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Lorenzo Chiesa

Fake Interviews on Lacan: With Lorenzo Chiesa

Fake Matt Wolf – What generated your interest in Lacan?

Real Lorenzo Chiesa – As a philosophy undergraduate student in the mid-late 1990s I was vaguely aware of Lacan. The name circulated but more fashionable thinkers (especially Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze) eclipsed it. I got really hooked on him while reading and researching the poet Antonin Artaud. Allegedly, as a young psychiatrist, Lacan examined Artaud after he was interned in an asylum and concluded that he would have never written a single word again. Instead Artaud proceeded to produce some of the best philosophical poetry of the twentieth century. This blatant misdiagnosis intrigued me. I launched into Lacan's work with passion, and perhaps a secret intention to further disprove him. I soon discovered an incredibly original theory of the subject at a time when, it is important to recall it, triumphant postmodernism cynically declared the death of the subject, the end of history, and the impossibility of any actual political change. From that moment on, I never stopped thinking philosophically through, with, and beyond Lacan. A decade later, my entrance into psychoanalysis renewed my interest. Dissatisfied with academia, I wanted to become an analyst. That never happened but the concrete experience of undergoing Lacanian treatment made me appreciate the empirical basis of psychoanalysis, without which the theory has little significance. What happens in the consulting room is indeed very weird, especially in terms of your desire to know! My only advice to young philosophers interested in Lacan would be "Go and see what the practice is about!", assuming it is practiced well.

Why is Lacan regarded by many critics as the most important psychologist since Freud?

I agree with these critics. I believe Lacan is the most important psychoanalyst since Freud because he managed to rejuvenate or update psychoanalysis while remaining Freudian. In the 1960s, Foucault already intuited that the peculiarity of psychoanalytic discourse entails that a serious return to Freud modifies psychoanalysis itself. At bottom, Lacan's major innovation, both clinical and theoretical, was to dispel the romantic, idealistic, and even animistic idea – still partly present in Freud – that the unconscious is a hidden container of naughty/dirty wishes, ultimately dependent on a free-floating libido or force-of-life, which civilisation needs to repress. Instead, for Lacan, the unconscious fundamentally amounts to the language we do not consciously control. As subjects we are first and foremost *the media of the social* that surrounds us. Our parents give us a name and have expectations about our future before we are born. In everyday communication we always say more or less than what we intend to say. Even our partners regularly misunderstand us. Think of the unconscious as a gigantic tape-recorder. It not only records everything every single *Homo sapiens* has ever said or thought but also continuously records *over* what it has recorded. There is no backup-copy of any given stage in this process. The tape-recorder does not tape itself. So there is actually no tape either and for the same reason the unconscious is all out in the open! The wager of Lacanian psychoanalysis is that one can rewind the virtual tape a bit, but not without recording over it again. Sexuality preserves an important role in this context yet only insofar as it marks something that does not really work, not a barely controlled abundance of instincts. Against the current predominance of

allegedly hedonistic ideology, Lacan's basic point is that language goes together with an impasse in sexuality. That is our species-specific trait. We are sexually fucked-up animals. And that is why we talk and think about sex much more often than we have sex.

How does Lacan define transference and countertransference?

This is a question a practicing analyst would be better equipped to answer. Theoretically, it is a very difficult question. In a tentative manner, we could define transference as the creation of love in the artificial setting of the psychoanalytic cabinet (Lacan says something along these lines somewhere in Seminar VIII, I think). But, on closer inspection, things actually get far more complex! On the one hand, "real" love relations, even the most successful, are always artificial, in the sense that love remains fundamentally narcissistic if not (mentally) masturbatory. On the other hand, the artificial setting of psychoanalysis goes together with an "event-like" dimension that is otherwise rare in the subject's everyday life. Anecdotally, out of my experience as an analysand, I would say one definitely develops a transference precisely when one *believes* one has *no* transference and even doubts its very existence. Along the same lines, I am tempted to claim that countertransference is making the analysand believe he *does* have a transference.

Bio:

Lorenzo Chiesa is a philosopher who teaches at the Freud Museum, London, and at the European University at Saint Petersburg. He is editor of the *Insubordinations* series at the MIT Press (forthcoming). Previously, he was Professor of Modern European Thought at the University of Kent, where he founded and directed the Centre for Critical Thought. His major publications include: *Subjectivity and Otherness* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2007); *The Italian Difference* (Melbourne: Re.press, 2009) (with Alberto Toscano); *Italian Thought Today* (London: Routledge, 2014); *Lacan and Philosophy: The New Generation* (Melbourne: Re.press, 2014); *The Not-Two: Logic and God in Lacan* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2016); and *The Virtual Point of Freedom* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016)

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