

The Lacanian Orientation – Clarifying the Abruptness of the Real Interview with Leonardo Gorostiza

What is the Lacanian Orientation? We frequently think that the Lacanian Orientation means an orientation in relation to Jacques Lacan's teaching, but it is much more than this. On the one hand, the Lacanian Orientation which gives its name to our School of the Lacanian Orientation (EOL) is the title of the Course that Jacques-Alain Miller delivered annually between 1981 and 2011. It is not merely a way of speaking; it is a firm position with respect to Lacan's teaching. The Lacanian Orientation means to take as a "whole" what is said in Lacan's teaching in order to avoid descending into dogmatism. I will explain. There is for example, a formula that I like to remember, that of the concept of the desire for knowledge. In 1954, in his writing *Variations on the Standard Treatment*², Lacan explains that "the desire to know", and to this he adds "[the desire] for power", is an "obstacle" to a "training analysis", that is to say, to the formation of the analyst. Twenty years later in 1974 in a short text entitled *Italian Note*,³ Lacan says that if the desire for knowledge has not emerged, there might have been an analysis but certainly not the production of an analyst. So, how are we to understand this? Where in 1954 the desire for knowledge is an obstacle to the formation of the analyst, and then in 1974 it is the index that an analyst has been produced. The dogmatic position would be to say "Lacan said," so everyone says, "Lacan said" and they start to fight and throw quotes at each other: "because Lacan said that the desire for knowledge is an obstacle" ... "no, no, no, Lacan said that the desire for knowledge is the index of the emergence and production of an analyst." This is what dogmatism is. To Situate the Transformations The Lacanian Orientation, to the extent that it points towards taking what Lacan said as a "whole", tries to follow the transformations that are produced, across the whole of Lacan's teaching in an uninterrupted way because they were only interrupted by his death. We can thus follow the way in which Lacan attempted to respond to the problems that he encountered in his practice as an 1 Leonardo Gorostiza was interviewed for the Seminar "Readings: Symptom-Unconscious-Interpretation" (Responsible: Ariel Hernández. Collaborators: Marisa Saad and Soledad Salvaré) delivered at the EOL - La Plata, May 2019. The interview is available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uCiVHPfLeo&t=644s> 2 Lacan, J., "Variations on the Standard Treatment", in *Écrits*, The First Complete Edition in English, Transl. B. Fink, London & New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006. 3 Lacan, J., "Italian Note," in *Autres Écrits*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001, pp. 307-311. Unpublished in English. ICLO-NLS Scríobh Issue 7 | May 2020 3 analyst. This is the effort of the Lacanian Orientation. To take as a "whole" what is said by Lacan in order to situate the transformations. Reading the first Lacan, Seminar II for example, I found a formula where it is Lacan himself, without calling this the Lacanian Orientation, who gives the following indication as regards the reading of Freud. If you go to page 147, where Lacan works over the dream of Irma's Injection – it is one of the most memorable classes of these first Seminars – he says the following: "we are going to take another look at this dream, from our present point of view" – that is, from the point of view of 1953. "We will be within our rights," he clarifies, "on condition of our not wanting to make Freud, who is still at the first stage of this thinking, say what is in the last stage, on condition of our not attempting to make these stages agree with one another according to our own whim". He continues: "Under Hartmann's pen" – the psychoanalyst of Ego Psychology with whom Lacan debated fiercely – "you come upon the rather candid admission that after all, Freud's

conceptions aren't quite in agreement amongst themselves and that they need to be synchronised.”⁴ By contrast, Lacan says: “Not for us the synchronisation of the various stages of Freud's thought, nor even getting them to agree” – and here comes the fundamental phrase – “[it] is a matter of seeing to what unique and constant difficulty the development of this thought [...] responded.”⁵ That is, Lacan indicates that there is in Freud – and we know that there is the first topography, the second topography, the first theory of the drives, the second theory of the drives, etc. – a constant transformation of concepts. We must keep present the fact that if the fundamental reference of our practice is the real, then, to put it broadly, our concepts which only come from the symbolic are always going to be transitory, relative, unstable; that they are going to suffer a constant transformation. So, far from making one concept concord with another, what is at stake is the reconstruction of the point of the real to which those concepts respond and therefore, also the reconstruction of the transformations that this produces. These transformations are tremendous in Lacan. In Seminar V, for example – I have it in mind now because I am going over it – you can see in the same Seminar, even within the same class, how Lacan, when he is working on the concept of the phallus, on the one hand says – I don't have the reference here to read it now – that the phallus is the signified, the signification produced by the paternal metaphor. The phallus is here a signified. Immediately afterwards he says that the phallus is a signifier, the signifier that gives to desire its reason. He locates it as a signifier that is not the same as the other signifiers, because it is the signifier that provides the condition of possibility for the engendering of all [the] meanings. We find in this, within minutes (the Seminars were a form of verbal locution for Lacan) a torsion that he enacts upon the very concept that he is working on. ⁴ Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II, “The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis”*, Ed. J.-A. Miller, Transl. S. Tomaselli, London & New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991, p. 147. ⁵ Ibid. ICLO-NLS Scriobh Issue 7 | May 2020

⁴ The Lacanian Orientation implies taking as a “whole” what is said in Lacan's teaching in order to situate these transformations, which make it impossible for us to stay ever calm with respect to this teaching. It reinstates in the field of his teaching that which he said makes the psychoanalyst uneasy, that is to say, the unconscious. He said, that in order to calm themselves,⁶ analysts have wanted to misrecognise the unconscious; not only the Freudian unconscious, which he characterised as being structured like a language, but also what he called our unconscious, the Lacanian unconscious, which he first characterised as a discontinuity, a gap. This gap, this hollow, this hole, in which he moreover situates the analyst's act, is what he reproduces in his teaching with the progressive transformations, the comings and goings even, those we find in this teaching. A Point of Perspective There is another point in relation to this that is very important and that was present in this mention of Seminar II when Lacan says we are going to read Freud, the dream of Irma's Injection, from our point of view, in other words, that of Lacan in these years. Lacan gives a warning in a text entitled *On My Antecedents*, one of the first *Écrits* in which there is a kind of description of the trajectory through which he entered into psychoanalysis. He warns about a certain risk that lies in wait for his students, and says more or less, that our students frequently believe that they find already there⁷ that which our teaching in fact led us to produce. He wants to say that his students, located at a point directed towards the end of his teaching, say “Oh! that was already there before.” Lacan adds that this is what is called a point of perspective. A point of perspective is to

situate oneself in some place from which one looks. From here I am going to look at you who do not appear at present in the image, but who are recording this little film. In agreement with the point of perspective that situates me I am going to see you and you me. This is what happens in the teaching. I locate myself at the end and can retrospectively project what I achieved at the end, thinking that it was there from the beginning. There is a formula that I like very much and that I wrote in a text for a volume of the COL entitled "Lacan's Problem"; the problem of how to articulate speech, the signifier and meaning, with the body, jouissance and the drive. To say it very quickly, this is the problem that is always present in Lacan. He says: "isn't it just enough that what I elaborated before has left open the path for what I produced afterwards?" I called this text Jacques Lacan's Open Paths. 8 Not the paths opened by Jacques Lacan - and he opened many, but instead the paths that he left open within his own teaching and that allowed him to move beyond. This idea of the Lacanian Orientation connects with something that Jacques-Alain Miller called, many years ago "Lacan en bloc", and which provoked a 6 Lacan, J., "The Mistaking of the Subject Supposed to Know", in *Autres Écrits*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001, pp. 329-339. Unpublished in English. 7 Lacan, J., "On My Antecedents", in *Écrits*, The First Complete Edition in English, Transl. B. Fink, London & New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006, p. 53. 8 Gorostiza, L., "Jacques Lacan's Open Paths", in *Lacan's Problem*, Lacanian Orientation Collection, EOLGrama, Argentina, 2017, pp. 27-36. Unpublished in English.

ICLO-NLS Scríobh Issue 7 | May 2020 5 shocking effect. He introduced this formula in a text published in Spanish in 1990, in one of the mails of the Freudian Field, that is, two years before the foundation of the EOL. I think this is the only time he mentions it in writing. The *École de la cause freudienne*, the Parisian French School was going through a crisis and it was in the context of this crisis that Jacques-Alain Miller wrote a text titled *Acier l'Ouvert* [Knives Out], which plays homophonically with *á ciel ouvert* (an open sky). This was something like a bringing out into the open of the crisis that was traversing the *École* in this moment. It is in this context, in this text, that Jacques-Alain Miller very clearly states the following: "we take everything: the young Lacan and the old Lacan, the Lacan of the concept and the Lacan of the matheme, the Lacan of the graph and the Lacan of the knot, the Lacan of the pass and the Lacan of the guarantee" – (the guarantee has to do with the AMS, the Analyst Member of the School, whereas the pass is a different kind of guarantee, it has to do with the nomination of AS, Analyst of the School, who have gone through the pass) – "the theoretical Lacan and the practicing Lacan, the institutional Lacan and the Lacan-in-spite-of-the-law [...] We said thus. And I made the house plan for us" – which is precisely the Lacanian Orientation, a plan that allows us not to bang our heads against the walls too much. He concludes: "this relation exists. It is verified. It is at the foundation of the work of the School and of the Freudian Field. More precious than any institution, this Orientation is the *agalma*" – that which is valuable. "Lacan is a block. He should be taken as such. This is the only opportunity of capturing what was for him the capital S of the barred A."9 This formula is not without a dimension of paradox. When we say *Lacan en bloc* we think of something absolutely compact, consistent; whereas Jacques-Alain Miller says that to take *Lacan en bloc*, which is to take as a "whole" what is said in Lacan's teaching, only serves to be able to locate the hole, the signifier of the barred Other, the impossible that Lacan constantly ran up against like any analyst in his practice, like any analyst who does not tend to fail to recognize the hole upon which his practice is founded. We would then have a *Lacan en*

bloc that paradoxically serves to preserve the hole. According to what I am setting out here, we might say that we always talk about the relation that exists between concepts and the clinic. But I would rather put into tension three terms: concepts, the clinic and practice. In a certain way practice comes first because psychoanalysis is a practice, it precedes the clinic and it precedes concepts. Why do I say this? Because the clinic is an elucidation of knowledge upon practice; and when we talk about the clinic, we are talking about a certain sedimented knowledge: the clinical cases that we construct and transmit; the clinical types; all the elucidations of knowledge that we possess concerning practice. Jacques-Alain Miller once said that the cases that we receive in our consulting rooms are ethical cases because they have to do with the patient's position, an ethical position and the ethical position of the analyst; and that it is only through the elaboration of knowledge that we transform them into clinical cases.¹⁰ Now, beyond the clinic ⁹ Miller, J.-A., "Acier l'Ouvert", in *La Lettre mensuelle*, n°85, January 1990, pp. 1-6. ¹⁰ Miller, J.-A., "There is No Clinic without Ethics," in *Matemas I*, Argentina: Manantial, 1987, p. 129. Unpublished in English. ICLO-NLS Scriobh Issue 7 | May 2020 ⁶ we have concepts as such. It is clear, that the first precedence for us is practice. Concepts arrive a posteriori and, because they refer to the real that emerges in practice, they are always unstable. This is why teaching conceived in this way must avoid attempting to suture this point of real, which is the point of the instability of concepts. Clarifying the Abruptness of the Real In this sense, given that we are accentuating the real, I often like to insist upon the risk of a formulation that in my opinion is problematic – although it is not that terrible and at times translates well because it was formulated in this way by Jacques-Alain Miller, by Éric Laurent, even perhaps once by Lacan, I don't know – I refer to the saying that our practice and our clinic are oriented "towards the real." I say this for the following reason: because every time that we say "towards," the perspective that we are putting into play is teleological, that is to say, it points towards a finality. And, without knowing it, we are reintroducing the dimension of the cause which Lacan linked to religion (in *Science and Truth*, a text that fundamentally deals with the notion of causality).¹¹ Religion occupies itself with truth under the form of the final cause. Whereas psychoanalysis occupies itself with truth under the form of the material cause and Lacan is referring there to the materiality of the trait, the trace, the signifier stripped of all kind of signification. By contrast, it is much more pertinent to say then, that our practice and our clinic tends to orient itself by the real not towards the real. What does by the real mean? That from the beginning I am going to be oriented by what in the symptom indicates an emergence of the real. I am going to be oriented by what in the discourse of the analysand implies a reference to the real of the drive that is at stake. I am going to be oriented for example, by the appearance in a dream of the phenomena of anxiety, by dreams of repetition or by nightmares because as Lacan says, there we are going to have a certain emergence of the real.¹² We are oriented by the real then, without making of the real our final cause, because it would be a contradiction to make of the real the final cause. Every time we think about a "towards", we place something on the horizon, we are in the regime of the quilting point. Every time – and this is proper to the speaking being – we formulate a quilting point, we say something with which we close the meaning of the whole of the previous sentence. For example, I am speaking and saying this and trying to articulate something else and I suppose that you three who are present here and are watching the recording of this little film will say: "Where does he want to finally get with what he is saying, with the other terms that

he is adding? Because the sentence never ends, and thus we are waiting to know when the sentence will finally be finished.” In saying this, I close the quilting point and thus meaning is constituted. 11 Lacan, J., “Science and Truth”, op. cit., p. 741. 12 Lacan, J., “On Hysteria”, presentation in Brussels on 26th February 1977, where he speaks of the “this space of aspiration [...]”. Published in French in Quarto N°2, 198, and in English in Psychoanalytical Notebooks, Issue 21, Transl. A. R. Price, 2010, p. 13. ICLO-NLS Scríobh Issue 7 | May 2020 7 ICLO-NLS Scríobh Issue 7 | May 2020 8 The quilting point is the same as the point of perspective. In a certain way, the point of perspective (which is Euclidian space, geometry, the visual field), is founded on the quilting point. It is to situate oneself in a more advanced point of the signifying chain, to read from there what came before and to produce a retroactive effect and meaning. Every time the quilting point is installed, the idea is introduced that there is a “towards”, a beyond, which is towards where the signifying chain is going to be relaunched. This veils the real. The real is not this. The real is discontinuity, rupture. Lacan calls it “the abruptness of the real.” 13 Our ethical responsibility as analysts is to elucidate, to clarify the abruptness of a real that has no beyond. Interview by Marisa Saad, Soledad Salvaré and Ariel Hernández Transcript and Editing by Ariel Hernández English Translation by Howard Rouse 13 Lacan, J., “Rep