

Human Canvas

Invention in the Real: Papers of the Freudian School of Melbourne, Vol. XXIV

Edited by Linda Clifton

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Good god, why ask oneself questions, and especially if they are any bit metaphysical when, god knows, after all everything is going so well, that you finish work at half past five, you have a whisky, you read a novel, usually a spy novel and you settle down in front of the television.

Jacques Lacan, qtd in *Invention in the Real*, xv

INVENTION IN THE REAL: PAPERS OF THE FREUDIAN SCHOOL OF MELBOURNE IS IN SIX thematically-arranged parts. It begins with 'Time and History', which is followed by 'The Lacanian Clinic Today', 'Psychoanalysis and the Child', 'On Love and Knowledge' and 'Analysis, the Arts and the Well Spoken'. 'Death and Psychoanalysis' rounds off the volume. Roughly three quarters of the papers thus divided are by members of the Freudian School of Melbourne. The remainder constitute translations of papers or book chapters by other contemporary analysts. As the volume's title, the quote above, and the titles of the various parts all suggest, the orientation is Lacanian.

The word 'Lacanian' can, of course, mean various things. More specifically, it can denote various traditions. Consider the way editor Linda Clifton, introducing the volume ('Logos' xv-xix), contrasts the above reverie on television, whisky and the quiet life with Lacan's comment elsewhere that

psychoanalysis is a practice subordinated to that which is most particular in the subject and, when Freud emphasizes this to the point of saying that psychoanalytic science must be called into question with the analysis of each case ... he shows the analysis and the way of his formation. (xvi)

Clifton proceeds to cite a discussion of this second quote of Lacan's, in a paper by French analyst Jean Allouch concerning the 'quasi-suicidal aspect' of Lacanian practice (xvi). To realise that the Allouch paper Clifton is referring to was itself

published, translated from the French, in an earlier volume of the *Papers of the Freudian School of Melbourne*—making hers an Australian citation of an Australian translation of a French citation of Lacan’s own citation of Freud’s German—is to gather something of the weave of Australian receptions of French uptakes of Freudian practice through this volume. Nor can one, speaking of tradition in this manner, ignore the Latin-American strand, particularly in Part VI (‘Death and Psychoanalysis’), which opens with a paper by one of the school’s co-founders, Oscar Zentner, originally of Argentina, proceeds to a paper translated from Allouch’s French, and then to a further three papers translated from the Spanish of Gustavo Etkin, formerly of Argentina, now Brazil. In sum, the version of Lacan which you find in these pages is a French/Australian/Latin American one.

Only the matter is not as simple as that. Any such traditions can also be considered in terms of the attitudes they bear *to tradition*, their stances on repetition. Consider, in this light, the ethos looming in Clifton’s first quote from Lacan and fully present in the second: an ethos determining that the lines of knowledge and inheritance which I have just sketched could be the very things one must ignore in order to get to work. For if psychoanalytic practice is to be ‘subordinated to that which is most particular in the subject’ and ‘psychoanalytic science must be called into question with the analysis of each case’, this undermines any sentiment of debt to the past, whatever that past might be, in favour of the clinical moment, the encounter it stages and the radical difference that might emerge there for one with ears to hear it; indeed, the way of one’s formation as analyst is through just such a crucible, elsewhere named by Lacan as ‘the sentiment of an absolute risk’ (xv).

But what could be more paradoxical than citing Lacan as some sort of authority on the matter, via the very quotes through which he undermines his, or any one else’s, future citability on psychoanalysis? You could ask some version of that question of many of the papers here. I don’t find anything cultish in these *Papers*, for all that. For actually the experience of reading this volume, beginning with Clifton’s expansive introduction—which cites Lacan in the above manner, and in the same breath makes reference to ‘the incompleteness of Lacanian theory’ (xvii)—is to find oneself in a refreshingly non-doctrinal space. Some of this might be attributed to the disconcerting, but also liberating, poetic quality of Lacan’s style. For Lacan will certainly be cited as authoritative, here as elsewhere. But it is never quite clear if the author citing him has the same meaning for words like ‘*lalangue*’ or ‘*jouissance*’ as you do. One certainly finds common interpretations over the pages of this volume. But one also gets a sense of the greater than usual difficulty one would have in trying to make Lacan doctrinal, by dint of his shape-shifting prose, which seems to alter its sense in each new context, yet retains a

stark resistance to transposition as well. That makes quoting—as opposed to paraphrasing—a little unpredictable.

Then again, churches can be founded anywhere. It seems to me that the more cogent reason things feel so decidedly undogmatic in these papers has to do with a certain almost empiricist commitment among the authors. David Pereira, in ‘The Necessity and the impossibility of interpretation’, a paper in Part II (‘The Lacanian Clinic Today’), puts the matter this way:

For my part, my practice is oriented by sticking as closely as possible to what is said/to the saying. This is something I understand to be emblematic of the practice and transmission of psychoanalysis within the Freudian school of Melbourne, and certainly of my training as an analyst within that school. (55)

Which empiricism is of course the import of Clifton’s second quote. One might well take one’s cue from knowledge, whatever knowledge attaches to this Lacanian discussion all around you, but the mainstay of clinical practice for these authors, they frequently state, is the analysand’s actual words. Their grounds for practice are the productive, traumatic and strangely creative powers that emerge in a focus on what is said by, i.e. through the mouth of, the analysand on the couch.

The way such a risky commitment manifests in a volume replete with reference to past texts is well illustrated in one of the most focused of its six parts: ‘Psychoanalysis and the Child.’

Its opening paper, which is something of an introduction to the three to follow, is by Tine Norregaard Arroyo and Michael Plastow. The authors begin with a brief history of the psychoanalysis of children by the early Freudians, with specific attention to the work of the analyst Hermine Hug-Hellmuth, whose early contributions, they argue, have been obscured in favour of Melanie Klein, Anna Freud and their epigones. Hug-Hellmuth, for instance, was the first to introduce play as a clinical technique for working with children. In fact, her writings ‘open up this area with a richness that was ignored by the child analysts who followed’ (102). A key instance of this lies in her stark indication of ‘the place of the parents in regard to the analysis of the child’: for one of the things the analyst of children specifically needs to work with is the typical ‘wish of the parents, in particular that of the mother, to retain the *status quo* of a particular *jouissance* in regard to the child’ (102). The distance of such a position from Freud’s own claim, in the famous ‘Little Hans’ case study, that the ideal situation for analysing children would be one in which ‘the authority of a father and a physician were

united in the one person' (Freud, qtd 107) is marked. Hug-Hellmuth point-blank criticised Freud's belief that a parent could analyse his or her own child.

Those are some of the things tabled in the first paper of this section. The two papers immediately to follow constitute translated excerpts from recent French books. The first of these is an excerpt from the 1996 second edition of Jean Bergès and Gabriel Balbo's *L'Enfant et la Psychanalyse: Nouvelles Perspectives* [*The Child and Psychoanalysis: New Perspectives*]. The excerpt again focuses on Hug-Hellmuth's ideas, including in relation to how one elicits a transferential relation (and therefore a demand upon the analyst, and through that an articulation of desire) from the child, who is often there against his or her will. It also canvasses how an analyst might work to intervene with that child's parents. For one needs to realise, as Hug-Hellmuth offers, that the very presence of their child in analysis represents 'a narcissistic wound ... in play for them from one end of the treatment to the other,' with all sorts of potential negative effects upon the treatment (113).

The next paper in Part III is an excerpt from Erik Porge's 1996 book *Freud Fliess: Mythe et Chimère de l'autoanalyse* [*Freud Fliess: Myth and Chimera of Self-analysis*]. Porge's book criticises instances in the history of psychoanalysis where a conflation has occurred between the positions Lacan theorised as (i) 'the Name of the Father' (i.e. the signifier of Oedipal law for the subject) and (ii) 'the Subject Supposed of Knowledge'¹ (i.e. the position allotted the analyst in the transference, as that being who might know the truth of the analysand's symptom). Porge cites and criticises several instances of such conflation, beginning with what he sees as a version of it in Freud's filial relationship to Fliess, before proceeding to the cases of analysts analysing their own children. His argument relies upon the joint contention that, while 'The Name of the Father' is an indispensable element of neurosis, prior to, throughout and beyond the analysis, the figure of the 'Subject Supposed of Knowledge' can be 'desupposed' through that same analysis. Indeed, to 'traverse the fantasm' and so conclude one's analysis involves, as Gustavo Etkin states in another part of the volume, becoming 'convinced that knowledge is not incarnated in someone' (267), a desupposition which will leave analysands with no grounds other—and this is the freedom it offers—than an attention 'to what is said/to the saying' all around them. Hence the need rigorously to separate these two positions in the clinic.

¹ The more familiar English translation of Lacan's *sujet supposé savoir* is 'The Subject Supposed to Know'. The Freudian School of Melbourne uses 'The Subject Supposed of Knowledge' as their preferred translation.

Part III concludes with a case study by Norregaard Arroyo, the analysis of a ten year old boy, whose father is a welder. The boy was brought to analysis due to recurrent accidents with his father's welding tools:

His symptoms, the accidents and burn marks on his body appeared at the crossing point of the knowledge about the 'welds' of his own body and his attempts at 'welding' the parents' relationship. (125)

Norregaard Arroyo proceeds to discuss her work with the parents of this child as well, and so offers something of an illustration of the ideas and practices discussed in relation to Hug-Hellmuth and the other early analysts over the previous three articles. The effect of the four papers overall, and in this specific order, is to revitalise the tradition on the topic by bringing certain, hitherto little regarded, critical knowledges to bear on it; but it is also to offer 'the saying' (which might include what is said via the body and its 'welds') as pivotal to the validity of any of this introducing, translating, and theorising.

What does one do with 'the saying' that thus emerges? This is the overarching question of the volume, the title of which is, to recall, *Invention in the Real*. A paper of David Pereira's ('Must every psychoanalyst recapitulate the history of psychoanalysis in his own way?') offers one of the most concise and suggestive responses. Here is the issue, in his words:

how does the psychoanalyst inscribe his debt to a history in a way which yet maintains the transmission of an original creativity, a vitality marked by a certain *jouissance*, rather than via the preservation of a corpus of work through a joyless repetition which eventually spells the death of psychoanalysis? (4)

Pereira's response is that the 'transmission of an original creativity' is indeed possible; but it requires us to shift the meaning of a few key terms, and to observe the consequences of such a shift in our practices, if it is to be effected.

The way Pereira does this is by suggesting that we distinguish approaches to tradition in terms of 'a preservation and a perpetuation, on the one hand, and a translation on the other' (4). Translation, thus distinguished, will be the term for the sort of transmission psychoanalysis requires if it is to meet the criteria Pereira has just set for himself in relation to originality, vitality, *jouissance*. This is an interesting move because it involves dissociating translation from preservation and perpetuation, in spite of the popular and indeed institutional alignment of such terms. The fact that many national arts funding bodies will not give grants to support translation as an artistic act in its own right is a symptom

of the sort of common sense which Pereira here bucks. By his reading, translation is what the best artists do.

This counter-intuitive take on translation is not without precedent. The association of translation and creativity is a leitmotif of the recent scholarly field of Translation Studies, which has coined the term ‘transcreation’ to describe its object. The idea that one might traditionally hand down a creative vitality begins to make more sense from such a—translator’s—angle. On the other hand, the idea that radical originality might be achieved without some aspect of repetition and copying has come in for short shrift, at least since Derrida, but of course many times before him as well, Kierkegaard’s *Repetition* being a prime case in point. Here is Octavio Paz on the matter in 1971, and clearly speaking from his experience as poet: ‘No text can be completely original because language itself, in its very essence, is already a translation—first from the non-verbal world, and then, because each sign and phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase’ (Paz 154). As for Pereira, his problematisation of the idea of radical originality comes straight from the Freudian field:

Psychoanalysis casts some doubt upon [*such a notion*] insofar as it recognises a strong drive to repetition as a consequence of the torsion and stricture of what the subject is ensnared by. (5)

On this basis Pereira proceeds to suggest, much like Paz on translation, that creative practice works through, rather than against, repetition of a past practice. For the compulsion to unconscious repetition is certainly tyrannical in the dues it exacts from the subject, but it is also what opens the possibility that—rather than ‘remaining passive in relation to it’—one might ‘write the debt “in one’s own way”’ (7).

It is fascinating that Pereira will turn to the example of an artist, Francis Bacon, to illustrate how this might occur. I have already mentioned the consonance of his figuring of translation with that of the poet Paz. Now Paz is of course concerned with the production of art, while Pereira is focused on repetition in the unconscious, and how one might translate *it* more creatively than in the typical neurosis, by means of a specific clinical practice. Actually, the tenor of Pereira’s and others’ contributions to this volume is to lead us to question such easy distinctions between art and analysis. More on that below. For now though, and by way of further analogy, let me add that, even though Paz’s contention that language involves a primary translation ‘from the non-verbal world’ is contradicted by Lacan’s lifelong insistence that the overwhelming determinism of the signifier renders all such origins illusory, it is nonetheless that case that Pereira is interested in translations that will display ‘the possibility of an encounter with something at the limit of this determinism’ (6). He too admits a

gap in signification, one that might be, if not ordinary, at least originating. So he turns to Bacon, in search not so much of reality but rather the Real.

The crucial issue for Pereira concerns Bacon's professed adoption of strategies of repetition and chance, which serve both to repeat the past as one must, and yet to produce something new. Unpacking these strategies, Pereira describes Bacon's practice of rapidly sketching the figures he wished to paint, which rapidity was intended to allow elements of chance to emerge on the canvas. The discussion above might help us to comprehend how sketching the figures could constitute a translation, and indeed a repetition of them—particularly if we allow, *pace* Paz, that the being of those figures is semiotic through and through. The metaphor of translation for Bacon's creative work appears even more apt when we turn to Pereira's description of Bacon's constant, repeated work with images of Velasquez' portrait of *Pope Innocent X*. Bacon studied the portrait obsessively, and produced repeated versions of it. That would seem, at first blush, to ally the artist's practice with the devotional aims ('a preservation and a perpetuation') we have seen Pereira suggest psychoanalysis must eschew. What intrigues Pereira in this, however, is that although Bacon obsessively studied the Velasquez in reproduction, he avoided all approach to the original. This is in spite of the ease with which he could have viewed it in Rome, which he indeed visited, and for a lengthy period. For in this way, much as in his rapid sketching, Bacon allowed elements of chance—'manipulated chance' (9)—to interfere with the fidelity one might expect of either a close portrait from real life, or a close copy of an old master. Bacon subscribed to a law of repetition, in both instances, and by the same token he allowed maximal room for something else to emerge—by chance—in the very process of his translating from one copy to the other.

The reason, Pereira adds, that such creative practices of translation can be aptly analogised to the practices in the Freudian field is that psychoanalysis also delineates a space for chance in the repetitive working of the unconscious. More specifically, the repetition induced by the radical determinism of the repressed signifier (e.g. the repetitious need for the child to produce 'welds' and 'welding' in Norregaard Arroyo's case study, above) also produces, at its limit, an encounter with something, which Lacan will call a 'causal gap', and otherwise label with the term 'the Real'. The nature of this limit/gap/Real is somewhat illuminated by a comment of Pereira's in another paper in the volume: 'In psychoanalysis, one is required to do something with one's mistakes, perhaps even those which one inherits—to make work what does not work.' (226). This recourse to what might otherwise be counted 'error' seems to be what he is getting at through the analogy with Bacon's work. For at its limit 'the insistence of repetition opens onto the possibility of a translation', something one might attempt to manipulate and engineer, rather like an artist, rather than simply suffer it. None of which promises an end to repetition. But nor is there promised

any end to repetition's potential dialectic with chance, particularly when repetition is manipulated in the clinic or elsewhere to potentiate just that outcome.

The paper I have just rehearsed opens Part I of the volume, which is dedicated to 'Time and history'. Actually, its ethos of 'manipulated chance' in relation to the insistence of the unconscious symptom marks many of these papers, whether it be theorised in terms of the analyst's practice of interpretation, or from the perspective of the analysand, attempting to bring their analysis to a generative ending. Rodney Kleiman will, for instance, argue in a paper in Part IV ('On Love and Knowledge'), that although one can never ultimately understand what love is, the end of analysis might well consist in finding a way of living with the predetermined dimensions it seems so constantly to assume in one's own case. The task is to 'do something, not with the impossible knowledge of love, but with the recognition of one's own distinct style of loving' (152). I am reminded of Auden's 'Canzone', which opens:

When shall we learn, what should be clear as day
we cannot choose, whom we are free to love?

When indeed? At the end of one's analysis? Further discussions of something like a creative practice of 'manipulated chance' appear in Peter Gunn's account of the curiously creative practice of 'forcing' innate to Paul Cohen's version of set theory, Madeleine Andrews' paper on Duchamp, which ends with a discourse on the 'readymade' as a figure for both analyst and analysand (218), and Christiane Weller's 'On *Nachträglichkeit*', which offers a linguistically-informed discussion of the retrospective temporality called into play whenever the psyche designates a traumatic moment as traumatic, i.e. an account of the creativity inherent to repetition itself, something evocatively emblematised in her claim that 'the return of the repressed does not come from the past but from the future' (25).

Invention in the real indeed.

This is a powerful volume. Allow me to conclude my review of it on a question. It comes initially by way of a criticism. I mentioned Norregaard Arroyo's illuminating case study above. It constitutes one of the most detailed case-studies within the volume. There are many of them here, almost all the authors being analysts. But the discussion of cases tends to be glancing, often to me dissatisfyingly so. After all, the difficulty of the ideas we badge Lacanian—a difficulty not just in the literal comprehension of Lacan's strange style but also in the ferociously hard thinking his concepts demand the more you start to grasp something there—makes the case-study a particularly illuminating means of conveying the meaning that any given author accords to whatever term he or she

is invoking. In reading these papers I wanted more case-studies along the lines of Freud's famous five, and in particular more lengthy illuminations of instances of clinical interpretation, the theoretical concern of so much of this volume. Of course Lacan did not himself provide much in the way of lengthy case-studies beyond his doctoral thesis. But is that not why a Lacanian ethos that would militate for the importance of 'the saying/what is said' in the clinic finds itself required to assert this stance again and again? It should be obvious that that is what Lacan's work was all about. Where are the case studies that would make it obvious?

I suspected that the critique I have just rehearsed was an ignorant one and so ran it by friends who do work clinically. I am informed that there are considerable ethical problems involved in publishing psychoanalytic case studies, problems Freud himself ignored, to do with the fact that one's analysands will often be members of that same school in which one presents. Even in a larger agglomeration of analysts, or with analysands of a lay orientation, it is hard to see who would be altogether thrilled at having their neuroses writ large.

My question hinges on the following, fascinating fact. In the lack of such case studies, these authors repeatedly turn to artists, and specific accounts of their relation to their work, to illustrate the clinical matters of which they speak. Pereira does this, as we have seen, in the case of Bacon; but also in relation to painter David Beaumont, whose works comprise the subject of a paper of his later in the volume (221-236). Oscar Zentner discusses a similar issue to that canvassed in both these Pereira papers—the opposition between 'tyche (encounter, chance)' and 'Automaton (repetition)'—in relation to Junichiro Tanizaki and Yukio Mishima (240). Linda Clifton, on the other hand, argues that the plot-line of Dostoyevsky's *The Gambler* offers a far more illuminating structural analysis of problem gambling, and the 'enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle' (181) it proffers, than either Freud's, or later Freudian analysts', theorising on the matter. None of these four papers descend to psychobiography; nor does Michael Plastow's paper on Goethe (185-93), nor does Norregaard Arroyo's on Paul Auster (195-205). Rather, they each of them highlight that the artist's close attention to incarnating pleasure in the word or, alternately, pleasure in what we might describe as the flesh of the canvas, is in itself a 'practice subordinated to that which is most particular in the subject'. None of these are psychobiographical case studies, and yet they would seem to fill something of the gap I have just identified all the same, the lack of vivid illustrative material for the transmission of contemporary analytic practice. Which would say something—and I am not entirely clear just what, or even if it is ultimately knowable—about what the task of the artist nowadays is. When one reads Oscar Zentner's conclusion that the 'identification between art, creativity

and sublimation or reparation calls for urgent revision' (244), the question becomes even more intriguing.

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