

Jamieson Webster: “Institute No Institute” – Historical Context - Lacan

I want to return to a Lacan pre ex-communication, meaning when he was still a member of what he often called the Freudian body, attempting to speak about the problems of psychoanalytic training to colleagues in the IPA. This is Lacan 1954. He was excommunicated in 1963. He was in trouble starting in 1951 for his variations on standard technique. This is the name of the paper that I will focus on, as it gives us a fascinating snap shot of mid-century psychoanalysis. This is important to me because it was before a time when Lacan was radicalized by having been exiled. There is a great deal of work on this later, alone Lacan, and his school, how he structured it, his procedure of the pass and the analyst’s testimony to what in his analysis and training made him feel he was ready to be an analyst, and then Lacan’s dissolution of that school, what went wrong with it and speculations about why or why not the procedure of the pass worked. It is complicated and cannot all be covered today. But what is important to me are the germs of his thinking that are already there early on, and in a way I prefer them. I think Lacan always regretted having to leave the wider arena of psychoanalysis., he felt betrayed, and in some of his late seminars in 70s, he insists that he would have stayed, and that even though they were the hardest of hearing, he would have continued to try to speak to them.

Lacan starts the article with the sentiment that technique is increasingly formalized rather than theorized; leaving it as a set of rules, what is done and what is not done (and clearly he wasn’t following these rules), or, standardized though bureaucratic means: how often it must be done, how many hours for this or that, with whom, etc... in order to be an accepted analyst. Lacan turns

to Edward Glover's 1953 article "Therapeutic Criteria of Psychoanalysis" where Glover attempts to ascertain what were the actual technical practices and working standards of analysts. Out of 63 points, only 6 reached complete agreement, and only one of the six could be considered fundamental- the necessity for analyzing transference.

Glover goes on to say that while the institutes are "riven by differences" which lead to practices that must be as different as "chalk from cheese," they put on a unified front, not only for the public, but, in relation to one another where there is a "sedulously cultivated assumption that [they] hold roughly the same views and obtain much the same results... which are held to be satisfactory. *Not one of these assumptions will bear close investigation*" (p. 96). This fosters the development of a psychoanalytic *mystique* which not only baffles investigation but blankets all healthy discussion" (ibid.). The problem will only grow worse as criteria of psychoanalysis will become increasingly "perfectionist, undefined, and uncontrolled" (ibid.).

The effects of this group-psychology on psychoanalysis, Lacan claims, is that the maintenance of standards falls more and more "within the ambit of the groups interests" and power. "What is at stake is thus less a standard, than standing" (p.327). Lacan puts the nail in the coffin: what is meant by standard technique is simply what you have to do (or say you do) to be considered one of the group.

Glover points out that we must include the psychoanalysis of the analyst as one of the technical modifications of psychoanalytic practice, for an analyst who comes from years analysis practiced with allegiance to a tradition of

interpretation, will not have the courage to confess the failure of his training and set about a sound analytical re-orientation. Glover's conclusion is that "although elimination of the esoteric is supposed to be one of the tasks of training analysis there are in my view few signs that this important aim has so far been achieved" (p. 100).

Lacan points out that Freud is abundantly clear on this. There cannot be any ideal-ego of the psychoanalyst: "analysts in their own personalities have not invariably come up to the standard of psychical normality to which they wish to educate their patients" (p. 340). The analyst's ego is not a model of health or normality, it is not the standard in 'standard treatment'. To demand such an image only adds to the weight that Ferenczi acknowledges as the extreme and ongoing difficulties that the analyst faces: during long hours of listening to patients, analysts must split themselves between a focus on the patient, self-control, and intellectual activity; they cannot give free play to narcissism or egoism, and even in fantasy, only very minimally (p. 340-341). What the analyst must bring about in himself in order to endure these tasks of being a psychoanalyst seems to Lacan to not be a strengthening of the ego, but rather it's effacing (p. 341).

Balint at this time too was critical of the psychoanalytic institution in much the same line as Glover and Lacan. In his 1948 article "On the Psychoanalytic Training System" he writes:

Analytic training had taken the form of primitive initiation ceremonies: esoteric knowledge, dogmatic exposes, authoritarian techniques,

submission to, and identification with, the initiator on the part of candidates.

So we have Lacan, Balint, and Glover. What Lacan adds is a point unique to him, and in all the emendations to the psychoanalytic institution that took place from 1965-1985— the fights over inclusion of PhDs or social workers, lay analysts, fight for standing— these are secondary for Lacan to something of more profound importance to the training of analysts. He says, “assuming he has eliminated all the illusions of his ego,” no other knowledge, “whether immediate or constructed, can be preferred by him to be made a power of.” Lacan delicately answers the criticism made by Balint and Glover regarding the problems of psychoanalytic training, because if the analyst can assume his position outside of knowledge, then knowledge will no longer have the force of mystique, perfectionism, or esoteric authoritarianism (p. 349). No one is a master when it comes to the unconscious. The analyst is only the subject *supposed* to know. It is from this place that Lacan feels all technique and training must take its bearings.

Bringing this over to a question of training, Lacan says that we all know that malaise reigns. He points the reader to Dr. Knight’s 1952 address to the American Psychoanalytic Association. In a section on professional standards and training, Knight characterizes the situation as “a spectacle of a national association of physicians and scientists feuding with each other over training standards and practices.” Meanwhile trainees have changed from self-motivated, introspective, theoretically well-read individuals, to anti-intellectual, professionally hasty, clinicians (p. 356). Lacan says about this state of the union: “It is quite clear, in this highly public discourse, how serious the problem is and

also how poorly it is understood, if it is understood at all. What is desirable is not that the analysands be more “introspective” but rather that they understand what they are doing; and the remedy is not that institutes be less structured, but rather that analysts stop dispensing predigested knowledge in them, even if it summarizes the data of analytic experience” (p. 356-357). This is one of the most direct criticisms and subsequent recommendations regarding training that you will find in Lacan.

Lacan writes: “the candidate’s training cannot be completed without some action on the part of the master or masters who train him in this nonknowledge— failing which he will never be anything more than a robotic analyst” (p. 358). The analyst cannot analyze unless he “recognizes in his knowledge the symptom of his own ignorance” (ibid.). Lacan refers the reader in a footnote to Maxwell Gitelson’s 1954 article “Therapeutic Problems in the Analysis of the ‘Normal’ Candidate”— a now legendary paper— where he specifically takes up the challenge of Dr. Knight’s address. Gitelson says that their professionalism is the first line of an intellectual defense and the candidate’s normalcy works as a denial of the unconscious, especially in their phallic ambition which the current analytic training system fosters. This is especially true when the analysis of candidates, the so-called ‘training analysis,’ is seen as a learning process distinct from therapy or regular analysis, in other words, as dealing in knowledge as though between a teacher and a student.

Lacan then outlines the most outrageous program of study for the psychoanalyst. Nothing could be further from what actually takes place in a psychoanalytic training (p. 361-362):

- a) Study of the history of science prior to Aristotle,
- b) Study of Mathematics
- c) Study of Human Sciences
- d) Study of Linguistics in its most modern and concrete developments;
- e) Rhetoric
- f) Understand the modern notion of history to understand the function of history in the subject's individual life
- g) Theory of symbols restored to its universal function meaning the study of whole numbers, game theory, and set theory

A very Lacanian agenda, but nonetheless, what we find here is study that cannot be directly applied but is used in order to orient the analyst to what is being said, to structures of representation and logic.

Now, perhaps, we can understand the extreme discretion of Freud when he says – “I must however make it clear that what I am asserting is that this technique is the only one suited to my individuality; I do not venture to deny that a physician quite differently constituted might find himself driven to adopt a different attitude to his patients and to the task before him” (p. 362). Of course Lacan points out that this is not a sign of Freud's profound modesty but rather a truth about the analyst's relation to knowledge. The analyst must know that he cannot proceed by way of mimicry of Freud. Every analyst must reinvent psychoanalysis, must invent his own being and attitude and way as an analyst, and that Freud leaves this open; demands it even. So in a way, the 'standard treatment' decrees variation, this individual variation as invention of oneself as an analyst, something I think we are here to learn about today.