ABSTRACT

Let Fall: Hysteria and the Psychoanalytic Act

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This text proposes to examine the contemporary crisis of psychoanalysis by taking seriously feminist critiques of the theory’s phallocentrism, but arguing that the phallus cannot be metaphorically or metonymically replaced by any substitutive term, as most revisionist theories of psychoanalysis have sought to do. Castration is the central psychoanalytic concept, though the theory always seeks to cover it over. In order to develop a psychoanalysis that can confront this castration that is always repressed and yet, in its persistent return, continuously disrupts the continuity of psychoanalytic theory, a detour is proposed, returning to the origins of psychoanalysis and taking hysteria and the hysteric as its guide, following her down and through her blind alleys and dark continents. The project will examine hysteria’s four thousand year history, its radical discontinuity and non-identity as well as its thematic continuities and its relation to the theory of transference and the ego. This will develop into a more comprehensive examination of the ego in psychoanalytic theory with the conclusion that where ego is, hysteria is not, and, where hysteria is, the ego is not. The project will then examine the relationship of Bataille’s work and hysteria, particularly his concept of dramatization. Next, the Greek conception of kairos, or the opportune moment, will be examined in its relation to hysteria and introducing the key Lacanian concept of the psychoanalytic act. This will culminate in an exploration of the close relationship – and the project’s central theoretical construction – of
hysteria and the psychoanalytic act. Against any phallic mastery, the cure of psychoanalysis is a facing up to the real of castration, and both the psychoanalyst and the hysteric must let themselves fall in order to begin (again). This letting fall of the psychoanalytic act is the central object of inquiry in the dissertation, and it will be examined in its temporality and in its relationship to transference, to free association, to evenly suspended attention, to knowledge, to violence, and to castration. This fall will be examined from several angles in this work in its relation to the psychoanalytic theory of cure and more specific theories of technique: the fall of the analyst’s knowledge, of her sense of mastery and control, the fall into the unconscious through evenly suspended attention (the unconscious of analysand and analyst alike), the fall of imaginary and symbolic crutches that have propped up both analysand and analyst and defended them against the real, and, finally, the analyst’s fall as subject supposed to know that marks the end of a psychoanalysis. The final section of the project will examine the consequences of this theorization to questions of psychoanalytic training.

Keywords: Hysteria, Psychoanalytic Act, Castration, Kairos, Formation