“THE GROOM STRIPPED BARE”
interview 2007

Lieven Jonckheere

Abstract

In this interview, the Lacanian psychoanalyst Lieven Jonckheere, who is a founding member of the Dutch Circle of the New Lacanian School in Belgium, frankly discusses personal circumstances that lead him to his interest in psychoanalysis. He further explains the importance of art for him and for psychoanalysis in general. After discussing he politics of the end of analysis in Belgium he refers to the foundation of the Dutch Circle of the New Lacanian School (NLS) and to the work the Circle is currently engaged in, including the setting-up of a new journal. He comes back to the question of art within the context of fantasy and some of his own analytical questions. Subsequently he discusses his relationship to Serge Andre, the recently deceased well-known Lacanian analyst. Lieven Jonckheere ends the interview with a brief exploration of the meaning of evaluation in modern life and how psychoanalysis could or perhaps should respond to this.

JLS: *How did you become interested in psychoanalysis?*

My main interest was and is and will always be 'the position of the artist'. I like to think that I once had the required talent, maybe I still have, but for one reason or another the desire to occupy this position myself, and the jouissance of holding it against all odds, never really did torment me. Let's say that art and artists always fascinated and frightened me too much. For instance I have been drawing all of my life, but until now this has remained a sublime form of drawing back. Maybe one day this will change.

Anyway, it was being lost in this indecision that I started studying psychology, at the university of Ghent (Belgium). Looking for myself? Probably… However, as the result of a love affair, I completely lost myself. So I suspended my studies, fleeing into military service, gallantly exempting my brothers from it (at that time military service still was compulsory). And so for ten months I ran and I shot, I learned German and I read Kafka, I drew like a madman and I finally came to myself again. In any case, after this time-out I resumed my studies in psychology in a much more focussed way. Oddly enough I had completely skipped psychoanalysis in the first year, even committing some very clear parapraxes in order to be able to do so, but now psychoanalysis became my only point of interest.

Of course this had also something to do with the rather unconventional, and to some extent even artistic, way in which psychoanalysis was represented by Julien Quackelbeen at the university. I cannot say that I identified with him, but I had this reassuring impression that some Other did recognise something of himself in me, that he sympathised with my division, and even identified with it to some extent. Anyway, this transference, this feeling of not being alone in wanting to place "psychoanalysis in the service of art", this crutch for my failing desire and jouissance as an artist, has been an important factor for the development of my interest in psychoanalysis.

Of course this whole initial constellation was questioned and turned topsy-turvy during my own analytic cure –

which I started, once again, because of troubles in my love life. But this is another story, the story of how I eventually became interested in the real of the clinic, and the psychoanalytic position as the only means of dealing with it, an interest that was not evident at the start of my interest for psychoanalysis.

JLS: *You are very active as a member of the Dutch-speaking Circle of the New Lacanian School (NLS). Can you tell us something about your activities and some of the activities taking place within the school? You are the editor of a new journal of the Dutch-speaking Circle of the NLS. Has the first issue come out yet? What difficulties (if any) do you encounter? Is there a specific editorial policy and will the journal be peer-reviewed?*

Maybe I should first recall something of the origins of our "Circle", in order to understand something of its current specificity. You should know that there's another Dutch-speaking Lacanian association in Belgium, called "Gezelschap voor Psychoanalyse en Psychotherapie" (GPP), of which I myself have been of founding member (with Julien Quackelbeen, Paul Verhaeghe and Hubert Van Hoorde). Many of the founding members of our present Circle, not all, have been member of the GPP. What put us outside this association was simply the problem that finally explains all schisms in Lacanian groups, and that's of course the recognition of who can call himself a psychoanalyst. As a matter of fact the GPP had set up its own procedure for recognition. However it gradually appeared that it could not, and even did not want to sideline the analyst from the field of most of the candidates, favouring a particular kind of imaginary identification – which of course is exactly the opposite of the intention of the pass (Lacan's procedure for the recognition of the analyst). Finally a point of no return was reached when it appeared that the dominant faction within the GPP wanted its imaginary recognitions of so-called analysts to be recognised by the "European School for Psychoanalysis" (ESP). What until then had seemed to be motivated by the best possible intentions, by concerns of a realistic policy in view of the imminence of regulation of psychotherapy in Flanders, was then claimed with such hatred that many of us could not stand remaining with the GPP any longer. The GPP itself tried to take the honourable way out by breaking with the ESP. As a result several individuals, one by one, expressed a desire to continue to maintain strong ties with a School that, oriented by the teachings of Jacques-Alain Miller, distinguished itself for its serious effort to develop a really analytical manner of recognising analysts. It is the invaluable merit of Anne Lysy, of the French-speaking ECF in Belgium but with Flemish roots, to have acted at some point as the necessary 'bit of the real', as a point of 'extimacy' (*extimité*), allowing all of these 'loners' to join hands again in an informal List. Thanks to her unceasing efforts and her gentle skill, and with the assistance of some distinguished members of the ESP, such as François Leguil and Alexandre Stevens, acting as symbolic quilting points, this List gradually grew into a Circle (Kring), with Anne Lysy as the first president. Recently this Circle became affiliated with the New Lacanian School (NLS). As you know the NLS is part of the ESP, and successor to the so-called section 'Development' of the ESP. The NLS groups several more or less formalised associations and groups, which all are supposed to be able to form a web and to work together thanks to the shared knowledge of the English language. So we are no longer considered as being in need of psychoanalytic development, but find ourselves promoted as kind of colonists of the dark English-speaking continent …
And now, let me come to your question. Our activities? We work, work and work again – in the orientation indicated by Jacques-Alain Miller. Indeed, having lived more than twenty years of psychoanalytic history, I can only conclude that JAM, as he is called, more and more stands out as the only one capable of keeping “alive and kicking” Lacan's teachings, in an original way, not only in their immediate clinical implications but also in their political implications. In this Millerian vein the Circle has been organizing theoretical and clinical seminars tackling 'ordinary psychosis' (as opposed to Schreber's extraordinary psychosis), and, this year, after the edition of Seminar X on Anxiety, we are trying to understand what it means that "it is out of the question to cure anxiety, at the very most it is a question of *franchissement de l'angoisse*" (leaping/spanning/skipping anxiety). As to the political implications of Lacan we organised for instance a debate on the current tendencies of 'total quality control' and the evaluation of the efficiency of psychotherapies. And just a month ago we participated most

actively in the foundation of the "Belgian Federation of Psychoanalytical Associations", bringing together for the first time orthodox Freudian associations of the IPA and all kinds of Lacanian associations, but also Dutch-speaking and French-speaking associations (as Belgium is trilingual, German being the third official language). The main objective of this Federation is the united defence of the specificity of lay analysis in face of the law, basing analysis not on any certificate whatsoever, but on an appropriate evaluation of the end of the analytic cure and an endless formation.
And yes, recently the Circle also has founded a new Journal of the NLS, called INWIT. On the one hand this rather odd name discreetly betrays the English-speaking orientation of the NLS; mind you, the Journal is in Dutch! On the other hand it should make clearly known our intention not to get round the last period in Lacan's teachings, when his preoccupations with Joyce shook all of his former conceptualisations that were the result of his return to Freud (for instance the famous "The unconscious is structured like a language"). Usually Dutch-speaking psychoanalysis sticks to the first, symbolic period of Lacan's teachings. You may know that 'inwit' is part of the age-old expression 'agenbite of inwit', or 'again biting of inner wit' – used by Joyce and translated by Lacan as 'the biting of the unconscious' (*morsure de l'inconscient*), which has something to do with the jouissance, the oral jouissance of the unconscious … I have been asked to act as the first editor of INWIT, and I proposed immediately to dedicate the first issue to the subject of anxiety and the possibility of its *franchissement*. I am very proud to announce that we received Miller's *fiat* to translate Lacan in Dutch; indeed, the first issue of INWIT will be constructed around two chapters of Seminar X, in Dutch translation. We will also translate a lesson of Miller's Seminar, introducing and commenting the most salient points of Seminar X. Apart from original contributions by renowned Lacanians such as Eric Laurent, François Leguil and Alexandre Stevens, the first issue will also contain several theoretical and clinical contributions by members of the Circle. The first issue is expected for October 2005.
Will it be peer-reviewed? The first issue wasn't yet. I suppose the next issue should be.

JLS: *The Dutch Circle of the NLS is predominantly organised from within Belgium. What is happening in terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis in The Netherlands? Are you in touch with any people or groups there?*

Flemish contacts with The Netherlands have always been difficult. In general it could be said that, for historical reasons, Flanders have more cultural affinity with France than with the Netherlands, in spite of the shared Dutch language. This is not different in psychoanalytic matters: Flanders have embraced Lacan, but The Netherlands have remained as suspicious towards Lacan as did the Anglo-Saxon world. So maybe we will have to introduce Lacan first in the English-speaking world in order to have a chance of introducing him in The Netherlands. To some extent this already did happen; for instance Slavoj Zizek, with his studies on popular culture, is a huge success over there. Of course we should not complain about that. However, there also seems to be some dark underside to this. In a way you could say that finally philosophers like Zizek brilliantly argue that psychoanalytic theory justifies that the psychoanalytic position is an impossible one. In any case, he himself never considered becoming an analyst, he remains a philosopher. What I am trying to say is that studies like those of Zizek, brilliant as they may be, do not really cause a transference on psychoanalysis as a radically new response to jouissance, to the impossibility of the real; they do not inspire a desire to start an analysis, a desire to occupy the impossible position of the analyst … At least this is how I feel about it.
Of course, we have some Dutch members, with whom we are regularly discussing the case of The Netherlands. Maybe you should ask them. Sometimes, in desperation, I have this crazy idea that one of our Flemish colleague should move to Holland to live and work and lecture there … to provoke a new form of transference … I don't know …

JLS: *You published a book two years ago, which, if it would have been translated into English could have carried the title "Beyond Sexual Fantasy" (Beyond the Sexual Fantasy?) (Jonckheere, 2003). Will it be*

translated? The second chapter of this fantastic book concerns the artist Marcel Duchamp. You have written and lectured extensively on art. Where does your interest in art come from? Do you have a special interest in Duchamp? In the fourth chapter you also explore FLAC, the novel by the Lacanian analyst Serge Andre (2001), who recently passed away. You knew Serge quite well. What was the nature of your relationship with him and would it be correct to say that he was a huge influence on you and indeed on many others in the psychoanalytic group in Ghent?

I did not know my book poses so many questions!
Will it be translated? I do not know. I hope so. This does not depend on me. Is this a sollicitation, a proposition maybe?
Art and Duchamp then. I already gave away my personal motivation, if you can call it like that. But of course I could also develop a kind of theoretical and even an ethical motivation why I think psychoanalysis is not possible, cannot develop, cannot survive, without a continual reference to all kinds of arts on all kinds of levels. For instance for me personally I have the impression that, after having written my dissertation in psychology on Kafka and the *Unheimliche*, in my first analytic cure I analysed my relationship with my father in a kind of lateral transference on Kafka. And with comparable irony I sometimes say that in my second analysis I analysed my relationship with my mother, in a kind of lateral transference on Duchamp, resulting in the study on Duchamp and sexual fantasy that would become the hard core of my book. If I am in a mood for provocation I sometimes say that one cannot become and remain an analyst, if one is not continually struggling to come to terms with some artistic double. After all Freud is a case in point. And Lacan also had this weird, inextricable, topological relationship with an artist like Joyce.
The transition to your question on Serge André and his book "FLAC", as his very personal testimony that "Writing starts where psychoanalysis ends", is at the same time natural and difficult. I personally owe him a lot. Contrary to many other people I never had any difficulty whatsoever recognizing my debts towards him as a teacher (he introduced me and many others to Lacanian psychoanalysis in a way that was at the same time systematic and searching), as my analytic 'object-cause' (he was my second analyst), and even as a human being. But was he a friend? I don't know. Maybe we were about to become friends. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I don't know, with Serge André I never had the opportunity to experience personally what Oscar Wilde actually means by his inscrutable saying that "Friendship is far more tragic than love, it lasts longer", a saying that I often happen to quote when analysands get confused between love and friendship. In any case, in between the second last and last period of his fatal illness we had some very interesting and sometimes also rather personal e-mail-exchanges concerning all kinds of delicate subjects that he had touched upon in "FLAC", such as the love of the father and paedophilia and the voice of woman and music. I continue to encourage as far as possible the publication of his seminars by Bruno Wajskop (éditions Que). Who knows, maybe one day our correspondence shall close this series.

JLS: *You work as a psychoanalyst in private practice. What is it like to conduct such a practice in an era of so-called evidence-based therapies with a-priori defined aims and goals to ensure that people or institutions get value for their money?*

It means that I regularly have to talk about psychoanalysis in public, in order to elicit a 'positive transference'. Transference towards psychoanalysis is not any longer ready-made, you have to personalize and to update it regularly. In that respect psychoanalysis is business like any other.
On the other hand, people continue and probably always will continue to come to psychoanalysts, and other kinds of truth-tellers, precisely because of the fact that they do not really know what they want, because they do not know what they can expect from an analysis.
I think the only real problem, the only real question is, whether this desire will be granted a structural place in

mental health institutions too.

JLS: *For many years you have also taught management studies and organisational behaviour. This is an area of study with little or no Lacanian input. Do you think Lacanian psychoanalysis has something to offer to this field of research?*

I surely do think so. Last year I had the occasion to participate in a much listened-to radio broadcast, and I took advantage of this opportunity to denounce the rise of the ideology of evaluation in our society with its obsession by the quality of service, value for money as you call it. It was at the time when the Accoyer-affair was raging in France. Jacques-Alain Miller and Jean-Claude Milner had just published their lucid dialogues on evaluation entitled "Evaluation. Entretiens sur une machine d'imposture" (Miller & Milner, 2004). As it happens I am indeed quite familiar with the theory and practice of evaluation in the field of Human Resource Management, so I assumed my responsibilities you could say. But at the same time I also had this brainwave to ask Stijn Vanheule to join me for the radio-broadcast. Stijn Vanheule, member of our Circle, is a well-known university specialist in the psychoanalytic approach to so-called 'burn-out' (which by the way is a psychoanalytic invention!). So, in our radio-dialogue we distinguished between evaluation as control and evaluation as an instrument of growth, and then went on to develop the very simple idea that burn-out could be the consequence of an unbridled push-to-growth of the 'competences of the Self' ('competence', the master-signifier of current HRM, is also a psychoanalytic invention!), which is inherent in modern forms of evaluation. To our astonishment we received support from all kinds of quarters, many people seemed to be relieved that finally some seemingly competent Other had spoken out aloud what everybody was saying to themselves. So, yes, psychoanalysis has something to say about this social field, but the question remains whether this will inspire the victims of evaluation to speak out for themselves, one by one. Finally psychoanalysis always has to depend on this kind of hysteria.

JLS: *We have just witnessed the Accoyer affair in France and JLS were happy to publish Jacques-Alain Miller's response as the first volume of a new series. What is your position with regard to the state regulation of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy? What do you think about the culture of evaluation?*

I think I have already given some of the elements for answering this question. We have founded this Federation in defence of lay analysis; psychoanalysis will only survive if it continues to produce analysts itself, analysts are the logical product of analysis itself and not of some university formation. We're warning against the ideology of evaluation, hoping to create some form of non-collective hysteria around it. We want to save-guard a space for the particularity of desire in mental health institutions; analysts should be present there side by side with medical psychiatrists, university psychologists and certain kinds of psychotherapists. What else can we do?

References

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In an article entitled “Evaluation Today” published on the internet Lieven Jonckheere critically explores the meaning of evaluation in modern culture (Jonckheere, 2004). He argues there that HRM evaluation as control and evaluation as growth are a particular form of ideology and that ideology betrays itself by the undesired irrational effects it has as can indeed be shown with the results of evaluation. He likens the basic principle of evaluation of control to the discourse of the master: the explicit aim is to create equity between the workers but the implicit aim is to control and increase the productivity of a collective of workers. He sums this up as follows: “…workers either abandon all control to the Other, who consequently has to control everybody and everything more and more – or they start over-controlling themselves, so that there’s nobody and nothing left to be controlled by the Other.” (P. 5). However the manager of today is more interested in the idea of growth from a humanistic point of view. Man wants to self-actualise, to reach his or her full potential, and in order to reach that holistic ideal, he or she has to have a desire to be evaluated. Jonckheere then argues that the self does not realise or actualise itself by itself, but that this self needs a manager for itself. Enter the manager as evaluator and one has a harmonious marriage. The Other wants the self to grow (to improve the competences of the self) and the self identifies with this desire in the Other and experiences a growth-need: this self wants to improve and indeed improve the organisation (usually of course in terms of profits). However, there is a snag. Jonckheere writes: “In this infantalizing obligation to keep on growing towards an asymptotic self HRM realises the outstanding incentive of contemporary superego.” (p. 7). In other words, this self is now confronted with an “obscene and ferocious jouissance of having to grow out of joint”. (*ibid.*). So at the top of Maslow’s pyramid of self-actualisation the self has a tendency to become fearful of heights and a consequence is often burn-out. Nevertheless, man’s burning desire is to keep on growing and the modern manager is there to help him or her. In this time of stress this manager/evaluator needs a human face and uses his or her own lack to demand that the self/worker evaluate themselves. An honest and fair game: the kind of game that apparently we all want to play. A common desire for evaluation is the result and once this desire has been established selection can begin as to who is beneficial to the organisation and who is not. The ones who get a positive evaluation, or rather, whose positive self-assessment has been accepted, can in turn become evaluators or assessors themselves of the sefl-assessed and this has a tendency to lead to an exclusive sect of evaluators/assessors. Jonckheere ends the article by applying these ideas to the current problem of evaluation of psychotherapies. It is argued by authorities and policy makers that psychotherapists need evaluation and regulation or else these psychotherapists run the risk of becoming a sect. Ironically with the new culture of evaluation we are guaranteed of sect-formation: we all want to be evaluators of the ones who desire evaluation. For Jonckheere this is in a way nothing but a civilised instrument for exclusion and the implicit argument is that this exclusion also concerns the subject.