

NIDA LACAN STUDY AND READING GROUP: SEPTEMBER SEMINAR

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Derrida, Psychoanalysis, and Lacan: From Resistance to Love

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The French postwar era in the second half of the twentieth century was like a fairy-tale medieval Sorbonne. This era produced the finest and prolific thinkers who flourished new, diverse, and revolutionary schools of ideas, which are sometimes identified as French theory. French theory still rules almost every intellectual domain and the higher educational scenes in the West. Two well-known figures in this tradition undoubtedly are Lacan and Derrida whose works have been making great impacts across the global humanities and social sciences. One thing that is shared by both thinkers is the proverbial ambiguities and impregnability of their works. The relationship between these two thinkers have been intimate as well as uneasy. In this seminar we will endeavor to examine how Derrida reads, criticizes, and interprets Lacan. Such a task is unnervingly and daunting for one might be easily be entrapped in a double-bind of theories. To make things better, I will discuss Derrida's understanding of Lacan by examining two of his seminal lectures: "Résistances de la Psychanalyse" delivered at Sorbonne on October 1991 and "For the Love of Lacan," also delivered in 1991.

Let's us begin with *resistances*. In his familiar fashion of textual play, Derrida draws the guiding thread of his arguments by introducing and exploring the roots of his key phrases: 'one must', 'there is', 'resistance', and 'analysis'. He is making all attempt to generate a brain-teaser by going deep into the etymology of a words and the linguistic logic underlying his statements. By resistance Derrida has multiple meanings in mind, most of them envisaged by psychoanalysis. Resistance as a concept in psychoanalysis denotes everything visible or hidden in physical and psychological action on the part of an analysand that blocks admittance to his unconscious. Such a resistance is "impossible to overcome or interpret...but then he [Freud] realized that resistance was itself a means of reaching the repressed and unveiling the secret of neurosis; in fact, the forces to be seen at work in resistance and in repression were one and the same," (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973, 395). Derrida is also referring to the resistance as a hostile attitude that appears within the psychoanalyst when trying to expose the unconscious desire. Lacan sees resistance in the imaginary relation of the ego and psychanalytic treatment that includes the analysis of this

resistance. In other words, for Lacan resistance was the defense mechanism that the ego undertakes.

Among many resistances are for example resistance in politics, resistance of the analysand, resistance of the analyst, and resistance to psychoanalysis itself. The last resistance and the analysis of this resistance are crucial questions for Derrida. He begins by investigating Freud's tales of resistances in one of his own dreams, the dream, Irma's Injection that Lacan called it the dream of the dreams. The dream was celebrated by Freud himself that he admitted that this dream empowered him to proclaim that in each dream there is a wish fulfilment. Derrida recounts Freud's confession about his own 'feeling, a premonition' about the dream of Irma's Injection.

The interpretation, the analytic deciphering, the *Deutung* of a certain fragment did not go far enough: a hidden meaning (*verborgene Sinn*) exceeds the analysis. Let us say for the moment that the meaning *exceeds* and not that it resists analysis: the concept of resistance to analysis. (Derrida, 1998, 4)

Something that escape from analysis is that inaccessible secret, a resistance that Freud wants to expose. Freud writes in *The Interpretation of Dream* that his treatment of patients with hysterical anxiety was partially successful because the physical symptoms persisted and very hard to tackle. Freud and his patient Irma were both unsatisfied with the treatment. Freud remained unsatisfied about the meaning and the interpretation of his own dream. He saw an unbridgeable gap in this dream. Freud gives the details of his frustration in analyzing this dream when Irma continued to complain about her pain after the treatment ended, "I am not responsible for the persistence of Irma's pains; responsibility lies *either* in her recalcitrance to accepting my solution, *or* in the unfavorable sexual condition [Irma was a young widow] under which she lives which I cannot alter." (Freud, 1991, 427). With this dream Freud added the concept of '*either, or*' to his theory of the dream-thoughts. "Psychoanalysis is justly suspicious. One of its rules is the *whatever interrupts the progress of analytic work is a resistance*," (Ibid, 661-662).

Derrida highlights in this lecture, two observations that he terms 'fascinating' and 'passionate' in Freud's interpretation of Irma's Injection: First, Freud in his analysis, identified the figure of Irma with her two friends and even his own wife as well. For Freud these multiple figures associated with Irma were related to the processes of condensation and displacement that always happens in dreams. The real person in a dreamer's dream often is substituted for another person or other persons.

"Thus I had been comparing my patient Irma with two other people who would also have been recalcitrant to treatment" (186) "the other woman, whom I had as a patient in the dream instead of Irma, was also a young widow." (193) "certain other themes played a part in the dream, which were not so obviously connected with my exculpation from Irma's illness: my daughter's illness and that of my patient who bore the same name, the injurious effect of cocaine, the disorder of my patient who was travelling in Egypt." (197)

The important thing in the dream analysis, however, was the undecipherable and unresolved part or 'gap'. In the dream, Irma looked 'pale and puffy', "My patient (Irma) always had a rosy complexion. I began to suspect that someone else was being substituted for her."

(Freud, 1991,184). Later in the book, Freud clarifies this substitution further, seeing in the image of Irma a ‘collective figure’.

None of these figures whom I lighted upon by following up ‘Irma’ appeared in the dream in bodily shape. They were concealed behind the dream figure of ‘Irma’, which was thus turned into a collective image with, it must be admitted, a number of contradictory characteristics. Irma became the representative of all these other figures which had been sacrificed to the work of condensation, since I passed over to *her*, point by point, everything that reminded me of *them*.... the actual features of two or more people into a single dream-image.” (Freud, 1991, 399-400)

Freud was mysteriously ambivalent of Irma. His dislike apparently was stemmed from Irma’s rejected to have Freud’s solution for her pain and her acceptance of another physician’s solution. Derrida claims that Freud’s ambivalence might also have been another hidden resistance.

At no moment does Freud have even an inkling that a resistance might be, in this context, something other than a resistance to his solution, to his analysis or, beyond this context and in general, that a resistance might be something other than a resistance full of meaning. (Derrida, 2002, 10)

The second important question Derrida arises from this dream is Freud’s insistence on the fact that each dream has a navel, a Centre, and that ambiguous part that resists interpretation— *Omphalos* [in ancient Greek, navel of the earth] as Derrida writes, “‘inaccessible *topos*’, impenetrable, unfathomable, unanalyzable, like a navel, an *omphalos*, (Derrida, 1991, 11). Derrida identifies this gap in Freud as ‘the knotting and less on the hole’ and then adds that for Lacan it was a gap and hole to be sutured by psychoanalysis. The gap was the gap of unconscious to resist to enter into consciousness. Derrida takes a leap and call this impenetrable gap as the fight between two forces, that intellectual curiosity (which is also a force), discipline, psychological knowledge. In order to master these resistances one need to opposing them, “by buttressing oneself with an antithesis.” (Ibid, 13)

Derrida asserts that resistances are too many and cannot be unified.

If it is true that the concept of *resistance to analysis* cannot unify itself, for nonaccidental or noncontingent reason, then the concept of analysis and psychoanalytic analysis, the very concept of *psychoanalysis* will have known the same fate...if there is *one* resistance, there is not “*la psychoanalyse*”—whether one understands it here as a system of theoretical norms or as a charter of institutional practices. (Derrida, 1998, 20)

Derrida wanders to find another solution to the resistance by going back to psychoanalysis. He claims that compulsion to repeat is the strongest of resistances to analysis, where this repetition is in fact the insistence of that gap or navel that all his lecture is based on. The compulsion to repeat “is that whose resistance psychoanalysis today represents, in surest form of its ruse: disguised as nonresistance.” (Ibid, 24)

And finally, Derrida contends that his own deconstruction is an equal and parallel to psychoanalysis but not an alternative. “What is called “deconstruction” undeniably obeys an analytic exigency, at once critical and analytic. It is always a matter of *undoing*,

desedimenting, decomposing, deconstituting sediments, artefacta, presuppositions, institutions.” (27) Like psychoanalysis, deconstruction represent a desire for “simple and self-present originarity” (29) like *arche-trace* and *arche-writing, pharmakon, supplement*, etc. As such both psychoanalysis and deconstruction are caught up in a double bind. “Hyperanalyticism with which I identify “deconstruction”. (35), is inspired by the Enlightenment, transcendental phenomenology, and psychoanalytic reason that tirelessly analyzes the resistances.

Derrida also refers to Lacan’s insistence on the indestructability of the letter in his *Seminar on the Purloined Letter* calling his stand ‘dogmatic and idealist’. He asserts that the letter is divisible and the fact that the letter restores the lack by its return to its destination as Lacan emphasizes brings psychoanalysis to the boundaries of the traditional metaphysics. In other words, for Derrida the arrival of the letter to a specific addressee means restitution of the signified—the common metaphysical strategy. But Lacan replaces in this context the signifier for the letter and reaffirms the primacy and indestructability of the signifier.

For Freud the navel of dream is that knot in dream interpretation that doesn’t lend itself to interpretation, “the tangle of dream thoughts which cannot be unraveled which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown.” (Freud, 1991, 671). And in a footnote, he remarks that in comparison to his other three female patients Irma was recalcitrant and ‘foolish’, but there is a navel in each dream, “There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable –that is its point of contact with the unknown, (186). Derrida emphasizes that the resistance to interpretation put restrictions on knowledge, “a resistance to interpretation constitutes a limit to knowledge, an inappropriable otherness that both exhausts and excites thinking.” (Al-Kassim, 2007, 116)

Lacan at the outset of *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, when introduces his theory of the first concept, the unconscious, clearly refers to the unconscious as a gap that Freud identified as the navel of dream, the inaccessible ‘zone of shades’ and indiscernible core and ‘unknown centre’ in the dream. Lacan Lacan speaks about this in great detail in *Seminar II*. The removal or ‘stitching up’ of this gap is the focal points of psychoanalysis.

In conclusion, Derrida was very interested to identify at once psychoanalysis and deconstruction as twins but not conjoined. Deconstruction for him functions as a parasite that could harm and heals like his concept, *pharmakon*. In the meantime, Derrida affirms affinity between psychoanalysis and deconstruction and finally concludes that both psychoanalysis and deconstruction are, at the final analysis, adherent to a kind of self-resistant analysis.

In *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, the resistance to psychoanalysis offered by deconstruction (or, for that matter, any other discourse) is to be thought only alongside psychoanalysis’s own conception of ‘resistance-to-analysis’, which implies a resistance internal to psychoanalysis itself. Analysis and resistance are, in other words, intensely knotted together in the very movement or production of psychoanalysis, since each depend on and supplement the other. (Wortham, 2010, 158)

Derrida starts off “For the Love of Lacan,” with two questions or as the author identifies exclamations with intriguing grammatical structure, the first is in future anterior (future perfect) tense and the second in conditional.

What wouldn't Lacan have said!

What will he not have said! (Derrida, 1998, 39)

Derrida combines place the ‘future perfect’ and ‘conditional’ in order to highlights the problem of “archivization, of what remains and what does not remain.” (Ibid, 40). He brings the notion of speech and writing and how they both, with the help of psychoanalysis, especially Lacan, registers and archivize ‘inscription,’ ‘erasure,’ ‘blanks,’ and he non-said. Derrida claims that in this archivization things micrological and microscopic and things in themselves always escape attention. Instead of this, positioning and theses persist. Derrida introduces all these points in relation to Lacan's tryst with philosophers and philosophy. Derrida refers to Lacan's *Seminar XXIV: 1976-1977, L'insu que sait de l'une bevue' aile a mourre*, a seminar that he introduces the unknown known beyond knowledge by which the subject produces a signifier that has no meaning. “The desire remained to discover a new signifier on the basis of the researches on the symptom... A signifier that, like the Real, would not have any kind of meaning,” (Marini, 1992, 247). In reference, to the first session of this seminar which took place on 16th of November 1976, Derrida contradicts Lacan's maxim in his seminar on Poe's “Purloined Letter” where he stated that the letter always arrives at its destination. Derrida states that the letter might not arrive and go astray. Derrida goes further that in psychoanalysis and in Lacan's discourse too, the archivization of memories and what is repressed become problematic because they are subject to “efface (the destructibility of the letter or the name.” (44)

Like linguistic references in every page of Freud's writing, every page of Lacan's discourse is colored with myriad direct or indirect references to philosophy. Derrida is cognizant of as he says in his lecture, “Lacan's refinement and competence, his philosophical originality, have no precedent in the tradition of psychoanalysis...Lacan is so much more aware as a philosopher than Freud, so much more a philosopher than Freud!” (47).

Derrida summarizes his arguments in “For the Love...” into the following three points by reaffirming and reappropriating his positions in his text on Poe's short fiction, “The purloined Letter”. His arguments could be characterized as drawing parallels with Lacan's thoughts or paraphrasing him.

1. Derrida states that he read Freud in a different way to Lacan and this means that he deconstructs the privilege of presence, the presence of the ego by following Heidegger and Husserl. Lacan's discourse was the most deconstructable for Derrida probably because Lacan's discourse was always circled around the impossibilities of all kinds. On the whole, Derrida underlines eight motifs in his comments on Lacan's seminar on Poe. (1) Lacan appropriates a circular trajectory for the letter that arises from the lack and return to the place of lack from which it was detached. (2) In this ‘straight’ circular route of the letter, Lacan seeks the truth of the ‘origin’ and the ‘end’ for the trajectory of the signifier rises from the origin and return to the same place. The analyst in his role as the one who unveil the truth pursues the truth as the object of his unveiling. (3) For Lacan the imaginary dimension of speech was called ‘empty speech’ and the symbolic dimension ‘full speech’. The truth, according to Lacan, has to be derived from the full speech because this speech transforms the structure of the

language where the subject has less or no control over this speech. (4) The analytical process falls into phono-phallogo-centrism, because it always favors speech in its immediacy. This attitude ignores ‘archiving apparatus of repetition’, something that was present from Plato to Heidegger in the history of metaphysics. (5) Lacan furnishes a transcendental position for the phallus in the advent of desire. This links the truth with castration complex. Derrida doesn’t see Lacan’s revision of his theory of the phallus since his *Seminar: XX* in early 1970s. (6) The language of dreams as far as they are readable is organized symbolically is phono-centric even if it is articulated ‘phonematically’ or ‘phonetically’. (7) Lacan ignores or misrecognizes in his reading of Poe’s short fiction the ‘literary structure of narration’. This misrecognition is part of ‘psychoanalytic hermeneutics. (8) Overlooking of the outcome of the ‘double in Poe’s story’ scars the boundaries of the imaginary and the symbolic.

Derrida repeatedly confirms his statement that contrary to Lacan’s claim, the letter doesn’t necessarily arrive at its destination. Lacan insists on the contrary, for this is in the nature of signifier to stay and arrives in its movement back to its empty place identified with the destination. To put it another way, Lacan emphasizes on the insistence of the unconscious residues. Derrida further goes on in *The Post Card*, that Lacan return to himself by his persistence on the inevitable arrival of the letter, “that is, the whole: a dogma of unity,” (Derrida cited in Roudinesco, 2014, 75). Roudinesco argues that Derrida take a different road on this for Lacan himself stated in his essay “Lituraterre” that, “My own text would no more resolve itself by me.” (Lacan cited in Roudinesco, 74).

2. In Derrida’s opinion Lacan tends to revise and ‘recast’ the conceptual meaning of his own theories. He claims that after 1969, Lacan was influenced by his *Of Grammatology* (1967) for as he claims Lacan’s discourse become more ‘grammatologically’ after this influence. Still, Lacan doesn’t restrict the signifier to its phonematic contents. Derrida also indicates his skepticism about the future rendering of Lacan’s oral seminars since the publication of *Écrits* because of their tape-recorded nature and the problems related to copyright. Contrary to this incredulity, Lacan’s seminars have been published in French and in its English translation smoothly.
3. Derrida refers to Freud’s theory of the *libido* and its masculine nature which was fully supported by Lacan, but he claims that “not only was I not criticizing Lacan, but I was opposing Lacan or showing him to be wrong. The question lies elsewhere: it is the question of reason and of the principle of reason,” (Lacan, 1998, 63). Here Derrida develops his own strategy of deconstruction which appropriate engagement and disengagement with psychoanalysis at the same time,

Deconstruction for Derrida was essentially the experience of the impossible whereas Psychoanalysis is the suture of the gap created by this impossibility. This suture signals Lacan’s ability to get ahead of the deconstruction. For instance, when anxiety is caused by the existence of this gap in an analysand, Lacan’s intention is to suture this gap with detaching of the analysand from the traumatic real and the depressing lack.

From clinical point of view, when it becomes pathological, anxiety can be overcome if the subject manages to turn away from this traumatic real and distance itself from a

dread of lack, source of disappointment. It can then grasp its signification.
(Roudinesco, 2014, 77)

Thus, Derrida and Lacan are related to each other in so far as the gap of impossibility is concerned. But in the meantime, it is a relation of non-relation and non-relation of a relation at the same time. With Derrida we are experiencing the gap and with Lacan going beyond to do something about it. This signals a lesson that we might draw from Lacanian literary theory where the ultimate purpose is to reach the gap and textual blind spots in a literary discourse where language doesn't lend itself to signification. The moments the signification reach a deadlock, we are in the unconscious. The same happens in Lacan clinic. Lacan analysis, "refers us to in every turn to the verbal rough-and-tumble that takes place between analyst and analysand. Indeed, we could go further than this and say that spoken speech enjoys a special advantage over the extenuated language of 'theory', and continue to enjoy it even when the theories seasons his writing with the vernacular," (Bowie, 1991, 159). By seeking such redundancies and linguistic plays that Lacan terms *linguistricks* he finds himself in the middle of desire as desire also plays in the similar way. But desire is something that Derrida would always like to sidestep. Derrida had difficulties in Lacan enticing definition of desire, as he said in an interview, "What bothers me with the use of the word 'desire', and I have often tried to avoid it, is that where the word appears in writers such as Lacan, and well before him too, it tends to be defined as part of the structure of the subject: of the soul, the psychological and psychoanalytic subject as we have it in Freud and Lacan," (Derrida, 1991, 101). Derrida has thus a non-psychoanalytic understanding of the concept of desire for , as he admits "it's not tied to consciousness nor the unconscious nor to the psyche..." (Ibid)

What is perhaps striking here is the existence of a hidden and interminable game of love and rivalry behind theories of the two French giants. Derrida in his address to psychoanalysts in 1981 identified his presence in psychoanalysis as a 'foreign body' which neither can be debarred from it nor it can be incorporated into the larger body of psychoanalysis. Lacan claimed that he showed Monsieur Derrida a 'talented young man' the way. Derrida, I have no doubt, uses and plays with Lacanian concepts, arguments, and even his literary and philosophical examples and references freely and, on occasion, leaves them unacknowledged.

Regarding contemporaries, Lacan often felt he had been "plagiarized,"... Let's take as an example [sic] his relations with Jacques Derrida, who was an attentive, scrupulous, and uncompromising reader of Lacan's work. Well, Lacan could not stand him: he claimed that Derrida stole his ideas. (Roudinesco, 2014, 48)

Lacan is openly in disagreement with Derrida's radicalization of the concept of the real buried in the textual mesh as his famous maxim 'nothing beyond text' signals. Lacan remarks in *My Teaching*, "Monsieur Derrida has invented grammatology to entice people who are partial to such things, the ones who at the moment think that, just because linguistics has flung everything out, it's been a failure." (Lacan, 2008, 18).

In her *Read My Desire*, Joan Copjec criticizes Derrida on behalf of Lacan on two counts. (1) She criticizes Derrida's concept of difference seeing it "in support of an apolitical (naïve) optimism regarding the inevitability of change," (Copjec, 2015, 58). Copjec claims that nothing repeat itself exactly in order to reappear as before. It is because, the context that produces meaning is always changing. (2) Lacan shows us that Derrida's deconstruction "of the subject errs by conflating the infinity of the subject's desire with the subject itself." (59). The author adds that Lacan's subject is not infinite, but its desire is infinite, and the subject's

drawback brings about “the infinity, or unsatisfiability, of its desire,” (61). The limitation of the subject arises from the fact that subject is expurgated from the origin that makes it whole. Derrida’s non-psychoanalytic reading of Freud’s essay “Mystic Writing Pad,” is the ground of his theory of writing as predating speech. He also sees this essay as an evidence to the resistance of psychoanalysis to phono-centrism. This is non-psychoanalytic reading because Derrida investigate the psyche as a writing machine. As it was stated earlier, Lacan reaffirms time and again that speech is closer to the truth of the subject and its desire.

In *Without Alibi*, Derrida claims that psychoanalysis is like a civilization which is not dead yet, but it is mortal, and its ‘revolution’ is indestructible. By contrast, psychoanalysis existed as a non-articulated knowledge even before Freud in all civilizations of the world. Its birthplace was in fact in mythologies and the earliest part of the human history. Its existence, therefore, would not be contingent to any civilization. Derrida also argues that psychoanalysis remains foreigner in the Arabic, Islamic and East Asian cultures. “Why does psychoanalysis never get a foothold in the vast territory of the Arabo-Islamic culture? Not to mention East Asia,” (Derrida, 2002, 255). This, however, is largely unfounded. Jung made enormous attempts to validate his theory of archetypes on the basis of Koran and Sufism and also Buddhism. Lacan gone even further, as he termed his 900-page *Écrits* as a mystical discourse.

With all this Derrida still remains as Lacanian or less Lacanian than others for, as Derrida hinted in *Resistances to Psychoanalysis*, Lacan’s theories definitely irresistibly critical of the contemporary social, cultural, and media discourses, because they all are validating a ‘normalizing’ and ‘reductive’ demonstration of the metaphysics. It is curious enough that deconstruction and psychoanalysis both have much to say in order to disassemble the theoretical mechanism of each other. Derridean are keen to demonstrate the underlying nuances of phallogocentrism in Lacan’s discourse, whereas Lacanians would find it so easy unveil Derrida’s acephalic subject and its desire.

Notes:

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