

Retrieved from:

The European Journal of Psychoanalysis

Jun 24, 2024

<https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/articles/das-unendliche-ende-der-psychoanalyse-1/>

Jean-Luc Nancy

Das unendliche Ende der Psychoanalyse (1)

Summary:

Nancy writes about the inherent irony contained within psychoanalysis, not because it's a 'cure' but because it is nothing less than the discovery of truth, and how can there be any more truth about truth? He claims that Freud had some apperception of the 'end' his truth created, and that Lacan tried to keep his own perception secret, revealed only through his own substitute irony. Thus the end of psychoanalysis is nothing historical, and has nothing of knowledge, but is inherent in the discovery. However, Nancy also reveals the 'endless metaphor' that is possible once one knows one's limit.

Psychoanalysis came to its "end" (*fin*) (2) with Lacan. This could be considered as meaning its having achieved its ends. Naturally this singular manner of killing two birds with one stone is not the specific prerogative of psychoanalysis and Lacan as such, but we could say that any theory in general achieves its "ends" (objectives) by coming to an end. A remarkable coincidence, and evidently intended by Lacan: his "end" was also that of analysis itself. The desire to create this coincidence is exemplary of the theoretical will, and of the desire to realize the coincidence of theoretical will with *supreme praxis*. Aristotle called it *sophia*, and Lacan knew [*s'y connaîtssait en*] Aristotle well.

Psychoanalysis came to its "end", first of all, in the simplest way: irregardless of the duration of its survival, psychoanalysis has ended. Whatever its uses and the needs for interventions from now on, such as the *talking cure* (3) strictly speaking, or as an element included in various "*shrink*" practices, psychoanalysis is finished. (Its survival, notwithstanding, will presumably be long, perhaps interminable, even leaving out of consideration all would-be "psychoanalyses". And here, our intention is not to state that "the time of psychoanalysis has passed", that it has become obsolete, as for example the time of hypnosis passed with Charcot and became obsolete with the advent of Freud. The "end" of psychoanalysis must be understood in a totally different way).

Psychoanalysis has ended in the first place because in it and by it the theoretical and practical scheme of therapy has been subverted, even though any psychoanalysis cannot be dissociated from that scheme. Psychoanalysis thus consumes the resources for its own existence.

Freud possibly suspected this; Lacan knew it. We will now say what his return to Freud perhaps consists of. Contrary to the usual reading of Freud as a therapist, the "return to Freud" means reading a Freud who was "in reality" a thinker and a writer, who, to further these ends, had discovered a resource in the material of the neurosis and the "talking cure"-as if through a ruse of reason (or of the unconscious?). Freud needed to listen to people talk in order to think, as Socrates (whether it be history or legend), in order to think, needed to interrogate his fellow citizens. (Doubtless, both men dealt with illness, or at least with illness as something *listened to* and *not treated*. Both dealt with "illness" as *that which speaks*-or writes-and has no connection with any standard of health. Should one attempt to substitute a "health" for that "illness", it would be the robust health of a perfectly *idiotic* (in every sense of the word) muteness.

Freud's invention was not to treat individuals by making them (or letting them: it makes no difference) talk; he invented a form of listening to singular voices in order to hear something quite different from singular speeches: that is, a thought, or rather thought itself, or something to do with the thought prevailing at the beginning of the 20th century. (Of course, there is some *cure*, *there is* purification and purging, there is *catharsis*, but not what one might think, not a purging of secretions, with psychoanalysis as a substitute for the classical blood-letting as logorrhea, but in conformance with the Aristotelian theory of tragedy as *catharsis*: a discharge of passions, that is of thought).

The invention of Freud was poetic and philosophic-in no way was it therapeutic, and indeed (and for the same reasons) not scientific. The *talking cure* was perhaps, basically, not even a *method*, but the access to a truth, which imposed itself on Freud rather than one which Freud made. That truth was neither a truth of man, nor a truth of history, nor was it a truth of society (it was above all not a "truth of the modern man"), but a truth of thought. This means, at least, that this truth states above all that truth is neither of man nor history, nor of society; truth is not the truth of any thing.

That truth was the unconscious. That elementary statement never ceases to regulate and beat out the entire discourse of Lacan. That truth was the unconscious: that is to say [*c'est-à-dire (si c'est à dire; Lacan disait que ce n'était que direÉ)*], precisely and absolutely the contrary of "another consciousness", or of a subject hidden behind consciousness. The "unconscious" means the limit of consciousness-*the unconscious means the "end" of consciousness*. (One must not forget what that implies: "The unconscious means the end of signification". Freud knew this very well, and Lacan knew that Freud knew it). The "unconscious" means the nature (or the structure, which here is the same thing) *in itself finite [finie]* of consciousness. It is generally understood that the "discovery of the unconscious" meant the end of classical consciousness (of that, for example, usually attributed to the Cartesian subject). In truth, it did not mean its historical end, as though clear and present consciousness disappeared, or at least henceforth had to share its empire with the unconscious. It meant the eternal *finitude* of consciousness (the eternity of which is not at all at variance with the historical "discovery" of the unconscious. That historical and tardy nature of psychoanalysis is in itself both the hallmark and the status of eternal finitude).

It is moreover the reason why Freud's thought brutally and in its own way immobilized the philosophy of History: there will be no healing of humanity. The "pessimism" of Freud had little to do with this proposition. For it is a proposition apropos of finitude and not illness. Illness was doubtlessly for Freud a name for finitude.

However, insofar as that finitude is considered illness, it evokes the concept of healing and the vision-pessimist or optimist- of History ideally regulated by the process or by the progress of consciousness. Freud's statement, therefore, assuredly, testifies to his submission (which he was unaware of) to a metaphysics of History and Health. But in truth this statement signifies that there is no future for psychoanalysis. That is, the becoming [*le devenir*] of a therapeutic technique is not and has never been the future [*l'avenir*] of the thought picked up by Freud. Now, whatever the restricted and prudent meaning with which an analyst might attribute to the word "therapeutic", he is an analyst, i.e. he occupies that position only by virtue of being a "therapeutic indication", which has a duration and which aims at a future, even though that same indication is asymptotically abolished by that other "indication" according to which, at the end (but what endÉ for analyst and analyzand?), the place of the analyst must remain empty. However, for the unconscious there is no future, nor a past: there is eternity. The psychoanalysis was finished from its outset and by its principle [*dans son principe*].

It was finished, therefore, thanks to a very peculiar "exclusion internal to itself": the treatment of neuroses had nothing to do with the thought which nevertheless nourished itself by neuroses and was inseparable from them. That is-presumably-also the lesson of that very singular establishment or institution of analysis constituted by what is called Freud's "self-analysis". And that perhaps is also the lesson of the final period of Freud's life, with his increasing detachment *vis-à-vis* psychoanalysis and in his inversely proportional attachment to something which his own term of "speculation" indicates only in an imprecise way. (We

should follow Derrida in “the singular path of [Freudian] speculation”. That path “has neither the form of the dialectical circle, nor of the hermeneutic one. That path perhaps makes these circles visible, but is extraneous to them [*il les donne peut-être à voir mais il n’a rien à voir avec eux*]. It constructs-deconstructs along an interminable detour” (4). We might add: because it is not a circle, it is finite: it is the path’s *being finite* which makes it *interminable*.)

The thought of finitude is not at all the exclusive prerogative of Freud (which by no means imputes less “merit”, or “originality” to him: rather, it would confirm to what degree he had a fine and sensitive ear). The thought of finitude took form around Freud, with Heidegger, Benjamin and Bataille, at least. Among them, incomprehension, distrust and hostility proliferated-despite their common inheritance (even if in different ways) from Nietzsche and the *Frühromantik* culture, as though the thought of finitude could emerge only under the sign of a Heraclitian *Polemos*! But the most remarkable and substantial thing is the distrust the three others harbored towards Freud. That distrust is so obscure in its substance; that hostility so dull or confused (and it was so also for Bataille, who was nevertheless much “closer” to Freud than the other two) because of the confused acknowledgement [*reconnaissance*] existing within that incomprehension [*méconnaissance*]. The others acknowledge in the thought of the unconscious the “same thought of finitude”. At the same time, however, they strongly resist the entire therapeutic, positive (indeed positivist) setting of this thought, and also the fact that it appears to be obstinately fixed on a sexuality without eroticism and without love, without *Du*, in what seems a crudely biologically-dependent drive. It would therefore seem that their ear was not sufficiently good.

Lacan overcame this incomprehension [*méconnaissance*] and did what the others failed to do-this thanks to Heidegger and Bataille. He made a *return*, in fact, to Freud’s *thought* and not to psychoanalysis. More to the point, and with an highly tortuous and complex process, he attempted to combine psychoanalysis and the thought of finitude. In other words, he demanded that psychoanalysis reach the same level as the thought it essentially is, and he demanded this because he realized that psychoanalysis was already finished. Psychoanalysis was lamentably finishing in the therapeutic “comforting of the Ego” and in that which could be called liberal-subjectivism, that retarded antidote for all forms of national-socialism. Lacan wished to put an end to that end-that is, basically to end psychoanalysis itself.

Although without doubt he simply adhered, like Freud, to positive, scientific and therapeutic motifs, it is also true that he addressed “science” (or “Enlightenment”, as he put it) only in order to end positive psychoanalysis-the knowledge and power of psychoanalysis (and this was the secret of his permanent irony: above all so as not to take into consideration the effects of the power that he maintained thanks to the very power of his irony and its secret). He wanted psychoanalysis to be the “science” of its own ending.

It is nevertheless necessary to insist on the fact that, enjoying [*jouissant*] that purpose himself alone, as well as the benefit of the ambiguity maintained, he comforted and confirmed the Ego of the analytical institution. I insist on this neither to repeat once more a criticism the reasons for which are evident, nor to stir up the present conflicts of his heirs. It is rather because Lacan has led psychoanalysis to its end in that *double manner*: he simultaneously radicalized its finite form (which is nothing other-in theory and in practice-than the infinite desire for infinite power which psychoanalysis has in common, very banally, with politics, science and philosophy), and the thought of finitude.

However, the thought of finitude demanded the dissolution (analysis) of the finite form of psychoanalysis. Lacan knew this; indeed he knew only that. Lacan’s thought of dissolution was intended to be the thought effecting the internal exclusion of psychoanalysis. Having been expelled from the psychoanalytical institution, Lacan wished to end up expelling the whole institution from himself: something which would have dragged even “Lacan” to the abyss. However, the gesture of dissolution, simply because it was a “gesture” and a decision, could not be anything other than a gesture of Lacan, a gesture of psychoanalysis, again a gesture of healing; healing of the institution, and therefore an gesture of institution in itself, of reformation or formation, of the foundation of foundation or of re-foundation-albeit on the edge of the abyss. That gesture too inevitably concerned [*relevait de*] an infinite will, and it missed that which he wished to

stress: a thought of finitude more essential to psychoanalysis than psychoanalysis itself.

In a certain sense, this dissolution succeeded in spite of everything. Lacan submitted psychoanalysts to the *double bind* (5) by enjoining them to simultaneously remain analysts and to vacate the place of the analyst. Since then, each gesture affirming the correctness, the legitimacy, the sound foundation and the authority of any psychoanalytic *position*, clearly demonstrates that the *dissolvent thought* of analysis eludes that gesture.

Lacan's object (a) assumes his thought of finitude. The *small* of "small (a)" designates finitude itself. (To what extent did Lacan wish secretly to thus designate *Le petit* [The Small], which Bataille took up from the cryptic language of brothels (6)?) It designates the constitutive limit of the object of desire. The (a) designates that object as fragmentation, rupture or splitting of the big "O" ("A"); that is, the Other (*Autre*). The Other is the structure of identity originally split, the splitting of which effects (or effects itself as) the symbolic pact. The pact articulates, on the authority of a Name of the dead Father (of the impossible proper name of the Subject), the sending on or referral [*renvoi*] of the signifier to signifier along a chain which is infinite because it is the chain of desire. That "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other" therefore precisely means finitude (which is thought or posited as the dis-cursive quality of desire), the enjoyment of the subject assigned to the impossible. Finitude as dis-course is essentially connected to an unutterable Name beyond the discourse, and thus to the absolute otherness of the Other-that is to say to the empty place of the analyst, to that emptiness essential for articulating the pact of finitude.

At this point psychoanalysis ends. However, at that same point it suddenly regains all its positivity, it *realizes*, so to say, its impossible real, in the sense that one *realizes* a Stockmarket capital. Or, more to the point, in the emptiness of that place, the finitude of the subject is put into relation with the *assignation* of the empty place. Assigned, designated, *realized* in theory and in practice, the place of non-finiteness ensures and governs the indefinite process of finitude. Thus constituted and finally assured, finitude loops or buckles onto [*boucle dans*] the Other (or onto desire) an *infinite* signification. It loops or buckles at least in principle (but it is here only a question of "principles", all that construction is submitted to the economy of principle [*de principe*], that is of *buckling* [*bouclage*] in general, expressed by the Lacanian obsession of loops, buckles, knots; of all that discourse which only loses its thread within its own fastening). It loops or buckles this infinite signification as long as the empty place is designated-that is, finally filled, fulfilled-when an analysis, though interminable, attaches to this place the word of its own end (for example, the name of Freud, that of Lacan). ("Paradoxically, the difference which assures the most certain subsistence of the field of Freud, is that the Freudian field is a field which, by its own nature, becomes lost [*se perd*]. It is here that the presence of the psychoanalyst is irreducible, as witness to that loss") (7).

The demand of the *system*-the *demand* both of internal joining without remainder and of self-constitution (8) -is thus radically satisfied. The death of the Father is the life of the Other, the infinite process, or symbolic procession of which makes a faultless return to the Real, that is, to that impossible occupation of the place of the analyst. This return demands that this place of the analyst should in fact be occupied by s/he who does not represent but who *presents*, in truth (in silence, while being paid for his/her silence), the Name of the Father: the analyst. The systematic accomplishment here is not the mere completion of the theory; it is-in conformity with the Aristotelian requisite-the practical, or *praxical* [*praxique*], accomplishment of the theory. Lacan's system is perhaps the only complete achievement of the will to effect theory [*le théorique*], and this effectuation constitutes theory [*le théorique*] itself, or constitutes its political essence. The policy of the Lacanian institution was not at all an accident, it was the truth of the system. In particular, it was not the capricious tyranny of one man, but the politics of the Other, perhaps Politics in the absolute sense.

This systematic radicality *puts an end* to the thought of finitude. That thought no longer thinks that which it thinks, if it is accomplished. More exactly, to accomplish here requires un-achieving, to leave the thought to the unachievement of finitude. The "common" requirement of Heidegger, Benjamin and Bataille was that the thought of finitude should itself be finite. Derrida included that requirement in the pun of "*différance*": the thought of deferral [*différance*] is not the same as the thought of difference [*différence*] (of the Other), but it is the indefinite delay of the mastery of difference, and thus the thinking differal or the *finite, finished*

thought of finitude. The *fin* (the “end”) should then be understood as unachievement, and unachievement should be considered, in the active sense, as a beginning, a commitment, an opening [*frayage*]. This imminency of thought (or experience), what is to come [*à-venir*] has no place for the psychoanalyst. This does not mean that there is no future for psychoanalysis, but that what is to come [*à-venir*] in general has no places. The unachievement is essentially displacement.

However, Lacan knew this. He knew-which is no longer “a knowledge” [*un “savoir”*]-that the unconscious is the finitude of the consciousness, and that consequently the unconscious *puts an end* to psychoanalysis and it had in fact ended psychoanalysis *in statu nascendi*. Lacan possessed that knowing which is not “a knowledge”, and he displayed it ironically as the “truth” of “psychoanalysis”. Now, the irony, knowing what *absolute* finitude consists of, has always been the final philosophic resource against *unachievement*-which is not absolute and is not the absolute of finitude. Irony does not let itself go un-achieved and does not let anything un-achieve itself. Irony never lets itself go [*s’abandonne*].

Doubtlessly, Lacan did secretly let himself go. We might assume that Lacan had two secrets : the *manifest* secret of his irony, and the secret stolen [*dérobé*] from the unconscious abandoned to finitude. That second secret, because it was truly secret, was concealed [*dérobé*] to Lacan himself. He had nothing of it (9), except that he felt it [*il n’en eut rien, sinon qu’il l’éprouva*]. I do not ironically quote here the Lacanian definition of the woman’s relation with enjoyment (10). Speaking of the woman (of the woman of whom one cannot qualify as *the*, because she “is not whole” (11) [*elle n’est pas toute*]: she is unachieved), Lacan attempted to speak of the thought of finitude, or rather of thinking finitude. He attempted to speak of the secret which eluded him, and he attempted to speak of the fact that the secret was eluding him. In other words, Lacan attempted to speak of *the* [*“la”*: French *the* in the feminine gender] psychoanalysis as a woman, of the femininity of analysis, or of the love of psychoanalysis.

However, one does not speak of a similar secret. One does not speak of the love of a woman, though everybody speaks of nothing else. And how would one speak of the love of psychoanalysis, which is not a woman and which is perhaps nothing which one could love-or, consequently, which one could hate?

Something remains: Lacan loved psychoanalysis to the point of wishing to disappear with it, to the point of making it disappear with him, to the point of having done with it. And thus that which remains is not a sentimental homage to Jacques Lacan as much as a theoretical proposition which claims to tell the truth about psychoanalysis. That which remains is indeterminable and interminable.

Notes:

(1) French text in *Bordures*, No. 1, Montreal, December, 1982.

(2) *Fin* in French means both “end” and “aim” [*Translator’s Note*].

(3) In English in the original text [*Editor’s Note*].

(4) Jacques Derrida, *La Carte postale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), p. 287.

(5) *In English in the original text [translator’s note]*.

(6) Cf. Georges Bataille, “*Le Petit*” in *Oeuvres Complètes*, t. III (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

(7) *Le Séminaire, Livre XI, Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p. 116.

(8) Cf. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le titre de la Lettre* (Paris: Galilée, 1973).

(9) “*Il n’en eut rien*” means both “he had nothing of it” and “it did not exist” [*Editor’s Note*].

(10) *Le Séminaire, Livre XX, Encore* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 69.

(11) *Ibidem*, p. 68.