





HURLY- BURLY



ISSUE 12
JANUARY 2015



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Editorial

Jacques Lacan

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The Couch

The Letter! The Litter! And the Soother the Bitter...

Hypermodern Times

Jacques Lacan

Freud Forever: An Interview with *Panorama*

Questions by Emilia Granzotto

This interview was originally held in French and subsequently translated into Italian for publication in the magazine Panorama in 1974. It was later translated back into French by Paul Lemoine. The whereabouts of the original French transcript remains a mystery. This English version is based on the French translation, but with reference to the Italian, thus rectifying a few inaccuracies in the Lemoine translation published in La Cause du désir, No. 88.

Emilia Granzotto: There is more and more talk of a crisis of psychoanalysis. It is said that Sigmund Freud is outdated, that modern society has found his work insufficient for understanding man or getting to the bottom of his relation with the world.

Jacques Lacan: These are just stories. In the first place, the crisis: it does not exist. There can be no such thing. Psychoanalysis hasn't even found its own limits – not yet. There is so much to discover in its practice and in its knowledge. In psychoanalysis, there is no immediate solution, only a long and patient search for reasons.

In the second place, Freud! How can he be considered outdated when we still haven't fully understood him? What is certain is that he made us understand things that were completely new, that we hadn't even imagined before him, from the problems of the unconscious to the importance of sexuality, from the subject's access to the symbolic to his subjection to the laws of language.

His doctrine threw truth into question. This is something that concerns each and every one of us personally. It's something quite different from a crisis. Let me repeat: we are far from Freud's goals. This is also because his name has been used to cover over a lot of things, there have been deviations, his followers did not always follow his path faithfully, and confusion has been created. After his death in 1939, some of his students even claimed to be practicing psychoanalysis differently, reducing his teaching to a few banal formulations: the ritualisation of technique, practice reduced to the treatment of behaviour and as a means of re-adapting the individual to his social surroundings. This is the negation of Freud, comfort psychoanalysis, for the salon.

He foresaw this himself. He said there are three untenable positions, three impossible tasks: to govern, to educate and to practice psychoanalysis. These days, it doesn't make much difference who takes the responsibility to govern, and everybody claims to be an educator. As for psychoanalysts, alas they thrive as magicians and quacks. Offering to help people signifies assured success and clients queue up at the door. Psychoanalysis is something else.

What exactly?

I define it as a symptom – one that reveals the discontents of the civilisation in which we are living. It is certainly not a philosophy. I abhor philosophy; it has been such a long time since it's had anything interesting to say. Psychoanalysis is not a faith, and I don't like calling it a science. Let's say it's a practice, and that it's concerned with what's not working out [*ce qui ne va pas*]. It's terribly difficult because it claims to introduce the impossible and imaginary into everyday life. So far, it has obtained certain results but doesn't yet have any rules, and it lends itself to all sorts of equivocations.

It mustn't be forgotten that what is at stake is something totally new, whether in relation to medicine, or in relation to psychology and its annexes. Psychoanalysis is also very young. Freud died barely thirty-five years ago. His first book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, was published in 1900, with very little success. I believe about three hundred copies were sold in a few years. He had a handful of students, who were taken for crackpots, and who didn't even agree on the way to put into practice and interpret what they'd been taught.

What's not working out for people today?

There is this great life-weariness, as a consequence of the race towards progress. Through psychoanalysis, people expect to discover how far one can drag out this life-weariness.

What pushes people to get analysed?

Fear! When things happen to them, even things that they wanted to happen, things they don't understand, people get frightened. They suffer from not understanding and they gradually fall into a state of panic. That's neurosis. In hysterical neurosis, the body becomes ill through fear of being ill and without being ill in reality. In obsessional neurosis, fear puts bizarre things in people's heads, thoughts they cannot control, phobias in which forms and objects acquire various meanings and make them afraid.

For example?

A neurotic can feel compelled by a dreadful need to go, dozens of times, to see if a tap has really been turned off, or if something is really in its place, while being certain that the tap is off and the thing is where it should be all along. There are no pills that can cure that. You have to discover why you're doing that and know what it means.

And the treatment?

Neurotics are sufferers who can be treated with speech, and above all with their own. They must speak, recount and explain themselves. Freud defined psychoanalysis as the subject's assumption of his own history, in so far as it is constituted by the speech addressed to another. In psychoanalysis, speech rules – there is no other remedy. Freud explained that the unconscious is not so deep, but it is beyond the reach of conscious investigation. And he said that in this unconscious, the one that speaks is a subject in the subject, transcending the subject. Speech is psychoanalysis's main force.

Whose speech, the patient's or the psychoanalyst's?

In psychoanalysis, the terms "patient", "doctor", "cure", are no more appropriate than the passive expressions that one commonly falls into using. One says: "to get oneself analysed". It is wrong. The one who does the real work in analysis is the one who speaks, the analysand subject. Even if he does so in the way suggested by the analyst who indicates how to proceed and helps him through his interventions. He is also provided with an interpretation.

At first sight, the interpretation seems to give a meaning to what the analysand has said. In reality, interpretation is subtler, aiming to efface the meaning of the things that the patient is suffering from. The aim is to show him, through his own account, that the symptom, the illness, let's say, has no relation to anything, that it doesn't have any meaning at all. Even if it appears to be real, it does not exist.

The way to handle this speech act demands a lot of practice and infinite patience. Patience and a sense of measure are the tools of psychoanalysis. The technique consists of knowing how much help to give the analysing subject. As a result, psychoanalysis is difficult.

When one hears the name Jacques Lacan, one inevitably thinks of the expression "Return to Freud". What does this mean?

Exactly what it says. Psychoanalysis is Freud. If one wants to do psychoanalysis, one must return to Freud, to his terms and his definitions, read and interpreted literally. I founded a Freudian School, in Paris, precisely with this aim. I have been expounding my point of view for over twenty years: returning to Freud simply means clearing the field of the deviations and equivocations of existential phenomenology, for example, and also of the institutional formalism of psychoanalytic societies, by taking up the reading of Freud's teaching according to the principles defined and listed in his work. Rereading Freud just means rereading Freud. In psychoanalysis, anyone who doesn't do so is using it inappropriately.

But Freud is difficult. And it is said that Lacan makes him flatly impossible to understand. Lacan is reproached for speaking and above all for writing in a way that only few acolytes can hope to understand.

I know, people think of me as an obscurantist who hides his thoughts behind smoke screens. I don't know why. As for analysis, I repeat, with Freud, that it is "the intersubjective game through which truth enters the real". Isn't that clear? But psychoanalysis is not child's play.

My books are called incomprehensible, but for whom? I didn't write them for everyone, for them to be understood by all. On the contrary, I have never been the slightest bit concerned about catering to the tastes of my readers, whoever they may be. I have things to say and I say them. It is enough for me to have a public who reads. If they don't understand, be patient. As for the number of readers, I have had more luck than Freud. My books even get read too much, it amazes me.

I am also convinced that in ten years at most, those who read me will find me completely transparent, like a good glass of beer. Perhaps people will then say: "Oh Lacan, he's so banal."

What are the characteristics of Lacanianism?

It's a little early to say, as Lacanianism doesn't exist yet. We're beginning to get a slight whiff of it, like a presentiment.

As for Lacan, he is a gentleman who has been practicing psychoanalysis for at least forty years, and who has been studying it for as many. I believe in structuralism and in the science of language. What I say in my book is that "what the Freudian discovery returns us to is the enormity of the order in which we are inserted, into which we are, so to speak, born a second time, from out of the state that is rightly called *infans*, without speech".

The symbolic order upon which Freud's discovery is based is constituted by language, as a concrete moment of universal discourse. It is the world of speech that creates the world of things, which are initially muddled up in all that is in the process of becoming. Words are all there is to give a finite sense to the essence of things. Without words nothing would exist. What would pleasure be without the intermediary of speech?

My idea is that, by setting out the laws of the unconscious in his main works (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *Totem and Taboo*), Freud anticipated the theories that a few years later Ferdinand de Saussure used to open the way towards modern linguistics.

And what of pure thought?

Like everything else, it is subject to the laws of language. Only words can engender it and give it consistency. Without language, humanity wouldn't advance a single step in its investigations into thought. Hence, psychoanalysis! Whatever function one wants to give it, a means of treatment, training or inquiry, there is only one medium that we make use of: the patient's speech. And all speech calls for a response.

So, analysis as a dialogue then? There are some people who interpret it as being more of a lay substitute for confession.

Confession, it's nothing of the sort! In psychoanalysis you confess nothing. You go along and simply say everything that is in your head. Precisely, words.

Psychoanalysis's discovery is man as a speaking animal. It is for the analyst to connect the words he hears up in a series and give them a meaning, a signification. For a good analysis, there needs to be an agreement, an affinity between the analysand and the analyst. Through the words of one, the other tries to get an idea of what is at stake, and find, beyond the apparent symptom, the hard knot of truth. Another of the analyst's functions is to explain the meaning of words so the patient can understand what might be expected of an analysis.

It is a relation of enormous trust.

It is more of an exchange in which what's important is that the one speaks and the other listens. Even in silence. The analyst doesn't ask any questions and has no ideas. He gives only the answers that he really wants to give to questions that his desire gives rise to. But, in the end, the analysand always goes where the analyst leads him.

That's the treatment. And the cure? Can one be cured of neurosis?

Psychoanalysis succeeds when it clears the field both of the symptom and of the real. That is to say, when it arrives at the truth.

Can you put the same idea in a less Lacanian way?

I call a symptom everything that comes from the real. And the real is everything that doesn't work out, that doesn't function, that gets in the way of man's life and the affirmation of his personality. The real always returns to the same place, and that's where you'll always find it, with the same semblances. Scientists assert that nothing is impossible in the real. You've got to have a nerve to say things like that. Or rather, as I suspect, total ignorance of what you're doing and what you're saying.

The real and the impossible are antithetical. They cannot go together. Analysis pushes the subject towards the impossible. It tries to get the subject to consider reality as it really is, in other words imaginary and entirely devoid of sense. While the real, like a voracious bird, does nothing but feed on meaningful things, actions that have a meaning.

One always hears that one should give a meaning to this and that, to one's own thoughts, to one's own aspirations, to desires, to sex, to life. But as the scientists keep knocking themselves out explaining to us, we know nothing about life.

My fear is that because of them, the real, this monstrous thing that does not exist, will end up taking over. Science is in the process of substituting itself for religion, and it is still more despotic, obtuse and obscurantist. There is an atom God, a space God, etc. If either science or religion wins, psychoanalysis is finished.

What is the relation between science and psychoanalysis today?

For me the only true, serious science that's worth keeping up to date with is science fiction. The other, the official one, with its altars in laboratories, gropes its way forward without a goal and is even starting to be afraid of its own shadow.

It seems that the moment of anxiety has arrived for scientists. In their sterilised laboratories, in their starched white coats, these overgrown children, who play with unknown things, manipulate ever more complex apparatuses and

invent ever more abstruse formulae, are starting to ask themselves what might happen tomorrow and what their always new research might bring. At long last, I say. And what if it's already too late? Biologists, physicists or chemists, they call them. I call them lunatics!

Though they are already in the process of wrecking the universe, only now does it occur to them to ask if it might actually be dangerous. And what would happen if it all blew up in their faces? If the bacteria, cultivated so lovingly in their white laboratories, were to turn into a deadly foe? If the world were to be swept away by a plague of such bacteria along with all the crap in it, beginning with these scientists in their laboratories?

To Freud's three impossible professions, government, education, psychoanalysis, I will add a fourth: science – though they, the scientists, are unaware that their position is untenable.

That's quite a pessimistic view of what is commonly seen as progress.

Not at all! I am not pessimistic. Nothing will happen, for the simple reason that man is a good-for-nothing. He is not even capable of destroying himself. Personally, the idea of an all-encompassing plague created by man strikes me as marvellous. It would prove that man had finally succeeded in achieving something with his own hands, his own head, without divine, natural or any other kind of intervention.

All these beautiful bacteria fattened up for fun and spread across the world like the locusts of the Bible would signify the triumph of man. But it will not happen. Fortunately, science is going through a crisis of responsibility, everything will return to the order of things, as one says. As I have said, the real will win out as always, and we will be as done for as ever.

That's another of Jacques Lacan's paradoxes. You are not only reproached for your difficult language and obscure concepts, but for your wordplay, linguistic pleasantries, spoonerisms and precisely your paradoxes. Those who listen to you or read you have a right to feel disorientated.

Actually, I'm not joking, I'm saying very serious things. It's merely that I use words in the same way that the scientists we were just talking about use their distillation equipment and electronic gadgets. I always try to index myself on the experience of psychoanalysis.

You say that the real does not exist. But the average person knows that the real is the world, everything that surrounds him, everything that can be seen by the naked eye and touched.

First, let's get rid of this average person, who, for starters, does not exist. He is only

a statistical fiction. Individuals exist – that's all. When I hear talk of the man in the street, of surveys, mass phenomena, or anything of the sort, I think of all the patients I've seen on my couch over the last forty-years of listening. Not one of them is similar to another in any respect; none of them have the same phobias, the same anxieties, the same way of telling their story, the same fear of not understanding. The average person who is that: me, you, my concierge, the president of the Republic?

We are speaking of the real, of the world that is there in front of us.

Exactly. The difference between the real, namely what doesn't work out, and the symbolic and the imaginary, namely truth, is that the real is the world. To see for yourself that the world does not exist, that there isn't any such thing, you only have to think of all the trivial things that an infinite number of idiots believe the world to be. And I invite *Panorama's* readership to reflect thoroughly on what they've just read, before accusing me of paradoxes.

Always more pessimistic...

It's not true. I neither number myself as an alarmist nor as one of the anguished. Woe betide the psychoanalyst who has yet to get beyond the state of anxiety. It's true that there are some shocking and all-consuming things around us, like television, which regularly gobbles up a great many of us. But this is only because there are so many people who let themselves get consumed by it, to the point of actually finding an interest in what they're watching.

And then there are other monstrous and even more absorbing things: rockets that go to the moon, the exploration of the ocean's depths, etc. All these things devour us, but there's nothing to make a drama about. I am quite sure that when we've finally had enough of rockets, and television, and all their damned wild goose chases, we will find other things to keep us busy. Isn't there a revival of religion? And what more all-consuming a beast could there be than religion? It has served as a constant carnival for our amusement over the centuries, as has already been demonstrated.

My response to all this is that man has always been able to adapt to bad situations. The only conceivable real that we have access to is precisely one we have to come to terms with – making sense of things as I've said. Otherwise, Freud would not have become famous and I would be a secondary school teacher.

Is anxiety always like this or are their different forms of anxiety linked to certain social conditions, certain stages of history and certain parts of the globe?

The anxiety of the scientist who is afraid of his own discovery might seem to be a recent phenomenon, but what do we know about what happened in other

periods of history and of the dramas of other researchers? The anxiety of the worker tied to the assembly line like a rower to the oars of a galley – this is the anxiety of today. Or, more simply, it is linked to the words and definitions of today.

But what is anxiety in psychoanalytic terms?

It is something that is situated outside our bodies, a fear, but a fear of nothing that the body, the mind included, can provide a reason for. In short, the fear of fear! A lot of these fears and anxieties, at the level at which we perceive them, have something to do with sex. Freud used to say that, for the speaking animal called Man, sex is without remedy and without hope. One of the analyst's tasks is to find, in the patient's speech, the knot between anxiety and sex, that great unknown.

Now that sex is available everywhere – sex in the cinema, sex in the theatre, on the television, in the papers, in songs, on beaches – one hears that people are less anxious about problems linked to the sexual sphere. The taboo has fallen, they say, people are no longer afraid of sex.

Invasive sex mania is merely an advertising phenomenon. Psychoanalysis is a serious matter that concerns, I repeat, a strictly personal relation between two individuals: the subject and the analyst. There is no such thing as collective psychoanalysis just as there is no such thing as mass anxiety or mass neurosis.

That sex has been put on the agenda and is on display on street corners, treated like any old detergent advertised on TV, doesn't bring promise of any benefit. I'm not saying that it's a bad thing; but it's certainly not going to clear up specific anxieties and problems. It is part of fashion, part of this false liberalisation afforded to us like a benefit handed down from on high by the so-called permissive society. But it's not of any use at the level of psychoanalysis.

Translated by Philip Dravers

