

Transference listening

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In “Recommendation to Physicians Practicing Psychoanalysis” Freud formulates the analyst’s floating attention as a technique of immanent listening: “He must adjust himself to the patient as a telephone receiver is adjusted to the transmitting microphone”². The same sound waves are emitted, yet, from the position of the analyst, a second technical reflection—towards ‘reconstructing’ the unconscious — is necessary. Freud is clear that this style of listening is not to remain at the level of the imaginary axis or empathy. Rather, “the doctor should be opaque to his patients and, like a mirror, should show them nothing but what is shown to him.”³

In “The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power” Lacan develops an ethics of listening in relation to the question of the analyst’s desire. To listen for “what lies beyond discourse” is not akin to physiological auscultation, with a measurable object to be uncovered beneath⁴. Deferring understanding, and an ends-oriented way of thinking, Lacan nonetheless proposes a technique of listening that makes sense. The analysand freely associates, yet, as discursive, “nothing could be less free”⁵. Here the analyst lends his ear.

This technique of listening adjusts to the analysand’s demand as intransitive, that is, without object (at least not a fully sayable one.) The demand is inhered in the very fact that the analysand speaks and is subjected to the signifiers in those who “come to represent the Other for him”⁶. Lacan specifies that it is the analyst who has allowed the analysand to speak in the first place. Listening is the condition and support of this desire to speak. It is not reducible to demand.

The desire to speak as “I” is always to some extent resistance, as the desire to maintain desire; at the same time this desire is the positive transference that “maintains the direction of the analysis”⁷.

In an example from the analysis of the analysand writing here, an overpowering heartbeat was encountered at the beginning of each session. As resistance, it had to be spoken about. Once the heartbeat was spoken about, it could be listened to and interpreted, not in the terms of medical auscultation, but in those of analytic transference.

In J.-A. Miller’s “Interpretation in Reverse” we read that “unconscious desire is its interpretation”⁸. On the side of the analysand, one interprets, and hears, the unconscious by virtue of speaking. There is a spontaneous reflexivity. Yet ‘hearing

1. Member of a Flash Cartel in preparation for the 2018 NLS Congress.

2. Freud S. : Standard Edition of the Complete Works, vol. XII, London, Hogarth Press, 1958, p.115-116.

3. Ibid, p. 118.

4. Lacan J. : *Écrits*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2006, p.515.

5. Ibid., p. 514.

6. Ibid., p. 525.

7. Ibid., p. 531.

8. J.-A. Miller, “Interpretation in Reverse,” in *The Later Lacan: An Introduction*, ed. Véronique Voruz and Bogdan Wolf (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), p. 4.

oneself' is different than 'listening to oneself.' "The subject cannot listen to himself without being divided"⁹. With Miller, Freud's telephone receiver stands in for the position of the analyst within the transference to a subject supposed to know: "when the analyst takes over he does nothing other than what the unconscious does"¹⁰. This is the contingent link, in the discourse of the analyst, between objet a as agent and the Other¹¹. While the unconscious interprets, it also wants to be interpreted, which equally depends on the contingent relation between hearing and listening. The desire of the analyst interprets against the grain of the unconscious' own interpretation—to listen not only to hear—in order to "pass from the wild state the interpretation proves to be in the unconscious to the reasoned [raisonné] state where the analyst strives to bring it"¹². With the unconscious as interpretation, transference in turn presents itself as the supposition of knowledge in the unconscious¹³. To go beyond the pleasure principle, in listening to this spontaneously interpreting unconscious, what must be 'interpreted in reverse' ? The "phrase that is enjoyed."¹⁴

9. J.-A. Miller, "Jacques Lacan and the Voice," in *The Later Lacan*, p. 143.

10. J.-A. Miller, "Interpretation in Reverse", *op. cit.* p. 4.

11. Thank you to Jeff Erbe for his suggestions here, as well as to Renata Teixeira and An Bulkens for their comments.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Cf. P.-G. Guéguen, "Discretion of the Analyst in the Post-Interpretative Era" in *The Later Lacan*, p. 14.

14. J.-A. Miller, "Interpretation in Reverse", *op. cit.* p. 6.