

## Science's man does not exist: Psychoanalysis, scientism, and the structuralist project.

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Jean-Claude Milner's contributions to the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, and, in particular, his paper entitled 'The Point of the Signifier' (2012a) were fruits of the hyperstructuralist project that was prominent in the journal. This project took as its point of departure the period of Lacan's teaching—which Milner has described as the 'first classicism'—in which Lacan emphasised the logic of the signifier and the supremacy of the symbolic in his return to Freud, critiquing the then-dominant ego psychology of the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA). Lacan moved beyond hyperstructuralism (exemplified, for instance, in his paper on *The Purloined Letter*, in Lacan, 2006a), as did the contributors of the *Cahiers*, including Milner. Subsequent critics of the project—particularly Tracy McNulty (2012)—have alleged that Milner's structuralism was redundant from the outset, and suffered from a lack of clinical perspective. Others, such as Adrian Johnston (2012), have argued that, *contra* the structuralist moment, 'the present era is more than ripe enough...for approaching what Freud and Lacan awaited: a future in which the disciplines composing the field of biology are ready to greet psychoanalysis in such a manner as to initiate a trajectory of mutual modification of these sciences and analysis, as simultaneously a theory and a practice' (120). Both Johnston and McNulty take at least part of their inspiration for their positions from Lacan's 'Science and truth', initially published in the *Cahiers*, and now to be found in the *Écrits*.

Whilst acknowledging the limitations of the structuralist project, I would like to offer a qualified defence of it by returning to Lacan's 'Science and Truth'. In addition, I would like to consider structuralism with respect to contemporary developments such as neuropsychology, and the resurgence of 'lived experience' as a political, philosophical and psychological category. One of the arguments advanced by McNulty is that Milner's work in the *Cahiers* suffers from the defect of a lack of clinical perspective. What I wish to demonstrate is that, to the contrary, it is precisely in terms of clinical (and also political) praxis that the structuralist program is defensible. The unconscious structured like a language, which was advanced by Lacan in the 1950s and elaborated upon by Milner, Miller and others, remains a radical and unassimilated notion in psychology and neuroscience, and where we might expect to find some trace of it—for instance, in the collaboration between analysts and neuroscientists—it is conflated with the synthetic ego.

### The critique of hyperstructuralism

Let us turn to some of the objections to Milner's hyperstructuralist period. For Patrice Maniglier (2012), the 'concepts of structure' at play in the *Cahiers* 'cannot be generalised to each and every symbolic system without giving rise to absurdities' (p. 35). This straining away to identify isomorphisms between theories and thinkers was, as Milner (2012b, p. 233)

himself conceded, a hypothesis underpinning the *Cahiers*, and one that he has since renounced. The logic of the signifier implies something behind or beyond the signifying chain, and to the symbolic order as a necessarily incomplete system. For Rancière (2012, p. 271), May 1968 marked the end of the *Cahiers* project, with ‘Lacan the symbolic’ being replaced by ‘Lacan the real’, as exemplified by contemporary theorists such as Badiou and Žižek.

The more strident criticisms derive from Tracy McNulty (2012), for whom Milner’s work in the 1960s ‘retroactively appears as nothing more than an archaeological stratum in the development and dissemination of a particular phase of Lacan’s thought with no enduring theoretical significance for what follows’ (p. 90). According to McNulty, Milner stands accused of ‘collapsing the theory of the signifier with the problematic of primal repression’ (p. 91), and, above all, of ignoring the clinical roots of psychoanalysis which, after all, necessitate an engagement across all three registers rather than only the symbolic. It is true that Milner’s work in the *Cahiers*, as well as that of his co-writers, lags somewhat behind that of Lacan in the same period. There are no references to the knot, or the transference, or the real of the body. It should be added that Milner has since sought to remedy this position by invoking the notion of the ‘speaking body’, as a starting point for political thought (see, for example, Badiou & Milner, 2014, p. 27). Nonetheless, it is correct to assert that a purely, or principally symbolic, structuralist approach is inadequate to the clinic of Lacan. There are a couple of things to be said about this since an alleged hyperstructuralist reduction is not the full story here. First, in relatively subtle ways, Milner’s contributions to the *Cahiers* anticipated key elements of the so-called ‘late’ Lacan. The term in the signifying chain that ‘transgresses the sequence’ and acts as the founding authority of all terms, which we find in Milner’s paper on the signifier, is remarkably similar to the masculine portion of Lacan’s graph of sexualisation. There is a correspondence between this ‘founding exception’ and the obscene (perhaps fascist) father who is not subject to phallic law and castration.

Second, whatever the limitations of hyperstructuralism with respect to the Lacanian clinic, it is important to acknowledge that psychoanalysis is not the only clinical praxis available. That which is termed ‘scientific’ and ‘evidence-based’ in the realm of psychological interventions is equally as far removed from Lacanian psychoanalysis as it is innocent of even the slightest blush of structuralist influence. This point is important because the ‘science’ at stake here, as I shall discuss, proceeds within the confines of the discourse of capitalism. This discourse functions, broadly, as a kind of epistemic frame, but more than that, it ensures that the speaking body, which Milner takes as his point of departure on politics, is also a body that is spoken to, namely, the body of contemporary biopolitical procedures. To see the shift in this ‘science’ and its terms of reference compared to the late 1960s, it is necessary to revisit Lacan revisiting Freud.

### Freud and scientism, liberalism

One of Lacan's central arguments in his paper, 'Science and truth', was that Freud was steeped in scientism. In a sense, this is hardly surprising, since Freud (1933) himself made a point of claiming science as the *Weltanschauung* of psychoanalysis, above philosophy, religion or art. But what sort of scientism was Freud involved in? Lacan and everybody else by now is familiar with the influence of Helmholtz and co., with Freud's desire to obtain a certain intellectual respectability for psychoanalysis, typified, for instance, by his repudiation of Jungian occultism. Nonetheless, the sort of scientism from which Freud emerged, and the sort of science that was contemporaneous with his work, was, as Lacan points out, a procedure that allowed for uncertainty at its structural foundations. This is what radically differentiates Freud's endeavours from those of psychology and the other so-called 'human sciences'. Freud's invention of psychoanalysis designates 'the subsistence of the subject of a not-knowing', namely *das Unbewusste*. Consequently, '[T]here is no such thing as a science of man because science's man does not exist, only its subject does' (Lacan, 2006, 730). Lacan never fails to point out that when supposed sciences proceed, particularly the quantitative variety that predominates in the contemporary clinical disciplines, they do so by foreclosing the subject's foundational splitting (*Spaltung*) and end up, ethically, at least, devolving into biopolitical techniques. As Lacan (2006b, p. 730) put it, psychology 'discovered ways to outlive itself by providing services to the technocracy...like a toboggan from the Pantheon to the Prefecture of Police.'

There was, in the Hapsburg Empire of Freud's lifetime, a naïve liberalism that conjoined itself with scientism. A famous liberal slogan of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century was *Wissen macht Frei* (Schörske, 1961, p 43, 134). It's a phrase that has a rather different ring to 21<sup>st</sup> Century ears. Already by the time of writing the *Interpretation of Dreams*, however, this marriage of convenience between science and liberalism had collapsed. Freud emphasised throughout his writings that even if man were to 'become a kind of prosthetic god' by way of his technology, he would nevertheless be discontent (Freud, 1930/2001, p. 91–2). Liberal universalism too, was collapsing, long before World War One. Politics was characterised by ethno-religious identitarianism—that of the Slavs, or the Zionists, for instance—and would-be aristocrats and strongmen longing to make Austria great again.

We have to distinguish this Freudian milieu from that which dominates in our own times, when science is not so much an element of the discourse of the master, or even of the university, but of capitalism, especially where neuroscience, psychology and the clinical disciplines are concerned. Where once the problems of science were structural, now they are reduced to the merely technical. The exemplars of this discourse are less the great heralds of 'not-knowing' like Freud, Heisenberg or Gödel, but rather more like Elon Musk. The task of medical science in this paradigm is not so much to do with a cure, or the abolition of symptoms, but rather, the establishment of good order, 'well-being', and promoting the 'enhancement' of various functions. It is not a matter of waxing nostalgic for the old model, in which patients, such as the hysterics who pre-dated Freud's interventions, were brutalised. Rather, there has been a shift away from the qualitative and generalizable over to a quantitative domain that, *a fortiori*, has no limits.

Or, from a slightly different angle, we could proceed from Lorenzo Chiesa (2010, p. 171), who says of Milner that he:

is correct in claiming that the only pertinent scientific question concerning psychoanalysis is not ‘is psychoanalysis a science?’ but rather ‘what is a science that includes psychoanalysis?’, or also...what would contemporary empirical science look like if it preserved—and developed—its original Galilean minimalism? ... Lacan’s succinct answer to such query is: a science able to include psychoanalysis must be a science that acknowledges the real as the absolute contingency presupposed by the minimal logic of the signifier. This is precisely what the great majority of current science—based as it is on probabilistic causality and the anti-minimalist method of falsification—cannot afford to do and, consequently, also the reason why it excludes psychoanalysis from its sphere.

When it comes to the contemporary clinical sciences and their knowledge-production, which are untouched by any trace of structuralism, we can ask, after Milner (1966), ‘is it surprising that, on the terms of such knowledge, in order to obtain the truth of he who questions things, one must first make of him a thing that answers questions?’. It is here that, in my view, one finds the limit of critiques such as McNulty’s, which assails Milner’s structuralism from a purportedly clinical point of view, since the contemporary clinic, even when it is authorised in the name of psychoanalysis, is not necessarily Lacanian. In the face of these non-Lacanian clinical paradigms, structuralism of the ‘first classicism’ remains an important means of introducing rigour at the level of discourse and praxis.

### **Science and Truth**

Lacan’s own contribution to the Cahiers, ‘Science and Truth’, may move well beyond the hyperstructuralist project, but it does so more in the order of an *Aufhebung* than a pure negation. That the division of the subject is something structural, and foundational, may be self-evident to Lacanians, but it remains a radically subversive concept almost everywhere else. This division is not merely the split between consciousness and the unconscious, which Freud theorised and which, after all, had numerous antecedents even prior to him. It also implies the constitutive split that Lacan considered his most important contribution to psychoanalysis, namely, the constitution of the subject by way of the loss of the object, the *objet petit a*. This is entirely different to that which one finds in ego psychology, for instance, in which the ego—the domain of the imaginary, in Lacanian language—may be riddled with conflicts, but these difficulties can be surmounted by way of identification with the analyst, or by turning the ego into a ‘conflict free zone’, or perhaps by establishing a set of supposedly post-ambivalent object relations. Ego psychology is dead, of course, but much like Genghis Khan, it has a great many descendants, as we shall see.

One of the more curious comments on the hyperstructuralist project comes from Adrian Johnston (2012), who, noting that Lacan assigns psychoanalysis and the signifier to Aristotle’s ‘material cause’, whereas science is situated in the domain of formal cause,

observes that 'anti-science materialism is no materialism at all'. Further, the time is ripe, according to Johnston, as 'the neurosciences and logosciences can come together for mutual influence and modification'. For Johnston, the domain of Freud and Lacan is a 'logoscience'. Notwithstanding the problems with this notion, or the assumption that the scientific gaze is a benign accumulator of knowledge, rather than something superegoic, and panopticonic, one thing that I would like to examine here are the attempts in our time to produce the synthesis of psychoanalysis and neuroscience dreamt of by Johnston. There are a growing number of writers—on both the neuro and psychoanalytic side of things, including at least one Nobel Prize winner—who claim that Freud was essentially a frustrated neuroscientist, who invented psychoanalysis for want of technology. Or, that Freud produced a 'science' of subjectivity, and neuroscience can present an objective science compatible with Freud's basic assumptions. Just before examining this project, however, which for me, illustrates the vital necessity of importing some of Lacan's 'first classicism' into contemporary thought, I'd like to refresh memories when it comes to 'Science and Truth'.

At first glance, it may appear that the neuropsychologists are in agreement with Lacan, who, after all, assigns Freud to the category of scientism. But consider, for instance, what Lacan makes of Freud's second topography here. For neuropsychology, the id, superego, and ego are elements whose neural support is to be found localised within the brain. Lacan, by contrast, holds that they are not 'apparatuses', and need rather to be grasped 'in accordance with a dialectic' that 'structuralism has since allowed us to elaborate logically: namely, the subject—the subject caught up in a constituting division' (727). Moreover, the material cause, of which psychoanalysis is the exemplar, 'is truly the form of the impact of the signifier' on the body, on jouissance, and so forth. Johnston assumed that the neurosciences are self-evidently materialist, and the neuropsychologists tend to agree, calling Freud's project 'mystical biologism' (see Yovell, Solms & Fotopoulou, 2015). Yet for all their materialism, once they get beyond a very limited range of inquiry, they are obliged to import concepts and frameworks from psychology, which is to say, from metaphysics and ontology. Finally, Lacan emphasised that '...the subject must be as rigorously distinguished from the biological individual as from any psychological evolution subsumable under the subject of understanding'. Moreover, there is 'no such thing as a metalanguage, no language able to say the truth about truth' (737), and from the outset, it appears that the grand synthesis supported by Johnston and neuropsychology is an attempt to make the results of fMRIs scans precisely such a metalanguage, the 'truth' of psychoanalysis.

## Neuroscience

In general, it is easy to lampoon the 'science' of the psy-disciplines and the neuros, since they are founded not on mathematical precision, but on correlational statistics, a technology that Freud neither had, nor needed. Moreover, the philosophical naïvety that generally characterises these disciplines serves as a reminder of Engel's (1883) quote that '[N]atural scientists believe that they free themselves from philosophy by ignoring it or abusing it', and end up 'no less in bondage [to] philosophy but unfortunately in most cases to the worst

philosophy'. By no means are these charges necessarily applicable to the neuropsychologists, some of whom have some philosophical knowledge, and several of whom quote Freud chapter and verse. They would seem to be the exemplars of Johnston's idea of a synthesis between neuroscience and so-called logoscience.

The problem, however, is that no matter the level of sophistication of the neuropsychologists' syntheses, the object of their enquiries never becomes the subject of psychoanalysis, but rather, science's man who does not exist. This is evident in much of the literature on this topic, in which the neuroscientists deal with what they call the 'hardware', the 'neurocognitive organisation', whilst psychoanalysts deal with the 'software' (see Yovell et al., 2015, p 3, 11). This already subsumes psychoanalysis into the functionalist metaphors of cognitive science. 'Subjectivity', of which psychoanalysis is held to be the science, by the neuropsychologists, is defined as 'first-person experience', forgetting Freud's teaching that first-person, 'lived experience', situated at the level of the Cartesian cogito, is precisely the thing to be distrusted, and certainly to be decoupled from the subject as such. As one set of authors put it (Yovell, et al., 2015), psychoanalysis is about 'lived reality', and this reality 'is just another part of Nature. What else could it possibly be?' (33). Nature is here given with a capital 'N'. This sort of discourse is somewhat fashionable, in our times, with the resurgence of the soft existentialist and jargon of authenticity that one finds emphasised in 'lived experience'. There is a famous critique of these sorts of positions by Theodor Adorno, but equally important in my view is the work of the *Cahiers*, especially that of Milner and Miller, in which lived experience is an effect of structure. As Yves Duroux (2012, 197) said of the project, 'the words "concrete" and "lived experience" became our number one enemies'.

There is no sense, in the neuropsychological model, of a subject that is punctual, and effervescent, discerned fleetingly in formations of the unconscious. Moreover, whatever the philosophical pretensions of the neuropsychologists, whether it comes to the emphasis on the 'lived experience', or 'neurocognitive organisation', the sort of subject presumed always reproduces a logic of radical atomisation. There is a kind of crude, Lego-block ontology at work, with nothing resembling a Heideggerean *Mitsein* in sight, much less the extimacy of the Lacanian torus. As the analyst Eric Laurent (2014) put it, almost all neuroscience presupposes an 'Otherless organism, a profoundly autistic organism focused on its homeostatic auto-regulation and which is progressively refined throughout the course of evolution.' It is well illustrated in the sort of repression conceived of by the neuropsychologists, which, far from pertaining to a *Wunsch*, much less a signifier, is now construed as 'intrapsychic conflict'. The MRI machine is then called into service in an attempt to localise these conflicts. We should contrast these reductionist attempts at localisation with Bernard Stiegler's remark that 'the life of the brain to a large extent occurs outside the brain' For something to be intrapsychic, it must once have been extrapsychic in its structure. Lacan, in his early seminars, repeatedly mused on the origins of the incest taboo, which lies at the heart of repression and the Oedipal drama. It is not biological, he said, and nor could it be explained by Levi-Strauss' account of exogamy in tribes. The transmission of the taboo, and of Law itself, can only be grasped via discourse, namely, language constituting a social link. The neuropsychological approach to this topic, devoid of any structuralist

considerations, is rather like trying to understand the workings of the Australian Parliament by looking for law receptors in individual brains. But a brain is nothing without a body, and a body is always situated in a world, vis-à-vis an Other, and to the extent that any of this can be grasped, it is via language, not the supposed metalanguage of fMRI data.

Again, the ‘science’ at stake here is not the scientism of Freud, which allowed for a not-knowing. It does, however, conform to Lacan’s idea in ‘Science and Truth’ of a discipline which forgets its history and its own ideological underpinnings. As much as Freud may have situated himself on the side of science, some within psychoanalysis have long been embarrassed by his speculations. Thus, the death drive was whittled down in IPA circles to something resembling mere aggression. Repression was redefined as mere forgetting, devoid of the signifier and of any structural relations whatsoever, and it is only rebaptised thus that it can then become fodder for the MRI (see Schmeing et al. 2013). The statistical support for neuroscience erases the singularity of the subject at the heart of psychoanalysis, and quantitative methods in general presume a homogeneity of units. The attempt to add neuroscientificity to Freudian thought is more in the order of a conquest than a rapprochement, in which the ‘scientists’ plunder that which they can make use of, sully the rest. Adrian Johnston’s point that technology was sufficiently developed to produce a synthesis misses a fundamental point, and in a manner symptomatic of the capitalist discourse, since the impossibility of a neuropsychanalysis is not a matter of inadequate technology, but of the complete lack of conceptual apparatus that could sustain such a project without doing violence to psychoanalysis, and even to science itself.

The hyperstructuralist project emerged against the backdrop of Lacan’s critique of ego psychology. The latter, we should recall, attempted to secure legitimacy for its version of psychoanalysis, at the expense of veering into a praxis of adaptation. Almost everything radical, subversive or idiosyncratic about Freud’s work was neutralised, or ritualised away. Homosexuality was pathologised. In Paris, in May 1968, after years of the French state murdering and maiming Algerians, students, and striking workers, it was a pair of French IPA-affiliated ego psychologists who denounced the uprising as ‘infantile’ and ‘Stalinist’ (Rabaté, 2009). Ego psychology may now be an historical footnote, but its ethics and epistemology remain prevalent, and have perhaps even been strengthened and dispersed throughout contemporary clinical discourse. Structuralism can produce neither a ‘complete’ psychoanalysis nor a new science, but it remains an important weapon against contemporary scientism and biopolitics. It preserves a place for a subject irreducible to the Otherless monad of science under the capitalist discourse, and, in the words of Milner (2000, p. 57), situates psychoanalysis as ‘a doctrine of the infinite and contingent universe’, a clarification of death and sexuality under the materiality of the signifier on the living, speaking body.

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