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# Missing the Meeting with the Unconscious – An Essay on Jacques Lacan’s Philosophical View

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## Abstract

My paper comprises several considerations on Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytical theory, aiming at underlining its alleged Structuralistic frame, and also its concept of the unconscious. By this, I intend to cast a light over his hidden assumptions about the human psychic, and eventually to stress his perspective on the philosophical matter of human essence. Whether his perspective is or could have been relevant for the contemporary philosophical thinking in this respect or not – this will be my task to suggest, given Lacan’s self-confidence, as well as the promotion of Lacan’s work in different areas of humanities, since the middle of the last Century till today.

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Motto: “The utmost demand addressed to each of us is to listen to all that something tells us, and to make it tell us. Remembering this for oneself is the specific duty of each of us. Doing this for all and doing it convincingly – this is the mission of philosophy.” (Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1999, 218)

## 1. Does Jacques Lacan listen to the unconscious?

What I intend here is to tackle some main aspects of Jacques Lacan’s theory on the unconscious, in order to establish the relevance of the psychoanalysis founded and propagated by the famous French psychoanalyst to the philosophical theme of human essence; more precisely, I’ll try to identify his contribution to the depiction, interpretation or the attempt to approximate by a certain theory the specificity of the human psychic and its relation

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to the world. I consider that the magnitude of Lacanian influence on the Structuralist epoch, for decades in the European culture and abroad, accounts for this challenge. Also I intend to quote some statements pointing to the personality and the character named Jacques Lacan, as I consider that he embodies one of those cases in which the author's biography casts light on his work.

Here is an aspect which reveals Lacan's vision regarding philosophy, stated in a discussion with the philosopher Jean Hyppolite, in 1954, during one of the meetings of the famous Lacanian seminar held in Paris; it seems that Lacan surprisingly "dismissed" philosophy as discipline in favor of a Freudian *in statu nascendi* theory that would have been able to replace it. In this way – he added – this new revolutionary theory would have "access to structuralism" (Cf. Roudinesco, 1995, p. 220). He was talking as if the cultural trend named "structuralism" would have been a theoretical instance over all domains of humanities and more, even over history. As it seems now, the undisturbed simplifying confidence in the methodological virtues of Structuralist linguistics in all the social-humanist disciplines was the illusion of an entire epoch. But in this case, Lacan goes even further, assuming that a new super-theory, together with his original contribution to it, could be able to replace philosophy at all.

Simon Clarke, the Structuralist trend analyst, argues that its general view is that the human world is a world of objective cultural systems which can be studied with methods belonging to positive sciences. (Clarke, 1981, p. 117). My supposition is that Lacan assumed this goal, trying to transform psychoanalysis into such a science, but lacked the scientific rigor in his approach. In addition to that, I would say he seems to juggle with concepts and to be so "creative" and metaphorical, that he disregards what is commonly called "the property of terms". Without it, the attempt to conceptualization is impaired.

Thus, given from the very beginning, Lacan's philosophical aspiration casts a doubt over his research on human psychic and especially on the unconscious.

The narratives and the chronology of a French historian of structuralism, François Dosse, can offer a possible explanation for the personalized note in which Jacques Lacan conceived his psychoanalytical theory. The historian narrates how Lacan conceived his speech at the Congress in Rome, in 1953. After having been chosen the head of the Paris Psychoanalytical Society (SPP) following a collective riot against the former manager Sacha Nacht, in the same year he is compelled to hand his resignation in favor of the majority preferences towards Daniel Lagache. Afterwards, he declares he is excommunicating himself from SPP and in the same time assumes a new, original doctrinal direction: "...We must find an attractive path, a French path toward the unconscious." (Dosse, 1992, p. 128).

"A French path" – that sounds more like a vanity declaration than a methodological way, as long as this way to the unconscious neither has, nor needs national instruments or marks. In my view, judging by his further theoretical statements, this mysterious unconscious capable of social movements and riots has become more and more... Lacanian. Lacan's originality goes to the extent that some colleagues in his audience ask questions and show their uncertainties. For instance, Françoise Dolto questioned his abolition of the intellectual development stages of small children. Lacan's conception seems to me contradictory to his own earlier theory concerning *the mirror stage* (which I'll mention at the end of my paper). He declares: "the very originality of psychoanalysis lies in the fact that it does not center psychological ontogenesis on supposed *stages* – which have literally no discoverable foundation in development observable in biological terms." (Lacan, 1973, p. 74).

I will next question the theoretical level of his "philosophy", by analyzing whether the founding concepts which Lacan was promoting in his exposés and writings are rigorously described/defined, and constantly used, or not.

## 2. Does Jacques Lacan offer a concept of the unconscious?

Lacan's first theoretical innovation which I will refer to is that he compared the structuring of the unconscious to the way a language is structured. This is the basis of what has been called the *Lacanian philosophy of the signifier*. However, he seems to juggle with the notions, because in some places he argues that the unconscious "is somehow an effect of the language" (see Roudinesco, *op. cit.*, p. 223), but in another he says: "Most of you have some idea of what I mean when I say – *the unconscious is structured like a language*. This statement refers to a field that is much more accessible to us today than at the time of Freud. I will illustrate it by something that is materialized, at what is certainly a scientific level, by a field that is explored, structured, elaborated by Claude Lévi-Strauss and which he has pinpointed in the title of his book, *La Pensée Sauvage*. (...) Before strictly human relations are established,

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