Apres-Coup: Act and Transmission
Jamieson Webster

For some reason, I want to begin by telling you that I am afraid of psychoanalysts. I am even more afraid of psychoanalytic institutes. It doesn’t help me if you call them schools. I am not, however, afraid of psychoanalysis. And I am not afraid that a passion for psychoanalysis will disappear. I have, in my teaching and in my work, too much evidence to the contrary. I have also found that staying as far away as possible from psychoanalysts and their institutions best protects this passion.

Much of what I have heard over the course of this weekend begins from the radical place accorded to desire, its subversive power, and what many are after is something of the order of innovation, invention, singularity, and what will come of the freedom that is bound to the life of desire. If your institutes manage to support this, then we need your help. Tell us how you make this possible.

The psychoanalytic institutes here don’t have candidates. The New York Psychoanalytic Institute has no incoming class. If there are candidates the attrition rate is around 30-40%. Students who want to become psychoanalysts have to pursue a degree in a field that only borders on our practice—social work, psychology, and medicine. It takes them between 5-10 years and at the end most will have between 70 and 150,000 dollars in student loan debt. And yet they persist with their passion for psychoanalysis, in supervision, in their own analysis, in making the rounds at institutes and conferences like this one. Until the time when the question of going to an institute brings them face to face with the noise and disorganization, the dead repetitions and endless political quarrelling that inhabits these places.

I had an interesting misunderstanding with Patricia this morning. I was telling her about this and she thought with so much at stake they must become very conservative. But what I meant to convey was exactly the opposite. With so much at stake, if it is not subversive enough, what’s the point? Psychoanalysis must be a refuge from a previous experience of an infernal system. We must find a way to support their desire. They will be the one’s to reinvent psychoanalysis.

I would like to end with a clinical vignette that came to mind while listening to you. It comes from a paper by Selma Fraiberg with one of those unfortunate titles typical of American psychoanalysis, “Some Characteristics of Genital Arousal and Discharge in Latency Girls”.

Nancy, a 9 year old girl, was explaining to her analyst a rise in excitement, yet had no vocabulary for this experience. “You know what it’s like? It’s like when you’re playing the piano. Suppose you play do, re, me, and fa. Well, the fa is like crying for sol to get finished. It’s like a baby whining for its mother.”

Analyst: And do the feelings get finished?
Nancy: Well, I’d say no.

Analyst: Tell me what it is like. Use a song to show me how your feelings went.

Nancy: All right. It went like this. [She now sang in a queer atonal voice, using, of all things, the first phrase of My Country, ‘Tis of Thee] All right, it goes like this. My country ‘tis... My country ‘tis... My country ‘tis...

She seemed prepared to repeat this interminably. Finally the analyst asked: And how does it get finished?

Nancy: Well it ends when I go to sleep.

Nancy sings to her analyst a song of jouissance, a song of pure repetition of which there is no recourse but to go to sleep. It is here where her desire might find its support in what the analyst fails to notice, namely that the Other side of this political song that she sings, My country ‘tis of thee, is — sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.