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André Green

Against Lacanism. A conversation of André Green with Sergio Benvenuto

Benvenuto: You were a pupil of Lacan's for a while. Could you tell us something about your relation with him?

Green: I knew him in 1953 when I started as a psychiatrist at the SainteAnne Hospital in Paris. Some of my friends were in analysis with Lacan, who at the time was giving an extremely interesting series of lectures at SainteAnne, where he often invited the most important intellectuals of the time. I attracted Lacan's attention at a certain point, and our relation developed from there. In 1958 he invited me to Barcelona, where we had a very important conversation. He was surprised to hear that I had decided to join the Psychoanalytical Association he had left five years earlier. Our relations continued sporadically up until 1960 and the "Journées de Bonneval", where the work of his pupils Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclair had a considerable impact. I decided then to attend Lacan's seminar. We collaborated between 1960 and 1967, which caused me some problems with my Association.

Benvenuto: But in 1963 a major schism occurred in French psychoanalysis.

Green: Yes, I had friends on both sides of that controversy. I arranged the first study group between "young" members of both the Parisian Société Psychanalytique and the then called Société Française de Psychanalyse. I took part in Lacan's seminar, and had the privilege of lecturing there twice, in 1965 and 1967, and discussing emerging ideas. Lacan loved discussion. He hoped to also convince me, in the end, to join his side. In 1967 our paths parted. I had published a long article on narcissism in which I neglected to quote him. He reacted very badly and, behaving in his usual way, began making allusions during his seminars, which was fairly unpleasant.

My relationship with Lacan was a privileged one: I was close to him he himself encouraged my criticism because he needed interlocutors - and at the same time totally free because I belonged to a different association.

Benvenuto: You are openly critical today towards Lacan and Lacanians. But putting Lacanians aside, I'd like to hear more about your theoretical disagreements with Lacan.

Green: First of all, Lacan was exceptionally intelligent. Rereading his *Ecrits* after some time, one discovers that they still arouse considerable interest.

Benvenuto: This is an important statement, in light of the fact that many people even in France consider him an impostor. Lacan very often provoked extreme, conflicting reactions: uncontrolled admiration or utter contempt.

Green: Exceptional intelligence and the ability to produce some interesting works does not necessarily imply his adherence to the psychoanalytic experience. I also find Heidegger and Derrida interesting. But in psychoanalysis, we are committed to an alliance between practice and theory, and to the psychoanalytic institution. Thus, I cannot comply with your request to “put Lacanians aside and talk about Lacan”, because Lacanians are Lacan’s posterity, his creation, and Lacan is responsible for what they do today. We cannot regard a psychoanalyst in the same way we regard a philosopher. A philosopher’s only concern is himself and other philosophers: a psychoanalyst must also deal with people outside his field.

How is it, you might ask, that someone who for seven years was an associate and an admirer of Lacan could suddenly abandon him, and become one of his foes? My answer is that it requires time to completely deconstruct Lacan’s theoretical mechanism and to relate it to his practice in general. At the time, I limited myself to a kind of compromise, saying: “I cannot approve of your practice, but your theory interests me”. Only in 1984 did I realize that theory and practice were considerably more interwoven than one would have thought. It is impossible to say: “His practice was debatable, but his writing is sound”.

Benvenuto: Back in the 1960s, at the time you and Lacan were friends, which were the aspects of his practice which you had already begun to question?

Green: Lacan appeared at a moment of impoverishment for French psychoanalytic thought, as the analytic movement in France had been interrupted by WWII. In England, on the contrary, it had continued; the famous Anna Freud/Klein Controversies occurred between 1941 and 1945, while London was being bombed, and constitute some of psychoanalysis’ most riveting documents. Even the American movement continued during that period. Those in Freud’s circle, fleeing the Nazi invasion of central Europe sought safety where they could. France, itself occupied by the Nazis, never gave them a warm welcome, so they were more or less equally distributed between Britain and the United States, with a few in South America — which explains the presence of Viennese thought and controversies in those countries — while in France the only person to have known Freud personally was Princess Marie Bonaparte. Consequently, after the war, French theoretical and practical psychoanalysis had fallen behind. The only exception to this prevailing mediocrity was probably the work of the clinical psychologist Bouvet. Then Lacan appeared, equipped with considerable intellectual armor and gleaming talent, in an ambiance of incredibly impoverished analytical thought.

In the end I considered Lacan’s theoretical renewal to be purely circumstantial. Unlike other important works in psychoanalysis, it does not reveal an awareness of the difficulties of analytic practice, although Lacan was perfectly aware of what was happening on the intellectual scene. Early on, with “the mirror stage”, Lacan flirted with the theories of alienation, essentially of Hegel, and later of Wallon, a Communist psychologist. In Lacan’s best works during this period he refers to Hegel. In the early 1950s, Lacan felt that something extremely important was happening the rediscovery of Saussure and of synchronic linguistics, thanks to the mediation of Claude LéviStrauss and of his friends Maurice MerleauPonty and Roman Jakobson. In 1949, Lacan realized that LéviStrauss’s *Elementary Structures of Kinship* was a cultural event of some importance, focusing on language. But then the disappointments began: his meeting with Chomsky led nowhere; linguists did not accept his ideas. Linguistics, which he considered a leading science, later became for him *linguisterie*, “*linguhysteria*” or “*lingui-deli*”.

Benvenuto: Didn’t Lacan say that *linguisterie* was the right term for his approach, to distinguish it from real linguistics?

Green: In any case, after the marriage of linguistics and psychoanalysis, a divorce took place instead of a great renewal. Consequently, Lacanian thought in the 1970s tended more and more towards mathematical topology, and a logic of the pure signifier.

However, Lacan’s work moved completely away from psychoanalytic experience to drown in an ideology of science, moving radically away from the idea of psychoanalysis as an exploration of the depths of the unconscious, of emotional underworlds and of the first months of life, etc. In time, this struck me as an

incredible rush forward. The more difficulties he encountered, the more liberties he took with his technique. In the analytic situation he became a kind of Zen master, doing absolutely anything he wanted, not following any rule. Even so, he is the theoretician of Law. He talks of the Name of Father as a theoretical reference, but in fact he behaves more like an abusive mother than a law-providing father. As for his signifier theory, it goes hand in hand with the use of force, because the timing and interruption of a session correspond to a use of force.

But his position as the rebel of analytic institutions made it possible for a pole which considered itself revolutionary to gather around him. Lacan was hailed as having successfully opposed the establishment, and as having constructed a revolutionary line of thought and institution. At the very moment Lacan created the Ecole Freudienne and the so-called passe, his inspiration was coming exclusively from Mao and the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

Benvenuto: Many find Lacan's theory interesting but his clinical practice incomprehensible, in part because he himself talked very little about it. That would explain why in the US and in England, Lacan is more widely read by philosophers and literary scholars than by practicing analysts. In 1963 before the Chinese Cultural Revolution when he founded the Ecole Freudienne, he had already formed a generation of analysts as either their analyst or supervisor. If Lacan's clinical practice is negative, does that then mean that all analysts formed by him some of whom are very prominent today are bad analysts?

Green: When Lacan founded the Ecole Freudienne, a lot of talented Lacanians were still with him. Only later, in 1969, did they abandon him. Lacan wanted to remain the Maître absolu: he wanted to create a generation of followers who wouldn't turn against him, as they did in the schism of 1963. One day he confided to me: "I have two types of followers: apostles and mandarins. The apostles will follow me anywhere, while the mandarins always have something of the irreducible." He considered the passe one way of preventing the formation of a new mandarin.

You asked, "but are they then all bad clinical therapists?". Of course not. But it is not surprising that so many people left him, including some of the most prestigious and international names of the moment, not only from my Association, but also from the Association Psychanalytique de France (Laplanche, Pontalis, Anzieu, Rosolato, Granoff and others). And the analytical practice of Lacan's former pupils (Piera Aulagnier, François Perrier, Paul Valabrèga, Conrad Stein and others) resembles the standard clinical practice of non-Lacanians. They may have theoretical divergences but they are all in agreement as to the conditions of the setting. They abandoned him because they thought his clinical practice was undefensible.

Benvenuto: Freud, too, was abandoned by some of his most talented and brilliant pupils: Jung, Adler, Ferenczi. Is it not inevitable that the best pupils abandon their masters, just as often the most capable offspring who leave the family and make their own way?

Green: It is impossible to compare Freud and Lacan. After 1912, there were no real secessions from the Freudian mainstream, and any contrast took place exclusively within the analytical movement. There were problems connected with Ferenczi and Rank, but they were confined to the institution.

Benvenuto: That is not quite right. Wilhelm Reich was expelled from the Psychoanalytical International Association in 1933. Theodore Reik was never even accepted by the American Psychoanalytic Association. And even recently, long after Freud, Masud Khan and Donald Meltzer were expelled from the British Society.

Green: None of Freud's disciples, or Freud himself, ever questioned the analytic setting. Theoretical divergences were frequent, and are ongoing. Every five or six years we have a new prophet or Messiah, yet none questions the essential foundation of analytical protocol. No one practices as Lacan did shorter sessions; on the contrary, any change leans towards longer sessions. No one questions the analyst's neutrality, or tries to manipulate transference, or practices analytical seduction, or even violence. Lacan used

to beat some patients.

Benvenuto: But that was in later years, when he was already very old and increasingly eccentric.

Green: That is not so. There was talk of such violent behavior as early as the 1970s...

Benvenuto: Yes, in the 1970s he was already over seventy!

Green: But I have evidence that even before he actually began abusing his patients, Lacan would not allow certain things to be said to him, and would react abrasively. He was an absolute tyrant with his patients. And it takes time to become aware that Lacan wrote what he did from the very start.

Lacan understood well the conclusion of the Freudian lesson — the importance of primordial masochism. Paraphrasing Descartes, I would say that it is no longer common sense that is most generously distributed, but masochism, à propos of which Freud said: “I’ll step back, I’m not prepared to play this hangman role you want me to play”. Lacan instead took advantage of it. He thought that if a patient’s masochism wasn’t fueled, he would resort to more dangerous situations. He calls this “narcissism of the lost cause”. Better an alienated situation with Lacan than terrorist kamikaze operations. In fact, when he went to Vincennes in 19692, Lacan replied to some students’ challenge by saying, “vous cherchez un Maître” (“you are looking for a Master”) — and referring to himself he added, “that’s why you had me come here”.

Benvenuto: Reading the text of that debate in Vincennes, I had the impression that, taken in their context, those words meant something else. What he was saying to the students who, by challenging him, thought they were proving their total independence and freedom, was: “you think you are rebelling against the Maître, I incarnate by me at the moment, but you don’t realize that what you are actually looking for is authority, the tyrant”. And, in fact, many of them found their Maître in tyrants like Mao or Ho Chi Minh.

Green: Your interpretation favors too much Lacan. Try putting his words in relation to his life as an analyst and school leader: he has always set himself up as the Maître. The articles in *Scilicet* — the review of the *Ecole Freudienne* — bore no signature unless they were written by him, because the distinction between the Maître and the anonymous mass of disciples had to be maintained. Lacan was completely unresponsive to the idea of reciprocal relationship: others owed him everything, but he owed nothing to anyone.

Benvenuto: What you are saying about Lacan has been said of many other analysts. Did not Freud often behave as a Maître, and tragically so with Victor Tausk, Sandor Ferenczi and Otto Rank? Many criticize psychoanalysis because it is based on charismatic ties, or because the analytic setting is too unreciprocal, or because the analyst dominates too much.

Green: People not in analysis express their fantasies with regard to an analytic situation from which they need to distinguish themselves, while I speak as both a practicing and theoretical analyst.

I became interested in English (not American) psychoanalysis in 1961, when I attended a conference in Edinburgh and I met personally for the first time the Kleinians (Rosenfeld, Hanna Segal) and Winnicott. There, I finally observed a functioning clinical practice that corresponded to the problems of practice that time. My interests in Lacan and in English thought developed in parallel. Living in France as I was, it would have been difficult to resist the fascination of Lacanian thought; yet in England I had seen a different thinking about clinical psychoanalysis. And so for many years I was torn between the two.

Today, certain early Lacanians who abandoned him say, “I bought Lacan’s most recently published seminar and it bored me to death; how could we ever have been taken in by that stuff?” The effects of time are important. Today, reading Lacan dispassionately, it is easy to see his tics, tricks, manipulations, his various ways of seducing the public.

If we separate the core of Lacan’s thought from all the drivel, what we have left is quite a limited corpus of work.

Benvenuto: It has been said that Lacanian analysts are either the best or the worst; there is practically no middle ground. I don't know if this statement is true, but you are only considering the worst Lacanians. With regard to Lacan himself, I also have reservations as to his clinical style, especially when with age, he became progressively more eccentric. Yet we all know analysts who maintain a fairly traditional analytical setting (i.e., the forty-five minute session) who have been deeply inspired by Lacan's thought. What do you think of this contradiction, finding as you do the key to Lacan's theoretical approach in his "perverse, degenerate" clinical practice? And then, must we condemn Freud's theory because we know he fed the RatMan or analyzed his daughter Anna? The problem, after all, extends well beyond psychoanalysis: to what extent can a thinker's practical life be considered a key to grasping the essence of his thought? Take Heidegger for instance: many maintain that Heidegger's philosophical thought must be interpreted in light of his Nazi sympathies, because it is an artifice to separate theory and practice.

Green: The comparison between Lacan and Heidegger doesn't work. Heidegger's practice was not Nazism. Insofar as he is a philosopher, his thought originates from texts. But you cannot put the psychoanalyst in a similar position: he is responsible for the patients in his care. Every now and then I see some "couch-scarred" patients, who have undergone all sorts of abuse by Lacanian analysts. And they have had to pay for this! Here we are not talking about theories: this is the Lacanians' practice, this is how they earn their living!

Generally, analysis is a situation of total alienation. Those in a relationship with an analyst will never know a similar or worse alienation with anyone else, not even a doctor or lawyer, even though a doctor or lawyer can be a last recourse in catastrophic situations. It is true, analytic alienation rests on the patients' need for suffering and selfpunishment. When a subject finds someone who fuels his need to suffer, he rushes in. Some talk about analyses lasting fifteen or twenty years, and when I ask, "why did you go on for so long?", they answer, "out of gratitude, I owed him so much". But, in fact, their analysis has been a massacre!

Benvenuto: Your criticisms of Lacan are for the most part ethical ones. Strange, in the history of psychoanalysis Lacan more than any other has so closely connected ethics and psychoanalysis. In any case, one could object that disputes among schools are mostly ethical. A certain practice which seems unjustified theoretically also appears ethically perverse. Freudians, for example, while admitting no validity in Jungian theory, cannot deny that many patients of Jungian analysts have actually improved. How can this be explained in Freudian terms? Some say that a Jungian is successful thanks to suggestion. But suggestion is something morally depreciable for a Freudian; therefore Jungian analysis is immoral! One's own theory is scientific, while adversaries' one is purely ideological. Even Lacan, when he criticized American Ego Psychology, dismissed New York analysts as ideologists of the American Way of Life. Kris and Loewenstein's patients had improved because they were victims of propaganda! When you say that "Lacanians obtain their effects by exploiting their patients' masochism", you are doing nothing more than moralizing the scientific debate, which is so common in this field.

Green: Your relativism negates all specificity. In fact, Lacan, in his seminar on ethics³, states that an analyst is someone who does not give up his desire. This is how he himself described Lacantheanalyst: "I don't give a damn about legislation telling the analyst to behave in such and such a way. I'm going to do exactly what I like, unless criminal law prevents it." So he took advantage of the ambiguities in national law on psychotherapies to do exactly as he pleased. National law does not deal with psychoanalysis because that would imply recognizing it, also as a therapy, and having to refund analytical costs.

The ethical position which states, "I will not renounce my desire," is analogous to the ethics of terrorists who say before a tribunal, "one day we'll get rid of the judges who are now judging me". This ethic reads: "My desire is the only law". The Maître, like the terrorist, does not recognize a universal law. All are subject to the law but him.

You make comparisons with Jungians. Some of Jung's theoretical positions disturb me, but I can say nothing against Jungian practice. If you were to ask me what Jungian therapeutical results are based on, I would not say "suggestion" that would be too easy.

Benvenuto: But isn't saying that Lacanians get results thanks to their patients' masochism also too easy an answer?

Green: No, because masochism is everywhere, and is certainly not a Jungian prerogative. Jungians don't exploit masochism in an unacceptable manner. When two people remain face to face for some time, in an atmosphere of proximity, something inevitably happens. Even in Lacanian analyses something happens. But is what happens in the patient's best interest? The abandonment of neutrality, the imposition of the psychoanalyst's will — both Lacanian methods — do not benefit the patient. I know of a patient who tried to interrupt her analysis five times, and her Lacanian analyst phoned her and talked to her for hours to convince her to return. Where, then, is the patient's freedom?

Benvenuto: Analysts who behave incorrectly can be found in any analytical school. The Italian Psychoanalytic Association recently split over a psychoanalyst who slept with his patients, and he was not a Lacanian. You said you had nothing to say against Jungian practice — yet, as we now know from Carotenuto's book⁴, Jung slept with his schizophrenic patient, Sabina Spielrein. May the school that never sinned cast the first stone.

Green: You tend to relativize too much. There are analysts who do not abide by the law in any society, but they are in a state of delinquency. Amongst Lacanians there is no delinquency, because there are no laws!

Benvenuto: You do, however, draw a caricature of the Lacanian theory on the analyst's desire. Lacan says that every subject not just the analyst must not renounce his desire. More than any other analyst, Lacan insisted upon the structuring function of law in relation to desire. For Lacan, desire itself is partly an effect of the law. In fact, some leftists attacked Lacan quite virulently because his theory seemed too moralistic.

Green: Lacanians talk about the law, but in practice forcefully and arbitrarily interrupt sessions. They talk of the primacy of the signifier, but don't give people even the time to talk. What can one analyze in sessions that go on for perhaps five minutes? There is not even time to describe a dream. They talk of the NameoftheFather, but they seem more like possessive and abusive mothers: "Love me! And be on my side!"

Of course Lacan was warmly welcomed onto the French intellectual stage for the undeniable quality of his thought: he writes better than Melanie Klein, Winnicott or Bion, whose works don't address the intellectual world.

Benvenuto: But is it just pure chance that the analyst you criticize most is the one who writes best? Masud R. Kahn also wrote well, yet he too was thrown out of the British Psychoanalytical Association, apparently for ethical reasons. Is it not a "symptom" that in order to write well about psychoanalysis, one must stay at the fringes of it?

Green: Céline too was a good writer, yet he was a Fascist. Lacan succeeded better than others in selling psychoanalysis to the intellectuals, by telling them that the unconscious was structured like a language. An intellectual, whose primary tool is labguge, will be seduced by this conception of the unconscious which allows all shocking aspects of psychoanalysis, such as sexual drives, be ignored. Intellectuals are deeply offended when psychoanalysis tells them that they are indelibly marked by their childhood obsessions, their bodily and animal-like instincts. Lacan transforms the problem of castration, or mourning, or fragmentation, into a kind of general manque (lack), saying, "but this is the human condition". He does not acknowledge the theological and Christian side of psychoanalytic theory⁵: Lacan rewrites Freud's psychoanalysis in a Christian key, a softening for which the intellectuals were extremely grateful.

Benvenuto: Have the best interpretations of psychoanalysis been made by Jews?

Green: That is not the point. What is important is to avoid rewriting psychoanalysis in a Christian sense. Freud had Jewish origins, but he is above all an atheist writer I, too, am an atheist Jew. The Times Literary Supplement, in reviewing the *Ecrits*, quite rightly wrote that the weight of religion on Lacan's thought is

considerable. But his Christian rewriting of psychoanalysis makes it deviate from its course. With time, a considerable segment of Lacanian thought collapses. What remains is the charge of a deviated analysis. The surviving core allows many incompetent, untrained people to live off people coming to buy the illusions of healing.

Benvenuto: Does this apply also to the late Françoise Dolto? Although not strictly speaking a Lacanian, she was always a member of the Ecole Freudienne. Was it pure chance that the most popular clinical analyst in France today was a Lacanian? How can your accusations of abuse be directed against solid people like Dolto? True, Dolto was a Catholic and, like Lacan, drew people from outside the psychoanalytic circle to psychoanalysis. But can we say that she became inoffensive and acceptable to the Catholic masses for this reason?

Green: Dolto was a generous and sensitive person. True, she did admire Lacan immensely. Shortly before she died she said that she was going to heaven to play games with Lacan. Her works has had a vast impact in France, but she was never recognized by intellectuals. On the contrary, she was attacked by many Lacanians precisely because of her religious beliefs. In Lacan's case, there was a theological rather than a religious position — he was not fascinated by religion, but by the Fathers of the Church. Dolto's charitable spirit placed her at the other end of religion.

Benvenuto: But it is well known that the devil is an expert theologian... I think you are missing the "diabolical" aspect of Lacan's thought.

Green: Dolto spoke on the radio and ordinary people were touched; Lacan sold psychoanalysis to the intellectuals.

Benvenuto: Psychoanalysis has always sold well to the intellectuals; if it survives today, it is thanks to them. Psychoanalysis' privileged position today in Western countries is certainly not attributable to doctors, psychiatrists or academic psychologists, but to the enthusiasm that Freudianism garnered among writers, philosophers, journalists, artists and teachers.

Green: I don't agree with you. Up until now Freud has been a failure with intellectuals. Only a few men of letters have followed him.

Benvenuto: Are you referring to the Surrealists, for example?

Green: Surrealists totally misunderstood psychoanalysis. When Breton went to see Freud, the latter told him he was interested in dreams only to the extent to which they could contribute to understanding oneiric work and associations. The Surrealists, however, were fascinated by the phenomenon of the dream itself. Between the 1950s and the 1990s, interest in Lacan's thought was tied to so-called structuralism, which aroused the interest of some great names who nevertheless never subscribed to Lacanism, or to psychoanalysis for that matter: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, Deleuze, etc. Deleuze's *AntiOedipus* came out in the early 1970s. Towards the end of his life, Foucault, with his *History of Sexuality*, is at the point of a complete break with psychoanalysis.

Benvenuto: But Derrida has always been benevolent towards psychoanalysis.

Green: Indeed, he lives with an analyst, his wife! But Derrida does not admit a debt to psychoanalysis. His famous text, "Freud and the Writing Scene"⁶, is a lecture given by him at my seminar on psychoanalysis. He continued to write on Freud, but in what a style, his thought becoming even more bittersweet and acidic: "I'm afraid that all analysis is simply a question of adapting and conforming to social norms". It's true that he works with René Major, an important analyst.

The Paris Psychoanalytical Society's monograph, *La Psychanalyse: Questions pour Demain*⁷, contains a long text I wrote on the question of "thirdness", which was taken up by Charles S. Peirce. For this I reread Derrida and was astonished to find that his theory is none other than Freud's theory of primary processes,

although Derrida evidently doesn't feel obliged to acknowledge his debt. When he talks of the characteristics of a thought that doesn't know where it is going, that proceeds by associations, then undoes itself, errs, etc., he is simply talking about the unconscious analytic process.

Benvenuto: But Derrida has often admitted that Freud is one of his fundamental points of reference.

Green: It is not a question of paying homage to Freud or Marx, but of what to do with the notion of the unconscious. Will a philosophy of the unconscious ever be possible? Is what we are seeing today, behind the screens and contortions, an attempt to bring Freud's thought on the unconscious back into the bosom of something which is still consciousness, even if it is no longer called "consciousness". There is talk of Being, "difference," and other concepts which blur any reference to consciousness - because after Freud it became impossible to defend its primacy.

Benvenuto: Derrida has also criticized Lacan in *The Post-Card*.

Green: Yes, he criticized him in "Le facteur de la vérité"⁸, and during a conference at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. But today it is not a question of criticizing Lacan, but of placing oneself in relation to psychoanalytic thought, without Lacan. At the conference *Lacan avec les Philosophes*⁹, some philosophers recognized their debt to him, while others criticized him (in particular, the Russian linguist Avtonomova¹⁰, who radically criticized his conception of language). But the real, serious error is that today Lacan is the unchallenged authority for intellectuals when they are talking about psychoanalysis, when the real question is not Lacan, but psychoanalysis itself.

Benvenuto: Philosophers today find in the Lacanian language a more direct way of approaching psychoanalysis because, as you say, Lacan is comfortable with philosophical language, and because he rereads Freudian thought in a secretly Christian key. But why, then, is not Paul Ricoeur, a Christian spiritualist, the preferred authority of philosophers? In 1965, Ricoeur published a remarkable work on Freud, *De l'Interprétation*¹¹. Yet the publication of Lacan's *Ecrits* the following year completely obscured Ricoeur's work in the philosophical milieu.

Green: Ricoeur wrote his remarkable book on Freud in the course of a personal search. At a certain point he became interested in Freud, and even attended Lacan's seminars. Later Lacan reproached Ricoeur for not having cited him, to which Ricoeur responded that he had understood nothing of what Lacan had said! Ricoeur's book on Freud is nevertheless the work of someone who has stepped outside his habitual path.

After WWII, however, there was a general "return to Freud." MerleauPonty's *The Visible and the Invisible*¹² already contains several references to psychoanalysis. Sartre's relationship to Freud is more delicate; LéviStrauss states that his two masters are Marx and Freud. Ricoeur's book, therefore, is part of a predictable attempt to analyze Freud according to traditional methods. But Lacan's *Ecrits* is not the work of a philosopher; rather of someone who has dedicated his life to the practice of psychoanalysis, and who is moreover a man of letters and very much aware of what is happening on the cultural scene. Lacan, because he feared a poor reception by intellectuals, did not want to publish his *Ecrits*, and did so only under pressure from Jean Wahl¹³. I saw Lacan before the publication of the *Ecrits*, and he was extremely distressed.

Benvenuto: Why this fear of intellectuals? He repeatedly stated that his seminars were exclusively for analysts, even if every now and then he liked to invite some cultural celebrities.

Green: Because Lacan always belonged to the intelligentsia. Many photos show him in the company of people in vogue on the Parisian intellectual scene. He frequented Kojève's seminars, Queneau, MerleauPonty and LéviStrauss...

Benvenuto: Do many psychoanalysts in France envy their colleagues who - like Lacan - succeed in the world of intellectuals? One has the impression that French analysts aspire to an intellectual role - something far less common among American or British analysts. Could it be that Lacan is envied as the first analyst,

after Freud, to be a star of the Parisian intelligentsia?

Green: Of course, any analyst would enjoy success among the intellectuals - although at a price of becoming a seducer. Intellectuals may be impressed when told: "even you have an unconscious!", but there are always limits beyond which one may not go. The price Lacan paid was not going beyond these limits.

The *Ecrits* had an impact above all because it expressed an original and clear cut thought, and because its style of writing is excellent. At that time intellectuals felt somewhat guilty for having so hastily dismissed Freud. And here is Lacan advertising another Freud who is a philosopher and linguist, in short, a Freud who does not offend them.

Benvenuto: I was astonished when you said that intellectuals take offence to the importance given by Freud to sexuality and the body! University professors today deal with nothing but sex, gender and the body! It appears to me that the opposite is true: Ricoeur at that time seemed too "sublimating", while Lacan emphasized the phallus, sexuality and castration, which pleased the intellectuals. Anyway, many foes of psychoanalysis say it is too seductive as a whole. In his *Conversations on Freud*¹⁴, Wittgenstein remarked that Freud very often denounced the resistance which psychoanalysis provoked - particularly among intellectuals - yet Freud was totally blind to its other side, that is, to the enormous seductive power of his theory. You say that Lacan created a caricature of psychoanalysis to seduce the intellectuals, but caricatures often reveal more of the truth than exact copies. A good part of your criticism of Lacan can actually be deflected against psychoanalysts in general.

Green: My criticism of Wittgenstein is similar to my criticism of Lacan: I don't think one should keep silent about what cannot be spoken of. On the contrary, one should make the utmost effort to talk as much as possible about what cannot be spoken of. Wittgenstein blames Freud for being too convincing, for giving himself too many means to prove his objects...

Benvenuto: He blames Freud for wanting to explain too much...

Green: Perhaps on a textual level Wittgenstein is right. But after Freud, things went ahead: a new interpretation of Freud is needed, but it is also necessary to extend psychoanalysis to things that Freud barely glimpsed. French analysts are often accused of being too Freudian, but in my opinion Freud's work is a permanent workshop for interpretative re-elaboration. Freud was said to have been a seducer, but so was Wittgenstein, if we give credence to what Richard Wollheim says, for example. But if Freud's thought is so seductive, why then did it meet with so much resistance? Philosophers who aim at the naturalization of thought through neurosciences, as well as the Heideggerians, are certainly not seduced by Freud.

Benvenuto: In Italy, Heideggerians (Vattimo, Rovatti) and many others (Bodei, Galimberti — who is also analyst — Gargani, Rella, etc.) have always dealt with Freud.

Green: You may be right as far as Italy is concerned. But Freud never really triumphed on the philosophical scene. On the contrary, philosophers' resistance to Freud is still very strong. Freud succeeds on the other hand in the most unpredictable fields - for example, among mathematicians such as René Thom¹⁵. Both logicians and hermeneuticians usually state that psychoanalysis is neither rigorous nor convincing, and so hazy.

Benvenuto: What you are saying surprises me, because it appears to me that in Europe - and especially in France - Freudian thought is still dominant. Harsh criticisms of Freud are a sign of his success: all thinkers who have left their mark on an era have been criticized. The fact that in the US Newt Gingrich is now spoken of in foul terms is a sign of his power, not of his weakness. In any case, I don't see why some wellargued criticism of Freud should be factiously dismissed as "resistance". You only seem pleased when a philosopher propagandizes psychoanalysis, propaganda fidei. Would you like philosophy to be for psychoanalysis what theology should be for the Catholic Church, proof that the Pope is always right? And is it true that many Parisian philosophers are in analysis?

Green: If they undergo analysis, they certainly don't go around shouting about it, and they are perfectly able to maintain an absolute separation between psychoanalysis as a personal experience and psychoanalysis as a corpus of thought.

Benvenuto: But can you deny that, worldwide, psychoanalysis has made more inroads on intellectuals than on doctors? Why do psychoanalysts such as yourself so often complain about intellectuals', and not psychiatrists', resistance against psychoanalysis? There are many well-known French philosophers or theoreticians who have become professional analysts: Julia Kristeva, Cornelius Castoriadis, Paul-Laurent Assoun, Luce Irigaray, to name a few.

Green: I hold Julia Kristeva in great esteem, but I don't consider her a philosopher. Cornelius Castoriadis has multiple identities, as he is also a sociologist and a political thinker. But neither Kristeva nor Castoriadis belong to the principal philosophical currents.

Benvenuto: Yet Freud was essential to the work of philosophers like Bachelard, Marcuse, Althusser, Deleuze, Lyotard. Habermas, in *Knowledge and Human Interests*¹⁶, elevates psychoanalysis to a paradigm of a "science of the spirit". And even for Richard Rorty, Freud is important. Isn't that enough?

Green: Habermas' thought is not psychoanalytically but politically oriented. And the "conversions" of the philosophers you mentioned are rare. Among the so-called pure philosophers - of the calibre of Gadamer or Rawls - you won't find a single psychoanalyst. I would hope, nevertheless, that Freud's thought will become part of the epistemological thought.

Conversation held in Paris, 17.5.94 – Translated from the French by Gianmaria Senia

Notes:

1 – Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, *The Unconscious. A Psychoanalytic Study*, tr. by P. Coleman, *French Yale Studies*, 48, 1972.

2 – Lecture held by Lacan at the University of Vincennes, before a large group of leftist students.

3 – Lacan, *The Seminar*, book VII. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (London: Tavistock-Routledge, 1992.)

4 – Aldo Carotenuto, *A Secret Symmetry. Sabina Spielrein between Jung and Freud*, tr. by Amo Pomerans, John Shapley and Krishna Winston (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

5 – Slip of tongue: Green meant "Lacanian", not "psychoanalytic". We have left in any slips of the tongue which emerged in the conversation, as a tribute to the psychoanalytic theory of slips of tongue.

6 – In Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, tr. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

7 – André Green et al., *La psychanalyse: Questions pour demain* (Paris: PUF, 1990).

8 – Jacques Derrida, *The Post-Card, from Socrates to Freud and beyond*, tr. by Alan Bass (Chicago, London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 411-496.

9 – Green is referring to the *Colloques*, the acts of which have been published in the volume *Lacan avec les Philosophes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991)[reviewed by Fulvio Marone in the *Journal of European*

Psychoanalysis, Nr 1, Spring-Summer 1995, pp. 185-7].

10 – Natalia Avtonomova, “Lacan avec Kant: l’Idée du Symbolisme”, in *Lacan avec les Philosophes*, cit. supra n. 8, pp 6786.

11 – Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy. An Essay on Interpretation*, tr. by Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970.) Editor.

12 – Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, tr. by Alphonso Lingis (Evernston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1968).

13 – Slip of tongue: Green is referring not to Jean Wahl, the existentialist philosopher, but to François Wahl, the prestigious editor of the Editions du Seuil, editor of the *Ecrits* and a great supporter of Lacan.

14 – Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Conversations on Freud” in Cyril Barrett, ed., *Lectures & Conversations* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1980), pp. 41-52.

15 – René Thom is well known in France as the creator of the mathematical “catastrophes’ theory”. See René Thom, *Modèles mathématiques de la morphogenèse* (Paris: 10/18, 1974); *Paraboles et catastrophes. Entretiens réalisés par Giulio Giorello et Simona Morini* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983).

16 – Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, tr. by Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: Heinemann, 1972).