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Racism 2.0 **Éric Laurent**

The recent debates surrounding the ban of Dieudonné's show in France are producing a very contemporary echo of what Lacan foretold[i] with respect to the function of psychoanalysis in civilisation. The closing words of *Seminar XIX*, in June 1972, were firmly levelled at what lies ahead of us. According to Lacan, our emergence from the patriarchal civilisation of yesteryear was now beyond doubt. The post-1968 period was still buzzing with talk of the end of paternal power and the advent of a new society of brothers, accompanied by the blithe hedonism of a new religion of the body. Lacan played the party pooper, specifying a consequence that hadn't yet been noticed:

When we come back to the root of the body, if we are to reassert the value of the word *brother*, [...] you should know that what rises up, the ultimate consequences of which have yet to be seen – and which takes root in the body, in the fraternity of the body – is racism.[ii]

Body idolatry has very different consequences from the narcissistic hedonism to which some thought they could limit this 'religion of the body'. These consequences

foreshadow other forms of religion besides the secular religions, as Raymond Aron put it, which haunted this period and which, to Aron's thinking, were peddling the 'Opium of the Intellectuals'. [iii]

Whilst Lacan was predicting the rise of racism, which he was stressing insistently as of 1967 and through into the 'seventies, the prevailing atmosphere was rather one of delight at the prospect of integrating nations into larger ensembles that would be authorised by 'common markets'. At that time, people were more in favour of Europe than they are today. Lacan accentuated this unexpected consequence with a precision that back then came as something of a surprise. Questioning Lacan in 'Television' (1973), Jacques-Alain Miller was a sounding board for this surprise, highlighting the importance of his thesis: 'What gives you the confidence to prophesy the rise of racism? And why the devil do you have to speak of it?' Lacan replied:

Because it doesn't strike me as funny and yet, it's true.

With our jouissance going off track, only the Other is able to mark its position, but only in so far as we are separated from this Other. Whence certain fantasies – unheard of before the melting pot. [iv]

The logic that Lacan develops is as follows. We have no knowledge of the jouissance from which we might take our orientation. We know only how to reject the jouissance of others. With this 'melting pot', Lacan is criticising the twofold movement of colonialism and the will to normalise the one who has been displaced, the immigrant, in the name of all that is supposed to be for his own 'good'.

Leaving the Other to his own mode of jouissance, that would only be possible by not imposing our own on him, by not thinking of him as underdeveloped.

[...] How can we hope that the empty forms of humanhysterianism [*humanitaire*] disguising our extortions can continue to last? [v]

This is not culture shock, but the shock of different forms of jouissance. This manifold jouissance splits the social bond apart, hence the temptation of calling upon a unifying God.

Lacan also heralds something else here: the return of different forms of religious fundamentalism. 'Even if God, thus newly strengthened, should end up existing, this bodes nothing better than a return of his baneful past.' In these comments on the logic of racism, Lacan takes into account the varying forms of the rejected object, distinct forms that range from pre-war anti-Semitism (which led to Nazi radicalism) to post-colonial racism directed at immigrants. Racism effectively switches its objects as the social forms undergo modification. From Lacan's perspective, however, there is always, in any human community, a rejection of an inassimilable jouissance, which forms the mainspring of a possible barbarism.

Before 'Television', Lacan has raised the question of racism in his 'Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School' and in his 'Address on Child Psychoses' of the same year. In the 'Proposition...', he mentions the precursory aspect of Nazi barbarism:

Let me summarise by saying that what we have seen emerge from this, to our horror, represents the reaction of precursors in relation to what will unfold as a consequence of the rearranging of social groupings by science and, notably, of the universalisation science introduces into them.

Our future as common markets will be balanced by an increasingly hard-line extension of the process of segregation.[vi]

In the ‘Address on Child Psychoses’ he specifies the nexus between the position of the psychoanalyst and the movement of civilisation: ‘we need to know what the rest of us, I mean psychoanalysts, are going to respond [to] segregation, which has been put on the agenda by an unprecedented subversion.’[vii]

The logic by which Lacan constructs all human ensembles, of any shape whatsoever, actually gives a twist to Freud’s *Massenpsychologie*. In 1921, after formulating the second topography that organises psychical reality, Freud looked again at the question of the destiny of the drive, starting off from the fate of identification which governs psychical life in a decisive way:

In opposition to the usual practice, we shall not choose a relatively simple group formation as our point of departure, but shall begin with highly organised, lasting and artificial groups. The most interesting example of such structures are churches – communities of believers – and armies.

[...]

We should consider whether groups with leaders may not be the more primitive and complete, whether in the others an idea, an abstraction, may not be substituted for the leader (a state of things to which religious groups, with their invisible head, form a transition stage), and whether a common tendency, a wish in which a number of people can have a share, may not in the same way serve as a substitute. [...] Hatred against a particular person or institution might operate in just the same unifying way.[viii]

For Freud, hatred and racist rejection form a bond, but remain connected to the leader who takes the place of the father, or, more accurately, the place of the father’s murder. The limitless dimension of this requirement lives on in the group, and the establishment of the social bond remains founded upon the base of the identificatory drive. A stable group harbours within it the same principle of limitlessness that was isolated for the primal group. In this way, Freud was able to account both for the army as an organised mass and for the savage power of killing that accompanies it. A common hate can unify a group, which remains bound to a segregative identification with the leader.

When Lacan constructs the logic of the social bond, he does not begin with the identification with the leader, but with an initial rejection at the level of the drive. His formulation of logical time concludes with the proposition that all human assimilation follows three temporal phases through which the subject and the social Other are articulated:

1. A man knows what is not a man;
2. Men recognise themselves among themselves;
3. I declare myself to be a man for fear of being convinced by men that I am not a man.[ix]

These temporal phases do not set off from some knowledge of what it would be to be a man, followed by a process of identification. Rather, this logic sets off from what *is not* a man – A man knows what is not a man. This says nothing of what a man is. Next, men recognise themselves amongst themselves on account of *being* men: they

know not what they do, but they recognise themselves in each other. Lastly, I declare myself *to be* a man. Here lies the whole question of the affirmation or the decision that is linked to the function of hatred, the function of anxiety – for fear of *being* convinced by men that I *am* not a man.

This collective logic is grounded on the threat of a primordial rejection, on the menace of a form of racism: a man knows what is not a man. And this is a question of jouissance. He whom I reject for having a jouissance distinct from my own is not a man.

This movement provides the logical form of all ‘human’ assimilation, precisely in so far as it posits itself as assimilative of a barbarism, but which nonetheless reserves the essential determination of the ‘*I*...[x]

When Lacan wrote this text, Nazi barbarism was close at hand. It began by pointing the finger at the Jew as he whose jouissance is not the same as the Aryan’s: a man is not a man because his jouissance is not like mine. The flipside of this is that, within this logic, it may be asserted that whilst men do not know the nature of their jouissance, men do know what barbarism is. Thenceforth, men recognise themselves amongst themselves, but they don’t really know how. Then, subjectively, one by one: I am caught in a movement of haste. I declare myself to be a man, out of fear that I will be denounced for not being a man. Based on an absence of any definition of *being-a-man*, this collective logic will tie together the ‘*I* that declares’ and the ‘set of men’, and in doing so will bypass the leader.

This logical form was to be pursued throughout Lacan’s work. It later became more complex with the theory of desire and the theory of jouissance, but it would continue functioning, as is the case in the logic of the Pass. The logic of the constitution of a psychoanalytic collective was to be approached in keeping with this same anti-identificatory logic, or more accurately, a logic of non-segregative identifications, as Jacques-Alain Miller called them in his ‘Turin Theory’[xi].

1. A psychoanalyst knows what is not a psychoanalyst – on no account does this mean that the psychoanalyst knows what a psychoanalyst is.
2. Psychoanalysts recognise themselves amongst themselves as psychoanalysts – this is what is asked in the experience of the Pass: for a cartel to recognise this fellow here as one of us.
3. To present himself for the Pass, the subject must declare himself, to decide, to be a psychoanalyst and to run the risk of not convincing the others than he is a psychoanalyst.[xii]

In his ‘Proposition...’, Lacan insisted on the dimension of racism in order to stress that any human ensemble harbours in its depths a jouissance that goes off track, a fundamental not-knowing with respect to the jouissance that would correspond to identification. The psychoanalyst is simply he who has to find this out in order to constitute the community of those who recognise themselves as psychoanalysts.

The malicious jouissance at stake in racist discourse is the failure to recognise this logic. It is the fundament of any social bond. The founding crime is not the murder of the father, but the will to murder he who embodies the jouissance that I reject. Therefore, antiracism always has to be reinvented in keeping with each fresh form of the object of racism, which loses its shape with the rearrangements of social groupings. However, our history has shown in particular, behind each guise of racism,

the central place of anti-Semitism as both a precursor and a horizon. Here I shall cite Bernard-Henri Lévy's analysis of the new form of what is coming our way:

Anti-Semitism has a history. Over the ages it has taken on different forms, but they each correspond to what the spirit of the times was willing or able to hear. I believe that, for reasons that it would be impossible to detail here, the only anti-Semitism that could possibly 'work' in this day and age, the only one capable of abusing and mobilising a broad swathe of women and men, as it did in other periods, is one that can tie together the threefold thread of anti-Zionism (Jews who support a 'deadly Israel'), negationism (an unscrupulous people capable of inventing or exploiting the martyrdom of its own so as to reach its goals), and competitive victimhood (the memory of the Holocaust functioning as a screen over other massacres across the planet). Well, Dieudonné was in the process of joining all three.[xiii]

The astonishing response that Nicolas Bedos has directed at Dieudonné has opened a further question as to the status of the comedian who, in our civilisation of mass democratic individualism, goes straight for the stomach. Besides, the stomach is not enough. These days it takes all the viscera to make oneself heard. This brings with it an unexpected consequence: television is losing its softness as a medium, with everyone edging towards the violence of the internet.

Translated from the French by A. R. Price

[i] Miller, J.-A., 'Lacan's Prophecies', translated by A. R. Price in *Hurly-Burly* Issue 6, November 2011, pp. 217-20.

[ii] Lacan, J., *Le séminaire, livre XIX, ...ou pire*, Seuil, Paris, 2011, p. 235.

[iii] Cf. Aron, R., *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, translated by T. Kilmartin, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 2001.

[iv] Lacan, J., 'Television', translated by D. Hollier, R. Krauss, & A. Michelson, in *Television/A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, Norton & Co., New York, p. 32.

[v] *Ibid.*, pp. 32-3.

[vi] Lacan, J., 'Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School', translated by R. Grigg, in *Analysis*, Issue 6, 1995, p. 12.

[vii] Lacan, J., 'Address on Child Psychoses', translated by A. R. Price and B. Khiara-Foxton, in *Hurly-Burly* Issue 8, October 2012, p. 271.

[viii] Freud, S., 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego' translated by J. Strachey in *S.E. XVIII*, pp. 13-14; p. 51.

[ix] Lacan, J., 'Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty' in *Écrits, the First Complete Edition in English*, translated by B. Fink, H. Fink and R. Grigg, Norton & Co., New York, 2006, p. 174 [Translation modified].

[x] *Ibid.*

[xi] Miller, J.-A., 'The Turin Theory of the Subject of the School', presentation at the first scientific congress of the Scuola Lacaniana di Psicoanalisi on 21 May 2000, whose theme was 'The Pathologies of Laws and of Norms'. The text is available in English language translation by V. Dachy and H. Menzies at: www.amp-nls.org/page/gb/60/the-turin-theory-of-the-subject-of-the-school.

[xii] Laurent, É., ‘Les paradoxes de l’identification’, lesson delivered at the Clinical Section on 1 December 1993, unpublished.

[xiii] Lévy, B.-H., ‘Pour en finir (provisoirement?) avec l’affaire Dieudonné’ in *Le Point*, 16 January 2014. Available online: www.lepoint.fr/editos-du-point/bernard-henri-levy/pour-en-finir-provisoirement-avec-l-affaire-dieudonne-16-01-2014-1780757_69.php

Access to some of the references – A work-in-progress:

a) The closing words of *Seminar XIX*, in June 1972 [p. 235 of the French edition]
Details of availability in translation : [Seminar XIX: 1971-72: ...Ou pire ...Or worse : from 8th December 1971 : Jacques Lacan](#) or [here](#)
<http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=706>

From Cormac Gallagher’s translation : Wednesday 21st June 1972 : Session XII : p11 to 12 :

I mean that what is born of an analysis, what is born at the level of the subject, of the subject who speaks, of the analysand, is something which with, by means of – man thinks Aristotle said, with his soul – the analysand analyses with this shit that is proposed to him, in the figure of his analyst, the *little o(a)-object*. It is with this that something, this split thing ought to be born which is nothing other when all is said and done – than the arm by which a weighing scales can establish what is called justice. Our brother transfigured, this is what is born from analytic incantation and this is what binds us to the one that we wrongly call our patient.

This *parasex(u)al*, discourse huh? It must be said like that ... that, that some batons may be handed back. I would not like to leave you uniquely on something over sweet. The notion of brother, so solidly stamped thanks to all sorts of jurisprudence throughout the ages, coming back to this level, to the level of a discourse, will have what I called just now its return on the level of support.

I did not speak to you in all of that about the father because I think that enough has been said to you already about him, enough explained, to show you that it is around the one who unites, the one who says no! that there can be founded, that there ought to be founded, that there cannot but be founded everything universal! And when we return to the root of the body, if we revalorise the word brother, he is going to enter under full sail at the level of good feelings.

Since I must not all the same allow you to look at the future through rose coloured glasses, you should know that what is arising, what one has not yet seen to its final consequences, and which for its part is rooted in the body, in the fraternity of the body, is racism, about which you have yet to hear the last word. Voilà!

b) ‘Whilst Lacan was predicting the rise of racism, which he was stressing insistently as of 1967 and through into the ’seventies,’ ... Probably from Seminar XV – See www.LacanianIreland.com for Cormac Gallagher’s translations.

c) Availability of Television given [Television: 1974: Jacques Lacan](#) or [here](#) p32 to 33 : Quote

Jacques-Alain Miller : From another direction, what gives you the confidence to prophesy the rise of racism? And why the devil do you have to speak of it?

Jacques Lacan : -Because it doesn't strike me as funny and yet, it's true.

With our *jouissance* going off the track, only the Other is 'able to mark its position, but only insofar as we are separated from this Other. Whence certain fantasies-unheard of before the melting pot.

Leaving this Other to his own mode of *jouissance*, that would only be possible by not imposing our own on him, by not thinking of him as underdeveloped.

Given, too, the precariousness of our own mode, which from now on takes its bearings from the ideal of an over-coming [*plus-de-jouir* – Both “end-of-coming/enjoying” and “excess-of-coming/enjoying”] which is, in fact, no longer expressed in any other way, how can one hope that the empty forms of humanhysterianism [humanitairerie] disguising our extortions can continue to last? Even if God, thus newly strengthened, should end up ex-sisting, this bodes nothing better than a return of his baneful past.

d) Details of the availability of ‘Proposition’ given [‘Proposal of 9th October 1967 on the psychoanalyst of the School’: Jacques Lacan](#) or [here](#)

From Russell Grigg’s translation: Let me summarise by saying that what we have seen emerge from this, to our horror, represents the reaction of precursors in relation to what will unfold as a consequence of the rearranging of social groupings by science and, notably, of the universalisation science introduces into them.

Our future as common markets will be balanced by an increasingly hard-line extension of the process of segregation.

Is it necessary to attribute to Freud the wish, given his introduction at birth to the secular model of this process, to guarantee his group the privilege of universal floatability (*flottabilité*) that the two above-named institutions benefit from? This is not unthinkable.

Be that as it may, this recourse does not make it any easier for the desire of the psychoanalyst to situate itself in this conjuncture.

Let us remember that if the I.P.A. of Mittel Europa has demonstrated its preadaptation to this trial in not losing one single member in the said camps, it was due to this feat that after the war it saw an exodus—which did not occur without a contrary movement (one hundred mediocre psychoanalysts, remember)—of candidates in whose minds the motive of seeking shelter against the red tide, a fantasy of the time, was not absent.

Let us hope that the “coexistence”, which could also be illuminated by a transference, not make us forget a phenomenon that is one of our geographical coordinates, as it were, and the significance of which the drivel about racism rather masks.

e) Lacan, J., ‘Address on Child Psychoses’, translated by A. R. Price and B. Khiara-Foxton, in *Hurly-Burly* Issue 8, October 2012, p. 271

Also availability given [Autres Écrits: 2001 : Jacques Lacan](#) or [here](#)
<http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=756>

Quote: What does this mean? It certainly does not mean that I hereby intend in any way to seal off these problems, nor to open them up, as people say, or leave them open. It is a matter of determining them and grasping the reference point from which we can deal with them without remaining ourselves trapped in a certain illusion and, in order to do so, of accounting for the distance to which the correlation whose prisoners we are inclined. The factor at stake here is the most burning issue of our times in so far as this era is the first to have to undergo the calling into question of every social structure as a result of the progress of science. This is something which we are going to be contending with, not only in our domain as psychiatrists, but in the

furthest reaches of our universe, and in an ever more pressing fashion: with segregation.

Mankind is entering a period that has been called “global”. In which it will find out about this something that is emerging from the destruction of an old social order that I shall symbolise *Empire* whose shadow was long cast over a great civilisation, such that something very different is replacing it, something that carries a very different meaning, the *imperialisms*, whose question runs as follows: what can we do so that human masses, which are destined to occupy the same space, not only geographically, but sometimes in a familiar sense, remain separate?

The problem at the level at which Oury set it out just now using the pertinent term “segregation” is therefore merely a local point, a small model of something to which we need to know what the rest of us, I mean psychoanalysts, are going to respond: segregation, which has been put on the agenda by an unprecedented subversion. Here, we should not neglect the perspective from which Oury was able to formulate just now that, within the collective, the psychotic presents himself essentially as the sign, a sign in deadlock, of what legitimises the reference to freedom.

f) ‘Freud’s *Massenpsychologie*. In 1921’ Availability:

Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego : 1921 : Sigmund Freud

You will find Freud's paper in English with the original German text laid out in the right hand column : published by www.Freud2Lacan.com : available [here](#) : Reference found by [Bruno de Florence](#)

f) Also **Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism : 1945** from *Écrits*, transl. into English by B. Fink and M. Silver in Ellie Ragland-Sullivan (ed.), *Newsletter of the Freudian Field*, vol.2, 1988. See [Écrits : 1966 : Jacques Lacan](#) for current availability or [here](#) . It is hoped to make this available shortly. <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1206>

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