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Editorial: What's Next For Psychoanalysis?

By Todd Dufresne

Already in the 1950s some were proclaiming the twentieth century the “psychoanalytic century.” As it happened, they were right. But to which psychoanalysis were they referring? For clearly there has never been one psychoanalysis, as scholars of various persuasions have noted. Even during Freud’s life as a psychoanalyst, from 1896-1939, we find a multitude of possible psychoanalyses at work. Freud himself is responsible for this situation, since he changed his views as often as he wished - with or without comment. As for Freud’s most gifted followers, such as Otto Rank, Carl Jung, and Sandor Ferenczi, they quite naturally took this important lesson to heart: they made psychoanalysis their own. Of course, only Freud was permitted to do as he pleased without being judged a heretic or “wild” analyst. Only Freud could wander from the path of true psychoanalysis, even if there never was one.

Debate among the many variants or, better, deviants of psychoanalysis - namely, among all of them - has therefore proven interminable. Yet as Sonu Shamdasani argues, interminable debate among competing psychoanalyses has been good for the promulgation of “psychoanalysis.” With the Index of the *Standard Edition* in hand, nearly anyone can find ample evidence that the latest fad is sponsored by something Freud once said, almost said, or should have said. Let’s just face it: Almost all opinions are possible in the psychoanalytic literature, especially when it is a matter of grounding theories on a surfeit of fictional case studies concocted by Freud and his followers.

That this history is far less scientific than politico-religious is obvious to almost anyone outside the analytic fold. But one still cannot assume such awareness among the many intellectual players of psychoanalysis, let alone among the (as a rule) less educated, practice-oriented therapists. Here’s a provocation: How many 20th Century theorists, most of whom have some stake in psychoanalysis, would admit that their intricate interpretations have only fed the politico-religious history of that movement? And another: How many semioticians would see their interpretive work as part of the recent history of exegesis of the divine word of Freud? Such provocations are intended for my colleagues who, through

interpretive strategies that seek to repair, complete, or even dismantle some version of psychoanalysis, have to that very extent - sometimes ironically-continuously refashioned the foundation(s) of the movement today. In this respect, to echo something Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen has said, sophisticated partisans of Freud are grateful when intellectuals spin these theoretical yarns, at times beautifully and creatively executed; when they set up psychoanalytic instruction in universities, no matter how critical or, more likely, sycophantic; when they publish yet another article or book on psychoanalysis, no matter how ill-informed or dim-witted; and when a review journal such as the *SRB* devotes more column inches to the latest thinking about psychoanalysis. And why wouldn't they? Psychoanalysis is not just a theory, but a therapy; and not just a therapy, but a culture; and not just a culture, but a business. The products of intellectual activity are an essential part of this economy; an economy in which many intellectuals remain heavily invested.

Of course, even heavily invested intellectuals, weighing the evidence, critically reflecting upon their own beliefs, can change their minds. They might even catch up to a popular culture that has largely moved beyond psychoanalysis; where Freudian ideas are bandied about, not because people believe them, but where they function as a kitschy short-hand for making a facetious point or generating easy laughs. In short, psychoanalysis is good for the knowing writers and viewers of *The Simpsons*.

So what, then, is next for psychoanalysis among intellectuals? First some consideration as to what we should not do: We should not continue to churn out more interpretive justifications, each one more delirious than the last, for some variant of Freudianism. The throne is empty, was always empty, and the subjects of analytic discourse should be set free. The prescriptive morality of this position will no doubt make some intellectuals uncomfortable, trained as they sometimes are to suspend judgements of that sort. But any theory that directly impacts people's lives is already a moral matter. Failure to face up to this responsibility with thoughtfulness is, I submit, a coward's game - among other things. As for what we could do, I have four contenders for the task. First, we could re-consider the unfashionable views of scholars we might otherwise ignore. For example, post-structuralists could take the time to figure out what scholars like Allen Esterson and Frank Cioffi think about Freud's lies and fictional case histories. Or theorists might reconsider the work of historians, such as Edward Shorter, with whom they do not share a belief in, say, the biological bedrock of medical discourse. Intellectuals usually have good reasons for their views, and it behooves us to understand what they are. Second, theoretical work could be inflected with historical insight. History, such as that provided in these pages by Shamdasani and Horst Gündlach, is often surprising, and it is against these surprises that we can productively trace and even measure our shiny new insights and/or theories. Third, in a spirit of openness, we could provide an avenue for dissenting views, including informed pro- and anti-psychoanalytic views. And so, in these pages, Fuhito Endo argues that psychoanalysis, while not without its problems, is indeed good for something: in the Japanese context, it is good for undermining a fascistic nationalism. And finally, fourth, we could all use more humour and frank disclosure in our work. Unlike Alphonso Lingis' delightful recollection of Lacan

contained herein, too much work on both sides of the debate about psychoanalysis is tiresome, humourless, and obscurantist - and symptomatically so. It is lack of humour and candid assessment, first and foremost as it concerns one's own investments in psychoanalysis, that makes rigid dogmatists the scourge of the field.

If these four criteria are any measure, this special issue of the *SRB* is a model of how to think about psychoanalysis in the 21st Century. Best of all, the contributors to this international effort demonstrate that the investment of deep thought about an old subject can still enrich us all.

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