan, 'has something of the scribe about him'(6). In this respect, the analyst is indeed a locus, that of the

Other, and this is why Lacan can say that 'a quite bureaucratic regularity is all that is required of the patient, but it is precisely the time of the session that manifests the fact that this Other is de-completed, lacking, and it is here that the question of desire can be posed.

Thus it is the analyst who is the scribe, not the setting.

d) Let's take a closer look at this notion of the setting. In this same text, J-L Donnet says that the fixed time of the session, like any element of the analytic setting, is the condition of possibility for symbolisation, and it must, when it is respected, take on the value of the love of the mother after having been the formulation of a founding paternal proscription... between 'symbiotic and symbolic'! In this way, it would embody the constraint of the Other as 'fit to be symbolised' and, as setting, would allow for 'the symbolisation of symbolisation' and 'of non-symbolisation' when symbolisation doesn't occur, as in psychosis for example. A third element between analyst and patient, the fixed time would have a function 'that vacillates between real and symbolic'. The setting would thus be the projection 'of the shadow borne by the patient's superego, which would have to be interpreted starting from there.' In the end, maintaining the temporal setting would be convergent with the possibility of interpreting the transference. He says 'it would assure, at the end of the session, the disjunction of the analyst as support «of the imaginary transference» and as support of the «symbolic transference».' The setting would thus be the best ally of the symbolic, according to this author.

One can see how the Lacanian concept of the symbolic has here the value of a signifier for all uses. If, as Lacan said, the real is what subsists outside symbolisation, it can only be encountered as lacking; therefore there is no 'connivance of the Real to be symbolised' and neither the analyst nor a fortiori the resources of a formal setting have any legitimacy whatsoever to embody the Other. There is no best ally of the real.

Finally, isn't it to guard against the imposture of the transference, against the mistake of the subject supposed to know that the requirement of a legalism is maintained and confused with the symbolic? We ought rather to say that the fixation on the rigid setting is but a superego. The analyst's superego. It's the analytic discourse that defines the setting, and not vice-versa.

II) Logical Time

Thus, it is not by means of the setting, whose discretion would assure the non-*jouissance* of the analyst, that Lacan theorises the cure, but rather by means of 'discretion', in the sense of logicians, of the signifier's discontinuity. The Lacanian analysis of the unconscious emphasises discontinuity, the fissure, the trait, the rupture, the obstacle, the crack (7). The unconscious is structured as a language and must be situated in the dimension of a non-temporal synchrony, but at the level of the subject of the enunciation, the unconscious is lost and found; and the subject, in so far as it is undetermined, is always grasped 'at some unexpected point' (8). Therefore, it is the unconscious, in so far as it presents itself as an unpredictable contingency, disappearing no sooner than it has appeared, which creates the time of the session. And the analyst follows this time; it is solely in this interval that the reality of the unconscious as sexual opens up.

So it is neither the time of the clock, nor time as experienced, that gives the analytic session its rhythm. Rather it is a logical time where the function of haste, as in the apologue of the logical time of the three prisoners, takes on its full value. Since the scansion is always possible, the analysand's discourse hastens to try and say what is most acute in subjective experience. So, time, in the form of haste, is in itself 'agalmatic', the surplus *jouissance* that causes subjective division.

And, for the analyst, to refuse this time is to always intervene either too soon or too late... To confuse the time and the space of the setting of the session is to reduce the value of the unconscious. It is this unconscious that dictates the setting of the sessions, for there is only one unconscious in the session, and that is the patient's; this is where the principle of the psychoanalyst's tact stems from, and

there is no rule that can compensate for it. 'The presence of the psychoanalyst... must be included in the concept of the unconscious.'

How then can we accept the practice of analysts who at the end of each session sum up what was said at the beginning and the end in order to bring them into relation, as if the session bore a unity of signification that it would be the analyst's function to re-establish? This isn't the retroaction of meaning, it's the systematic and retroactive pedagogy of the entire session. It isn't the unconscious to be realised, it is comprehensive synthesis. It isn't unconscious desire overcoming the limit of the pleasure principle, it is a symbolic subordinate to the reality principle. How, one might ask, with such a practice, could the effects of sense ever question atypical *jouissance*?

III) The time of the cut: the asemantic session

In Lacan's late teaching, from 1974 on, he reformulates the symptom as the effect of the symbolic within the field of the real and thus it is important not to nourish the symptom with meaning but on the contrary to 'starve' it of meaning by employing the equivoque outside-meaning, but also by pinpointing what Lacan calls '*trou-matisme*', the kernel of non-sense bordered by signifying material. Thereafter, the symptom is no longer simply a message to be deciphered, but it is also connected to the fantasy in the cure as that which resists elaboration; it is 'sinthome', the mixture of symptom and fantasy as a defence against the real. This implies a reconsideration of the effects of the interpretation that is, as Lacan announced in the Seminar *Ou pire* (1971-1972), in decline (here I am referring to the advances made by J.-A. Miller and his communication 'Interpretation in Reverse', published in the *Psychoanalytic Notebooks of the London Circle*, Issue 2). The cut aimed at the semantic aspect of the session is to be distinguished from its asemantic dimension which relates back to the real and the *jouissance* of the fantasy.

If the punctuation adds to the signifier another signifier extracted by the analyst, and produces a certain signification, the cut on the other hand separates. It interrupts a movement of elaboration concerning the meaning of the symptom and leads the subject, as J.-A. Miller puts it in this article, back to the opacity of his *jouissance*, to perplexity; this is how, for my part, I interpret the '*c'est ça*', 'that's it', articulated by Lacan at the end of a session. A traumatic cut contrary to the unconscious whole. 'The soul of the symptom', says Lacan in 1975, 'is something hard like a bone' (9) and the cut, even if it be silent, reminds the subject not to confuse the impossible with the saying-true.

Our colleagues in the IPA ask us what the immediate effect of the cut is at the moment of its occurrence? If one may evoke by way of a paradigm the example given by Lacan of a fantasy of anal pregnancy ending in a caesarean section produced by a patient preoccupied until that moment by the art of Dostoevsky, at least one can say that the effects that prove to be based on a change of discourse are equally effects of being awakened to the Real. The encounter with this real is analogous, says Lacan in 1975, with the real of the drive (10). Therefore it's a matter here of 'disturbing the defence.' This is why the question of the duration of the session isn't a technical question, it's an ethical question, that is, it is oriented by the Real.

It seems to me that, each time the standard of the fixed length session is evoked, one confuses standard and analytic rule. The would-be rule of 45 minutes does not belong to orthodoxy but, as J.-A. Miller recently declared, to orthopraxy.

Translated by Adrian Price

1) *Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage*, 1953; *Ecrits*, p.313 (p. 98 in Sheridan's translation)

2) *Conférence sur Le symbolique, l'imaginaire, le réel*, 1953.

3) Monique Canto: *Histoire du kairos. Sur le temps opportun de la parole*.

- 4) *Seminar XI*, p. 268
- 5) *Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage*, (p. 48 in Sheridan's translation)
- 6) *Ibid*, P 313 (p. 98 in Sheridan's translation)
- 7) *Seminar XI*, p. 26
- 8) *Ibid*, p29
- 9) 'Conférences et entretiens', *Scilicet* 6/7, p 60
- 10) *Lettres de l'Ecole freudienne de Paris*, Avril 1975

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