

Psychoanalysis interruptus: Quickies on Jacques Lacan's couch

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Abstract In this article, correspondences between psychoanalysis and prostitution form a conceptual framework within which to examine the broader socio-cultural context of Lacan's controversial interrupted/short sessions. Considering the similar position of the prostitute and the analyst vis-à-vis their clients, I interpret Lacan's method of "pricking" a patient's discourse as both a way of rejecting the feminized position of the analyst and a performative dissociation from the ghost of the prostitute in the analyst's office.

Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society advance online publication, 22 September 2011; doi:10.1057/pcs.2011.3

Keywords: Lacan; variable session length; prostitution; gender; time

To N.B., for listening, invariably

I wish to say something about the length of sessions. ... No one can ignore its importance to the subject in analysis. The unconscious, it is said – in a tone that is all the more knowing the less the speaker is capable of justifying what he means – the unconscious needs time to reveal itself. I quite agree. But I ask: how is this time to be measured? ... The neutrality we manifest in strictly applying the rule that sessions be of a specified length obviously keeps us on the path of non-action. But this non-action has a limit, otherwise we would never intervene at all – so why make intervening impossible at this point, thereby privileging it? – Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*

On Jacques Lacan's couch psychoanalysis was a "talking cure" only on rare occasions. During the 1970s the French psychoanalyst, who had been experimenting with sessions of variable length (*séances scandées*) since the

1940s, introduced ultrashort sessions that typically lasted from a few seconds to only a couple of minutes. As a consequence, his patients could never be sure that they would have a chance to speak at all during the session. “In the course of a few years, with some of his patients, he transformed the short session into a non-session,” writes Lacan’s biographer, Elisabeth Roudinesco (1997). “Unlike the short session, [the non-session] didn’t allow the patient either to speak – he had no time – or not to speak: [Lacan] had no time to waste on silence” (p. 397).

For Lacanians, the interrupted/short session is a measure to prevent a patient from wasting the analyst’s time by indulging in “empty speech,” a discourse in which the subject uses chronological time as a defense against the “now” of the unconscious, where the count of time is suspended (Fink, 1997). As Lacan claims in his 1953 lecture “The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis,” “Setting in advance a time limit to an analysis, the first form of intervention, inaugurated (pro pudor!) by Freud himself – regardless of the divinatory (in the true sense of the term) sureness the analyst may evince in following Freud’s example – will invariably leave the subject alienated from his truth” (Lacan, 1966, p. 256).

Because fixed-length sessions, Lacan argues, lead the patient to believe that truth can emerge without effort, they must be avoided in favor of the sudden, “propitious punctuation that gives meaning to the subject’s discourse” (p. 209). Frustrating, indeed, but, as Lacan assures us, the frustration produced by punctuation adds to the well-being of the patient, whereas the emotionally more gratifying fixed-duration session creates the false impression that the advent of truth can be equated with a certain moment in time, as if “truth is already there” (p. 256) instead of something that the patient achieves with the help of the analyst. For his critics, however, the short sessions are a symptom of Lacan’s impatience and egocentrism.

I am completely against short sessions. The argument for the short session is that it is flexible. It is not flexible. The flexibility is always in one direction only: against continuing. A “flexible analyst” is never in favour of one-hour sessions. I have never seen a ‘flexible analyst’ make sessions of one hour or more, waiting for a good moment for scansion, the moment when the analysand has said the right thing. In fact, in the paper where he discussed this, Lacan said exactly the opposite. He said he stopped those sessions because they were uninteresting. (Laplanche, 2000)

I propose a third possibility: what if the interrupted sessions were a reaction to and comment on the function and field of psychoanalysis in a broader (popular) cultural context, a context suggesting that the analyst’s profession bears a certain resemblance to that of the prostitute? What if Lacan’s impatience with his patients was an attempt (conscious or unconscious) to erect a symbolic boundary between the world’s oldest profession and “the world’s oldest

therapy” (Freud, 1905a, p. 110), thereby asserting his masculinity as an analyst?¹

Similarities between psychoanalysis and prostitution are not difficult to detect.² Both services involve an encounter between two people in a private space in which one person offers a personal service of some sexual significance for which the other person agrees to pay a certain sum of money. In both encounters a (day)bed, sexual desire, and castration anxiety play an important role. Both professions feminize those who practice them regardless of their actual gender: the prostitute serves as the receptacle for the client’s desire (Grenz, 2005a, b); the analyst offers himself or herself as object for the transference love of the patient. The “treatment” works best when prostitute or analyst does not reveal details about his or her personal life. What happens within the walls of a bordello is as secret as the conversations in the analyst’s office.

Am I comparing apples and oranges? Let’s begin with a simple question.

What Does a Man Pay For?

Attracted by what Roudinesco (1997) calls “psychoanalysis reduced to zero” (p. 385), Stuart Schneiderman, a professor of English, quits his job at an American university and leaves for Paris to be analyzed by Lacan. On his return to the US many years later, Schneiderman (1983), by then a Lacanian analyst himself, writes a book about his time on Lacan’s couch

The first one [of the short sessions] is doubtless the most memorable. You arrive for your sessions, let us say, in a fairly good mood, filled with things to say, about your past, your present, your fantasies, your dreams, whatever. The analysand has a lot to say because even the preliminary interviews have started to produce an effect: all sorts of things have come bubbling to the surface and nothing gives more satisfaction than to recount them to a friendly analyst. So begin the session with some introductory remarks and pass to the subject you want to elaborate, to analyze, to ponder, to understand. You want the analyst to hear this because it is really important. But no sooner have you broached the topic, no sooner have the words identifying it passed through your lips, than Lacan all of a sudden rises from his chair and pronounces the session to be over, finished, done with. And he did this unceremoniously with a total lack of good manners to which one is accustomed. When it’s over it’s over, no appeal, no going back, no revising, no reconsidering. Whatever remained to be said would have to wait. The ending of the session, unexpected and unwanted, was like a rude awakening, like being torn out of a dream by a loud alarm. (One person likened it to coitus interruptus). (p. 132)

If one likens the unexpected and unwanted interruption in Lacan's consulting room to sexual frustration, why not spell out the resemblance? The psychoanalytic version of *coitus interruptus* is, of course, *oratio interrupta*. Just as *coitus interruptus* is not supposed to be part of the deal between prostitute and customer, *oratio interrupta* usually is not what analysands want when they commit to the "talking cure." Is speech to psychoanalysis what sexual intercourse is to prostitution? As a female prostitute tells her analyst, "What does a man pay for when he comes to see a woman like me? What he's paying for, is the right to be quiet, that is, to make love without speaking" (Didier-Weill, 1996, p. 55). What does a man (or a woman) pay for when he (she) pays a man like me? Lacan may have wondered. What he (or she) is paying for is the right to be heard, that is, to speak without having to make love, Freud could have replied. I'm not sure this is what Lacan wanted to hear. Practicing *oratio interrupta*, Lacan denied the analysand the pleasure to "come" while allowing the analyst to "prick" the speech of his patient.

But why would that matter?

With the interrupted sessions Lacan reduced to zero the similarities between the symbolic position of the analyst and the symbolic position of the prostitute, thus letting his analysands know that his version of psychoanalysis had nothing in common with prostitution. Lacan's unwavering refusal to give up this controversial practice, which in 1963 led to his expulsion from the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA),³ speaks to a desire to occupy a masculine (phallic) position toward his analysands. Lacan's answer to the question, What does a man (or a woman) pay for when he (she) pays a man like me? was: What he (she) is paying for is *psychoanalysis interruptus*; that is he (she) is paying for the privilege of being in analysis without speaking.

Why would that be desirable, and for whom?

Listening

I would not say so much about it if I had not been convinced – in experimenting with what have been called my "short sessions," at a stage in my career that is now over – that I was able to bring to light in a certain male subject fantasies of anal pregnancy, as well as a dream of its resolution by Cesarean section, in a time frame in which I would normally still have been listening to his speculations on Dostoyevsky's artistry.
–Lacan, *Ecrits*

Resolution by Cesarean section? Like a pregnant woman's womb, on Lacan's couch the analysand's mouth is often closed. Is it because Lacan, who imagines

himself in the position of one who is “able to bring to light,” cannot tolerate the idea that his patients will deliver themselves through their own speech without the intervention of the analyst? Or is it that Lacan cannot permit himself to be affected (“impregnated”) by the patients’ “speculations” and thus feels the need to “abort” their speech? As if interrupting were a way of coping with the fact that, as listener, the male analyst finds himself in what is considered a woman’s position: receptive rather than creative, passive rather than active, paid instead of paying. “What is absolutely important for male analysts to know – and this is a question of discourse, it’s not simply a question of individual analysis – is that the position of the analyst feminizes,” says French psychoanalyst Patrick Guyomard (1996, p. 77). *Did Lacan (1966) know?* Is this why he justified cutting short the patient’s discourse entirely from the point of view of the analyst, the “importance to the subject in analysis” (p. 257) being of only secondary concern to him?

Freud (1912), too, was aware of his patients “sheering off into intellectual discussion during their treatment” (p. 119), but he never recommended a silencing cure. On the contrary, Freud believed that, to facilitate transference, the analyst must for the time being abandon his subjectivity and present himself as a medium dedicated to reflecting the patient’s unconscious feelings and memories: “To put it in a formula [the analyst] must turn his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient. He must adjust himself to the patient as a telephone receiver is adjusted to the transmitting microphone” (pp. 115–116). In the same paper, this time using a visual metaphor, Freud urges the analyst to “be opaque to his patient and, like a mirror, show them nothing but what is shown to him” (p. 118). He must, in short, learn to perform what in Western culture is associated with femininity and the maternal. A difficult position for any man, not just for a patriarch like Sigmund Freud. When Freud recommends “emotional coldness,” which “creates the most advantageous conditions for both parties: for the doctor a desirable protection for his own emotional life and for the patient the largest amount of help that we can give him to-day” (p. 115), he banishes the analyst as mother – and calls forth the prostitute. Here are the props: mirror, telephone receiver (more on call girls later), and “emotional coldness.” As Freud’s collaborator Karl Abraham (1922) insists, “frigidity is a necessary condition of the behaviour of the prostitute” (p. 21).

Really? Whose frigidity, and whose necessity?

It is the necessary feminine attitude of the analyst, as described and theorized by Freud in his technical papers written as *recommendations* (not as inviolable laws), that provokes anxieties about the respectability of the profession of the psychoanalyst. Practiced behind closed doors, psychoanalysis (like prostitution) feeds the cultural imaginary. Books and films, produced for a mass market, circulate fantasies about what it means to be an analyst (or a prostitute). What if the short session was Lacan’s way of distancing himself

from the patient, of exorcising the figure of the prostitute from his consulting room? But we're not there yet. Let's first take a look at some shared interests and mutual attractions.

Desiring

There is, it is true, one class of women with whom this attempt to preserve the erotic transference for the purposes of analytic work without satisfying it will not succeed. These are women of elemental passionateness who tolerate no surrogates. They are children of nature who refuse to accept the psychical in place of the material, who, in the poet's words, are accessible only to "the logic of soup, with dumplings for arguments". With such people one has the choice between returning their love or else bringing down upon oneself the full enmity of a woman scorned. – Sigmund Freud, "Observations on Transference-Love"

Accounts of analysts treating prostitutes are of interest, even to an audience unfamiliar with the theory and practice of psychoanalysis, because they stage a version of the unwinnable conflict between sex and speech. In the late 1920s French writer and psychoanalyst Maryse Choisy spent a month as a prostitute in a Parisian bordello and wrote a book about her experiences (published in 1928 as *Un Mois Chez Les Filles*). Three decades later she reexamined the subject, this time from a psychoanalytic perspective. Her *Psychoanalysis of the Prostitute* (Choisy, 1962), written in English, was aimed at a mass market interested in both psychoanalysis and prostitution. In this later study Choisy describes prostitution as a defense mechanism, assuming that a prostitute's frigidity stems from her "neurotic" inability to commit to an emotionally fulfilling relationship. To "mask her solitude [the prostitute places] an immense distance between other people and herself ... by sleeping with every Tom, Dick and Harry" (pp. 26, 29).

Who is speaking? Choisy the prostitute or Choisy the analyst?

In his 1958 doctoral dissertation and international bestseller *The Call Girl. A Social and Psychoanalytic Study*, New York psychoanalyst Harold Greenwald⁴ (1958) shares his "insights" into the psyche of the "aristocrat among prostitutes," as the dust jacket puts it. Greenwald's book, which inspired the 1960 Hollywood movie *Girl of the Night*, consists of four parts: a brief overview of the professional life of the call girl; a psychoanalysis of two call girls, named Sandra and Stella; an exploration of the social background of *the* call girl based on interviews with 20 call girls; and a description of the "men in their lives". Especially the first two chapters, which are also the most interesting, read like an uncanny analysis of the profession of the psychoanalyst – as if Greenwald had put himself on the couch. So striking are the parallels that

call girl and psychoanalyst at times become interchangeable in his text. Let's look at two examples in which I substituted "analyst" for "prostitute/call girl" and the male pronoun for the female one:

Little is known generally of the life of the psychoanalyst. How does he earn his living? How much does he earn? Where does he get his clients? What does he have to do in order to be good at his job? ... What is his social life? With whom does he associate and what is the nature of those associations? (p. 15)

First and foremost in the life of the psychoanalyst is the telephone; without it he could not practice his special form of therapy. Analysts make almost all of their appointments by phone. (p. 16)

Is it because of the confusion as to who is analyst and who analysed that Greenwald confesses to having violated several orthodox rules? Not only did he and Sandra exchange private letters, he also advised her in both professional and amorous matters, used her to meet other call girls to conduct his study, and even asked her for help with difficult cases.

It will of course be clear to anyone acquainted with psychoanalytic technique that the methods I employed with Sandra were far from orthodox psychoanalysis, in which the analyst acts as neutral as he can. With Sandra I was constantly partisan and pro-Sandra. I felt that she had been so deprived of normal human warmth that she needed this above all. Much of my work was therefore supportive. Fortunately there was so much in Sandra that I could genuinely like and respect that this task was not an onerous one. (p. 66)

We do not know what really happened during Sandra's (or Stella's) analysis. But Greenwald's "confessions" are instructive because they show that this male analyst got himself into gender trouble when analyzing a prostitute. It is not clear from Greenwald's account how the call girl is different from an analyst. Could it be that the prostitute may be the better analyst? "In general Sandra had an unusual ability to understand and interpret both her own dreams and those of others" (p. 45), and "Stella does a pretty good job of analyzing herself" (p. 84). Sandra even helps Greenwald with his patients' dream interpretation:

Early in the analysis when it became clear that Sandra had an ability to analyze dreams, I frequently shared other patients' dreams with her: first, because it was a helpful, ego-building experience; second, because it helped Sandra recognize that other people had problems; and third, because frequently her interpretations were quite helpful. (p. 96)

Where does this ability come from? How can a woman with very little formal education and no prior experience in psychoanalysis, and who has certainly not studied Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, become so skilled that a practicing psychoanalyst feels compelled to collaborate with her on some of his cases? The obvious answer is because she is a prostitute. However, the more important question raised in *The Call Girl* is whether Greenwald himself can be considered an analyst.

"Fortunately" (*for whom?*), Greenwald tell us, "I never found my work with Sandra tedious. It was always exciting – always a kind of walking-on-eggs operation" (p. 66). As part of his therapeutic approach, Greenwald finds it necessary to teach his patients how to behave like "normal" women, which means to enhance their femininity and sexual attractiveness for men. "In helping them to build this self-image, it was necessary first to stress their attractiveness as women" (p. 64). The irony in this approach does not entirely escape Greenwald the analyst: "It seems paradoxical that a girl who was earning her living by supplying female gratification should need advice from a man on how to be feminine" (pp. 64–65).

Paradoxical, to be sure. But what if it weren't "the girls" who needed advice on how to be feminine but the analyst who felt the need to reassure himself of his masculinity, to emphasize his attractiveness as a man? In the following paragraph Greenwald, speaking of himself in the third person, explains how he increased the girls' femininity:

The analyst did this by responding when they came attractively dressed, by mentioning how well they looked, by noting their seductiveness and by indicating that while he found it interesting and challenging it would not be to the advantage of the therapy situation for him to respond in kind. (This seductiveness was also a test by them to determine whether the analyst, too, wanted *them* for sex alone.) (p. 96, italics added)

Apart from the fact that it is Greenwald himself who asks "them" to dress more seductively in the first place, what seems to be at issue here is the analyst's desire. Nowhere in the book is the function of woman as reflection of masculine desire more obvious than in Greenwald's therapeutic approach. By enhancing a woman's feminine attractiveness Greenwald turns her into a prostitute offering herself to the analyst, who, because of his superior "insight," knows that it would not be "to the advantage of the therapy situation for him to respond in kind". Greenwald wants to seduce as much as he wants to be seduced. He creates a scenario (and a scene) that allows him to engage the fantasy that, if it wasn't for the therapeutic setting, he could "have" this woman. He imagines himself in the position of a John who doesn't want the woman "for sex alone".

What about “them”? Would “they” do it for love?

His psychoanalysis of Sandra and Stella motivates Greenwald to conduct a socio-psychological study among a group of New York call girls who are not in therapy with him. And, very much like a John who fantasizes about the prostitute’s desire for him, Greenwald wants to believe that the call girls he interviews do it for love:

All the girls who were interviewed by me seemed to enjoy it, and despite the popular belief that call girls are motivated only by the love of money, not one asked payment for her time, although a great deal of time was involved in several instances. Sometimes it was convenient to interview them in a restaurant or a bar, in which case I might buy food or drink, but they didn’t consider this as payment. (pp. 101–102)

In *The Call Girl* it is the analyst “who tolerates no surrogates” – the call girls don’t do it for money! – who is accessible to “the logic of soup, with dumplings for arguments.” But one of the “girls,” Stella, in fact refuses to “preserve the erotic counter-transference for the purposes of analytic work” and responds in kind: “Although – without wishing to wound your masculine vanity, which even a psychologist must have – I must say I feel no element of physical attraction to you,” she writes in a letter to Greenwald (p. 78). Stella, the call girl, is right on the money: what does an analyst desire? To be desired as a man.

Greenwald’s experiments not only speak to the diffuse boundaries between psychoanalysis and prostitution, they also show how important it is for a male analyst to perform his masculinity in the therapeutic situation. In Jacques Lacan’s consulting room, it would be much more difficult for a patient to reject the analyst’s masculinity.

Performing

It is, therefore, just as disastrous for the analysis if the patient’s craving for love is gratified as if it is suppressed. The course the analyst must pursue is neither of these; it is one for which there is no model in real life.

–Sigmund Freud, “Observations on Transference-Love”

“I think that a prostitute is in the position of an analyst with a man,” says French psychoanalyst Alain Didier-Weill (1996, p. 56) referring to the fact that both analyst and prostitute try to seem “neutral” (silent) during “the act.” Science has been reluctant to discuss the subject in more depths whereas fiction has taken it up readily. “It’s an act,” call girl Bree Daniels tells her female analyst in Alan J. Pakula’s (1971) movie *Klute*. “That’s what’s nice about it. You don’t have to feel anything” (This is not to say that prostitutes never feel anything during intercourse with their clients. As Savitz and Rosen

(1988) show, prostitutes frequently enjoy themselves while performing intercourse with a customer; whether it is the customer they enjoy in the encounter is a different question.) Rather than supporting Choisy's (1962) and Abraham's (1922) assumptions about prostitutes as emotionally disturbed women, Bree's remarks are closer to Freud's recommendations concerning transference love, even though Freud (1915) had a different role model in mind: "I cannot advise my colleagues too urgently to model themselves during psycho-analytic treatment on the surgeon, who puts aside all his feelings, even his human sympathy, and concentrates all his mental forces on the single aim of performing the operation as skillfully as possible" (pp. 163, 165). There are, of course, other role models, ones that are closer to the specific listening function of the analyst during a session. Even though Freud might not like it, the prostitute is one of them.

And the client? Just as transference can evoke negative reactions in the analysand, a John may resent the prostitute's detachment. In the final scene of *Klute*, when the serial killer Peter Cable confronts Bree, prostitute and psychoanalyst become indistinguishable in his mind: "That's what you all do; you prey on the sexual fantasies of others. ... There are little corners in everyone which were better off left alone. Sicknesses, weaknesses which should never be exposed, but that's your stock and trade, isn't it?" While for the analyst emotional coldness provides "a desirable protection for his own emotional life," it can put the prostitute's life in danger. What saves Bree from Cable's murderous pathological impulses is her intimate alliance to the Law, personified by private detective Klute, *John Klute*.

Most analysts agree that therapy requires abstemiousness. Freud (1915) was very clear that the analyst must not give in to the patient's desire for intimacy: "the analyst must never under any circumstances accept or return the tender feelings that are offered him. ... The treatment must be carried out in abstinence" (pp. 163, 165). In the words of Jane Gallop (1988), "by doing it for money, not love, by prostituting himself the analyst buys his innocence" (p. 24). In the movie *Klute*, Bree Daniels quits her job as a call girl (she won't be doing it for money any longer) and leaves New York City to marry Klute (from now on she'll be doing it for love).

Klute (the film and the character) suggests that the prostitute's indifference is a function performed for the John's benefit. Similarly, the analyst's neutrality, abstinence, and passivity constitute a therapeutic role performed *for the patient* and do not mean the analyst is incapable of seduction and sexual conquest. In view of common fantasies and widespread stereotypes about prostitutes, however, there is a tendency to deny the performative nature of prostitution. What the prostitute does is seen as an expression of her 'true' self. How, then, can the analyst be sure that he won't be identified with the "feminine" function he performs? Well, he can't – unless he refuses to perform this function, which is exactly the scenario Lacan (1966) envisions for himself when he justifies the

usefulness of the short session. What seemed like a play on Freud's comparison of the analyst to the surgeon, now reads as a defensive fantasy: "I was able to bring to light in a certain male subject fantasies of anal pregnancy, as well as a dream of its resolution by Cesarean section, in a time frame in which I would normally still have been listening to his speculations on Dostoyevsky's artistry" (p. 258). In his lack of interest in the analysand's "speculations," his unwillingness to listen, his eagerness to "bring to light," and his proud proclamation that he is the only "father" in the room, Lacan rejects the "feminized," silent, and "impotent" position of the prostitute. The analyst as creator and surgeon: masculinity regained. *It was about time.*

Lacan re-introduced the function of the father and therefore a certain symbolic function at a time when psychoanalysis was dominated by three awesome women: Anna Freud, Marie Bonaparte, and Lampl de Groot – leaving aside Melanie Klein. It was a moment when psychoanalysis risked becoming a women's field. (Guyomard, 1996, p.76)

The interrupted sessions may seem an extreme measure to dissociate analyst from prostitute. Freud (1913), too, took precautions to prevent his services from being confused with prostitution, however. First and foremost there is "the strict principle of leasing by the hour" (p. 127), which Freud considered central to beginning the treatment: "Points of importance at the beginning of the analysis are arrangements about time and money. In regard to time I adhere strictly to the principle of leasing a definite hour. Each patient is allotted a particular hour of my available working day; it belongs to him and he is liable for it, even if he does not make use of it" (p. 126).

With the help of "the principle," a boundary is drawn between psychoanalysis and prostitution. For it is the analyst not the patient who is in control of the allotted time. Unlike a prostitute, who (in the John's fantasy) is always ready for her customer, the analyst leaves no doubt that he is ready for the patient only during the assigned hour.

Then there is the couch (*Ruhebett*), the piece of furniture most prone to introduce fantasies of sexual services into the psychoanalytic setting:

I hold to the plan of getting the patient to lie on a sofa while I sit behind him out of sight. This arrangement has a historical basis; it is the remnant of the hypnotic method out of which psycho-analysis was evolved. But it deserves to be maintained for many reasons. The first is a personal motive, but one which others may share with me. I cannot put up with being stared at by other people for eight hours a day (or more). (Freud, 1913, pp. 133–134)

Unlike the prostitute who cannot avoid the John's gaze, the analyst makes sure he will not be subjected to the patient's voyeurism and to the sexual pleasures

that (as Freud well knew) derive from looking. Another word for voyeurism is speculation, which Lacan found impossible to tolerate in his patients.

Finally, for Freud, the quality of the services the analyst offers is founded on his “truthfulness,” which distinguishes his trade from that of the prostitute: “In this fact lies a great part of its educative effect and its ethical value. It is dangerous to depart from this foundation. Anyone who has become saturated in the analytic technique will no longer be able to make use of the lies and the pretenses which a doctor [and a prostitute?] normally finds unavoidable” (Freud, 1915, p. 164). While the prostitute, always already stigmatized as notorious liar, may simulate an orgasm, the patient can expect the analyst to meet him (or her) with the utmost truthfulness and sincerity.

Freud never demanded “unconditional acceptance” of his recommendations: “[T]his 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 the task before him” (Freud, 1912, p. 111). When the task before him was the analysis of his daughter Anna, Freud himself saw fit to adopt a different attitude. That Freud’s recommendations became tantamount to laws is the result of the institutionalization of psychoanalysis after Freud’s death. What concerns me about Lacan’s violation of “the sacred rules” of psychoanalysis is not that, or even why, he did it but *how* his decision to “adopt a different attitude” repudiated the figure of the prostitute in the consulting room.

Interrupting

For Lacan, scansion is always a way of marking a ‘castration.’ I must cut you, cut you somewhere. It’s a very *passe-partout* interpretation, the key to everything. All is castration. You must assume castration. “I castrate through a short session.” I am very against it, because I believe free association is one of Freud’s fundamental discoveries. If one believes in that method, one must have time to develop free associations. You must be comfortable to develop the association without knowing that you will be cut off in the midst of the very first phrase. I try to make my patients feel comfortable to do the analytic work – Jean Laplanche, *Radical Philosophy*

There’s castration, and there’s seduction. Before Lacan cuts his patients short, he seduces them. It is through a carefully staged scenario that, for Lacan, interrupting becomes a way of performing his masculinity. Let’s then take a closer look at Lacan’s “act.” Picture this scene described by Roudinesco (1997):

Lacan often received patients just after he had got out of bed, wearing an elegant dressing gown and black bedroom slippers. After dispatching a few

sessions at great speed he would disappear to shave, dress, and put on some scent. Sometimes he would ask Gloria to cut his nails, whimpering like a child at each snip of the scissors. He usually saw his tailor, his pedicurist, and his barber while conducting his analyses. (p. 391)

How easy for the patient to mistake Lacan's practice for a brothel; how inviting to look at the analyst and see a prostitute. Lacan let his patients know that he was a sexual being; he showed them that he (like a prostitute) was getting ready *for* them, ready to *seduce* them. (In this respect Lacan was quite unlike Harold Greenwald (1958), who wanted to be seduced by his female patients.)

What does this curious behavior mean? Was Lacan *acting* like a prostitute because he *wasn't* a prostitute? As if to say, "It's an act, that's what's nice about it". Consider another example, this one reported by Schneiderman (1983): "One of [Lacan's] more interesting and exasperating gestures was arranging piles of banknotes on his desk, to sort and count them. You might think that this is the image of the miser counting his money," Schneiderman speculates (p. 123). Why not that of prostitute who wants to take care of business first? "The other way of reading it is to see that the analyst who signifies that he has a lot of money, as was Lacan's case, is also signifying that he is not doing it for money" (p. 123). So he is doing it for *love*, after all? As with his writing, Lacan's behavior seduces through ambiguity.

Roudinesco (1997) tells of another "curious feature of Lacan's attitude to money: his habit of settling what he owed with checks, usually from his patients, on which the payee's name had deliberately been left blank so that Lacan might use them for his purpose" (p. 204). This way, Lacan not only denied having been paid by his patients, he also used his patients as currency (the symbolic function of woman) to settle his bills. Roudinesco estimates that in 1979 Lacan on average saw 10 patients per hour and earned approximately four million francs (p. 397). While Lacan tried to obscure the fact that he was paid for his services – he must have been familiar with Freud's (1913) advice that because "powerful sexual factors are involved in the value set upon [money] ... money matters are treated by civilized people in the same way as sexual matters" (p. 131) – Choisy (1962) quite frankly admits the sexually charged meaning of money: "In the 147th session, which was the payday of the month, [Paolo] told me: 'I love paying my analysis fees. I feel like a real man. I am keeping a woman'" (p. 49).

Does Lacan deliberately invoke prostitution to demonstrate that he is *not* a prostitute? Is this the reason why he seldom keeps appointments? Why his waiting rooms are often filled with patients who spend hours, sometimes even whole days, hoping to be called in by the "master"? Is his practice a stage on which the analyst places himself at the center of the analysand's desire, without ever fulfilling this desire? (Lacan avoided having sex with his patients on his couch or in his office.) A patient rarely leaves the master's

couch satisfied, for Lacan the seducer would make sure to interrupt the session before the patient had a chance to “come.” Indeed, interruption is Lacan’s most powerful tool to assure that, although psychoanalysis, under certain circumstances, resembles prostitution, it is not the analyst who is the prostitute.

As Jane Gallop (1982), not without admiration, once wrote about Lacan:

Not simply a philosopher, but artfully, a performer, he is no mere father figure out to purvey the truth of his authority; he also comes out seeking his pleasure in a relation that the phallogocentric universe does not circumscribe. To designate Lacan at his most stimulating and forceful is to call him something more than just phallogocentric. He is also phallo-ecentric. Or in more pointed language, he is a prick. In vulgar (non-philosophical) usage the prick is both the male sexual organ (the famous penis of penis-envy: attraction-resentment) and an obnoxious person – an unprincipled and selfish man who high-handedly abuses others, who capriciously exhibits little or no regard for justice. Usually restricted to men, this epithet astoundingly often describes someone whom women (or men who feel the prick of this man’s power, men in a non-phallic position), despite themselves, find irresistible. (p. 36)

Irresistible perhaps, but appropriate?

It is one thing to be flirtatious in a seminar where the “prick” is supposed to speak (as Lacan famously did), and it is quite another to employ this prickishness in the privacy of the consulting room, where it should be the patient’s turn to speak. Not so in *psychoanalysis interruptus*. Lacan, who would not be bothered with someone else’s unconscious for more than a few minutes, seduces his patients into being “punctuated” by the analyst as “master of truth.” As Daniel Widlöcher, who, like Schneiderman, was analyzed and trained by Lacan, says, “What Lacan could not endure was the passivity of waiting which for me is most crucial to psychoanalytic abstinence” (quoted in Langlitz, 2005, p. 103, my translation).

Psychoanalysis interruptus is Lacan’s way of turning this unbearable “feminine” passivity of waiting into phallic activity, however eccentric. By conceiving of the analytic situation as a battlefield and the patient as the analyst’s worst enemy, Lacan (1966) justifies his desire to “punctuate”: “We know how [the patient] calculates the moment of [the end of the session’s] arrival in order to tie it to his own timetable, or even to his evasive maneuvers, and how he anticipates it by weighing it *like a weapon*” (p. 258). *Psychoanalysis interruptus*, a masculine self-defense?

If “analytic listening,” as Horacio Amigorena (1996) writes, “is marked sexually, that is the difference between the sexes reveals itself at the level

of listening also” (p. 114), the short sessions can be seen as an attempt to transform the feminine position of the analyst as listener into the masculine position of “prick” and “punctuator.” To paraphrase Abraham (1922) on women under the influence of the castration complex: Lacan’s interrupted sessions reveal an intense masculine dislike of having to perform the role of a certain type of woman (p. 2). Lacan may have seemed like a whore, but he surely did not act like one. It takes a “prick” to practice *psychoanalysis interruptus*, to charge highly articulate people a lot of money for the privilege of being in analysis without speaking.

A waste of money? Perhaps.

A waste of time? Certainly not.

About the Author

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Notes

- 1 My translation of Freud’s (1905a) “Die älteste Therapie der Welt” (p. 110). The English translation by Strachey – “[T]he most ancient form of therapy in medicine” (Freud, 1905b, p. 258) – obscures the allusion to prostitution.
- 2 See Eva Heldmann’s (2008) recent documentary “Five Sex Rooms and a Kitchen.”
- 3 The IPA’s disapproval of the variable-session length may have also been motivated by the fact that, because of the short duration of the session, Lacan was in a position to see many more patients than did any orthodox analyst. Consequently, he was able not only to earn a lot of money but also to gain influence as a training analyst (Laplanche, 2000). As Roudinesco (1997) notes, by the early 1960s one third of all the training analyses in France were conducted on Lacan’s couch (p. 397). For a defense of Lacan, see Guéguen (2009).
- 4 Greenwald, who died March 30, 1999 at the age of 88, was Executive Director of the Association for Applied Psychoanalysis, and from 1975 professor of clinical psychology at UC San Diego.

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