

Jacques Lacan: Psychoanalysis, Politics, Philosophy

Frank Ruda & Agon Hamza

To go back to Jacques Lacan and *once again* discuss psychoanalysis – a theory which, as they tell us, has lost all legitimacy and is discredited – and its relation to politics, culture, etc seems nothing but a vain attempt. According to the brain sciences, with the new scientific breakthroughs of this field, psychoanalysis finally was sent to where it always belonged: the pre-scientific, quasi-religious universe. Psychoanalysis is falling behind or losing both at the level of the doctrine and clinic. The human mind appears to fit better to the models provided by neurobiology, than to the Freudian-Lacanian understandings of it. Further, the problems continue with the psychoanalytic practice: it is a long process, with no guaranteed result. It requires discipline and commitment from the analysand, but not in the sense of the analysand really desiring to change. There is a famous joke, which tries to make fun of the uselessness of psychoanalysts: how many psychoanalysts does it take to change a light bulb? One, but it really has to want to change. Funny, but incorrect. In principle, the analysand doesn't want to change his condition. As Lacan points out, the desire is always the desire of the analyst, that is, it is the engine of the psychoanalytic process.¹ As opposed to this, cognitive therapy and pills are advancing way too fast, thus having psychoanalytic treatment lag far behind.

The approach to Lacan gets more complicated when we recall his famous statement that his aim is to train analysts, thus reducing psychoanalysis strictly to the clinical dimension. We all remember his rather infamous statement: “I rise up in revolt, so to speak, against philosophy”² – a statement which continues to be an object of unresolved discussions. Perhaps here, in the spirit of Žižek's Lacanianism, we can suggest that when Lacan rebels against philosophy, he indeed rebels against a certain kind of a philosophical practice, which is a certain change in the positioning of the subject. Not quite a parallax positioning (an apparent displacement of the perspective), but rather a shift in the attitude of the subject itself. The conditions of the possibility of the rebellion against philosophy (or, against a certain practice) was made possible by philosophy itself and at the same time, was caused by philosophy. However, psychoanalysis is attacked, put into question, relativized, etc from all range of opposing field. From biology, to brain sciences, philosophy, and all the way to serious questionings of its clinic. He has very rigidly called for the need of doing an analysis even of the analytic community (so as to get rid off the fantasy that the analyst actually is someone who just knows and does not even have an unconscious). But, in his writings, the *Écrits* as well as in his Seminars, Lacan stubbornly refuses to keep psychoanalysis only within the terrain of therapeutic practice. His concerns

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1 Lacan 1998, pp.9-10, p.276

2 Lacan 1980

are far from only being clinical: in Lacan, we have ontological and epistemological commitments. As for example Alenka Zupančič has recently demonstrated, the central question of psychoanalysis, that is, sex, is the point of conversion between ontology and epistemology (that is, between being and knowing).³ In this sense, psychoanalysis is perhaps the opposite of philosophy, but as such, it has profound consequences for philosophy. But it doesn't function only at the level of consequences: the psychoanalytical event helped philosophy reinvent some of its fundamental principles.

So, why psychoanalysis, to refer to the title of a book, when all the odds are against it?

Althusser was someone who recognized that psychoanalysis, for all its obscure history and troubled situation in France, had crucial insights to offer politics and philosophy. He was one of most important Marxist philosophers who from the early phases of his work systematically engaged with Freudian, and especially, Lacanian psychoanalysis. He was one of the rare Marxist philosophers who not only accepted the consequences of psychoanalytic theory and practice for both Marxism and philosophy, but he worked through and with these theoretical consequences. Instead of doing a balance sheet of influences of one discipline to another, Althusser took another direction. Paradoxically, Althusser avoided taking the path taken by many contemporary Marxist-Lacanian, who hardly engage in any meaningful discussion of the contemporary critique of political economy and its categories, but instead they just throw the concept of *jouissance* and enjoyment as supplements or pointing out the similarities between the two fields. Althusser, on the contrary, was well aware that neither of these disciplines can serve as the supplement of other; nor they can be approached from the position of the *university discourse*. A philosopher once said that at one level of analysis, everything resembles everything else. But, this means nothing.

Consequently, he drew interesting and equally surprising parallels between the two fields. His premise was that both Marxism and psychoanalysis share nothing in common, no project and no agenda. The former is concerned with the forms of social production, whereas the latter is strictly concerned with the unconscious. However, in his *On Marx and Freud*, Althusser situates both disciplines within the same register. That is to say, both Marxism and psychoanalysis are 1) conflictual sciences (and, just like Marx and Freud, Althusser had a rather strange conception of what science is and what constitutes a scientific discipline), and 2) their main enemy does not come from the outside (brain sciences, counter-revolution), but rather springs from (internal-external) revisionisms.⁴

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3 Zupančič 2017

4 Althusser 2009, p.19

Althusser's point is Marxism and psychoanalysis are conflictual not only because they operate within a conflictual space, but because they constitute the very reality which they consider as antagonistic.

Ever since their beginnings, Marxism and psychoanalysis have suffered a similar fate. They have been declared irrelevant, quasi-religious, outdated, or even dead. For a certain time, this even happened by means of enthusiastic over-endorsement. It suffices just to recall the famous anecdote when Freud on the ship to the USA, told Jung that the American people do not know it, but the two of them were bringing them the plague. Yet, the plague that manifested in so called ego-analysis turned out quite different from what Freud expected. But today after many straightforward attacks on psychoanalysis from the outside, especially from within the realm of the sciences and with new discoveries in the brain sciences, it seems psychoanalysis suffered its final blow into oblivion. Finally, it seems to have become irrefutable: psychoanalysis is an obscurantist, non-scientific discipline, which at best can be used as a supplement to other disciplines. Perhaps it can be said that psychoanalysis today is the exact obverse of what Slavoj Žižek refers to as *ptolemization*, that is the process of supplementing or changing the existing theory (in crisis) with theses from *within* its own basic framework.⁵ But, from the perspective of the cognitive sciences, psychoanalysis is conceptualised only as a *ptolemization* of classical psychology, which fails to abandon its conceptual premises.⁶

On the other hand, with Marxism, the story is not that different. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse and disappearance of most of nominally socialist or communist states (China and North-Korea are still standing, yet a hard case to defend for a Marxist), Marxism no longer seem a viable political project or horizon in contemporary debates (even if Marx became again a bestseller during the financial crisis, but this did not lead to the emergence of thousands of new Marxists). It has been declared outdated, a misfortune to humanity, and a potentially criminal idea. But Marxism's effectivity as a political orientation has also been impeded or limited by an enthusiastic over-endorsement that can go under different names, one of them being historical materialism (and the idea of a science of history).

Against this background, some went as far as to declare Freud and Marx – along with Nietzsche – to be the culprits of a fallback into problematic kinds of substantialist metaphysical thought by introducing unexplained explainers, that is terms that are themselves not explained or derived but are supposed to explain everything. For Marx, this is class struggle, for Freud the unconscious, and for Nietzsche certainly the will.

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5 Žižek 2008, pp.7-8

6 Ibid.

These attacks, internal and external, point to a dilemma – what is psychoanalysis after all? It is clearly not evident what to this day in which field of knowledge psychoanalysis belongs; the issue has not been resolved is very much part of the ongoing debates. However, let us recapitulate some of the theses or positions that constitute it. First, there is something profoundly erroneous to reduce psychoanalysis only to its clinical aspect. Schematically put, the theoretical and clinical dimensions of psychoanalysis are inter-related, they inform and constitute one another. It is not that one aspect provides the “raw material” for the other, a kind of causality. Perhaps in a similar way to how Marxist doctrine and political praxis function. Second, it is equally a mistake to conceptualise psychoanalysis as a philosophical orientation, or a supplement philosophy. Psychoanalysis, especially the one of the Freud-Lacanian orientation, is a singular theoretical orientation.

The present issue of *Crisis and Critique* starts from the premise that the time of psychoanalysis is not over but is actually only now about to come. It addresses a series of questions, which do not reduce Lacan to the clinical dimension alone, but also address the constitutive and formative dimension of Lacan's oeuvre. The essays collected in this issue, far from pretending to be comprehensive, are a systematic and profound engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis and its philosophical, political and cultural consequences of it. The issue gathers some of the most important philosophers, theoretical and clinical psychoanalysts working in the Lacanian field today, albeit in different orientations, who help create a new context in which Lacanian psychoanalysis is not only actual, but a Lacanian perspective is necessary to grasp our contemporary present. This issue is not nor does it pretend to be exhausting. The hope of the editors is that the present issue of *Crisis and Critique* will not succeed in only pointing out the contemporary relevance, but together with Lacan, to orient ourselves in thinking.

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