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Après Coup: A Response to Jonathan House's Riposte

Jonathan House's Riposte: <https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/articles/on-apres-coup-riposte/>

We have a disagreement about the scope of the concept of *après-coup* in Lacan. To say it in very general terms, the question of temporality is so broad in Lacan that *Nachträglichkeit* is only one element in it, an element which Lacan isolated from Freud. In Laplanche, *après-coup* is a much more limited (in the mathematical sense) concept and always linked to *Nachträglichkeit* as a “psychic process” to be understood interpersonally. The ideas of anticipation, futurity, dialectical reversal, logical time, subjective instantiation, and others in connection with these can be found in Lacan since 1936: starting with “The Mirror Stage;” continuing with the 1946 essay on “Logical Time” structured around the temporality of precipitation; to the reading of the Dora case shortly after, seen as a logical unfolding of dialectical reversals via the elaboration of transference; to the “graph of desire” which appears in the 1950s where the relation between desire and demand is always a dialectical relationship that points forward more than it does backwards; to his translation of the *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*, where in the “*là où c’était*” the imperfect tense is used in its aspect of incompleteness; to his *Seminar 11* from 1963-1964 where the unconscious is defined as “non-realized” meaning that it is always open and its modification by retroaction is only one side of this structure of latency. Also the introduction of variable length sessions is a technique linked to the problems of temporality and precipitation in relation to the handling of time. (In the introduction to an issue of the *Psychoanalytic Review* where an earlier version of Jonathan House's JAPA article was published and which proposed to give an overview of “French psychoanalysis” this technique is mistakenly identified as “*séances courtes*”, “short sessions”—“*séances scandées*” or “*séances à durée variable*” would have been more correct, especially in relation to the disputes in the early 1950s and 1960s [see Emery 2015: 610]. We will come back to the place of this *issue* later). One could condense the entire Lacanian corpus by reconstructing its theory according to the idea of open futurity, anticipation and its dialectical unfolding in the direction of a treatment.

Eventually, Lacan in his later work radicalized his idea of time, following Freud's contention that there is no time in the unconscious, relying on topological structures which could cut through chronological time in various ways. As well, the subversion of the super-ego was part of this cutting, meaning that judgment aims at a future moment in which finality is phantasized, a stasis that could potentially fall away in a ‘cure.’ This is why analysts who study Lacan are not given to genetic interpretation (the example given of a Lacanian interpretation by Jonathan House and Julie Slotnick in their 2015 article devoted to the same topic [House/Slotnick 2015: 697] is not an interpretation that either of us recognize as anything a reader of Lacan would necessarily make, especially with respect to its certainty regarding historical truth). In a sense, it is somewhat strange to us to even have to argue this point concerning the importance of temporality, since it would seem rather obvious to anyone who has studied Lacan, not to mention a large literature by others in the field that followed from this. There are other disagreements between Lacan and Laplanche that are well known, centering at one point around the Bonneval conference and the idea of the signifier, enigmatic,

designed, etc. and the big Other. There are also arguments with respect to the relationship between psychoanalysis and science. It is not certain that Lacan and Laplanche, even when seemingly using the same terms “*Nachträglichkeit*”/ “*après-coup*,” are speaking about the same thing; the epistemological divide is profound. All these questions are of great interest but not for our purposes here.

In the JAPA paper by Jonathan House (2018), Lacan was named in order to sideline him quickly—Jonathan House writes that “Laplanche and Pontalis seem generous” in crediting Lacan with discovering and elaborating the concept in Freud. The purpose seems to us then to draw the image of a flourishing elaboration of *après-coup*, especially after the early 90s when readings by IPA analysts of Laplanche’s work followed a conference on the concept, erasing decades of scholarship by Lacan and by Lacanians on temporality in psychoanalysis. The methodological problems and questions concerning temporality in psychoanalysis are indexed in part by *Nachträglichkeit* /*après-coup* but does not warrant the exclusive use of only these terms.

To simplify for the sake of illustrating the divide, Jonathan House seems to be saying that the problems of temporality in psychoanalysis are concentrated in *Nachträglichkeit*/*après-coup* in such a way that they are tantamount to those terms; that the word *nachträglich* was discovered by Lacan in Freud in 1953; that not much was made of it till 1964 and 1967 when it was rediscovered by Laplanche/Pontalis; that again not much happened until the 1980s and 1990s when Laplanche worked on it; that the fruits of this work are now being rediscovered again in France and the US in particular. (One could add that this series of discoveries, this work and its ‘fruition’, if those do exist, would happen in the bed of historical succession placed in the solid albeit at times renovated building of an institution that subscribes to the possibility of being recognized by the City of Science as if to inhabit one of its real estate properties.) We would be saying that the question of temporality and historicity exploded at the onset of Freud’s discoveries and inventions; that his own writings as well as friendships and political endeavors are shut through with the attempts at coming to terms with it; that *Nachträglichkeit* itself is an effect of yet another complication of the unconscious; that time, chronology, historical construction cannot have the last word in psychoanalysis; that Lacan attempted to orient himself and others in these complexities by *projecting* (in the geometrical sense) them onto several different surfaces (linguistic, topological, political, etc.); that he was also punished for that: for not giving in to common sense, to scientific naiveté, to consolidated powers resting on historicist ideologies; that it is impossible to calmly hope to identify one’s place in this history because it isn’t one while experiencing that it also is a battle over images and identifications; that time is nomadic, an exile; that there is no purely theoretical concept in psychoanalysis.

For us, the conceptual and historical construction by House is also a continuation of a relationship of power maintained by the IPA, following the expulsion of an analyst who considered himself (and was considered by many) a Freudian, from the Freudian field—or the Freudian body—which remains a trauma, the repercussions of which are yet to be seen. But they are certainly felt by a younger generation who has to stand as if on two platforms crookedly divided. The introduction (by Edward Sieveking Emery) to the issue of the *Psychoanalytic Review* where Jonathan House and Julie Slotnick’s preceding article appeared in 2015, makes use of their argument for the purposes of what can only be called “scholarship by hearsay” to promote stereotypes like “the Master’s discourse” and is in fact incorrect, imprecise, or obscure with respect to several details—“*séances courtes*” already mentioned; the attribution of “discourse” to Kojève next to the omission of other important influences on Lacan; the expression “strategic, if at times illuminating, reading of Freud;” the strange figure in which Lacan became “Lacan;” the misuse of the theorem “*discours du maître*,” which Lacan designed to analyze the institution of power and not to designate an individual’s speech, among others.

This was the trouble we were having with the article. This is not a disagreement about priority or some fight over origins, but the use of a certain narrative and a certain methodology to repeat a well-known and worn-out image of Lacan, the very same one brought up at the end of Jonathan House’s riposte after a friendly dispute said to take place on scholarly grounds. House writes that “[...] given J&M’s connection with Lacan, it seems appropriate to excerpt a passage from Jeanne Favret-Saada’s 1977 ‘Excusez, moi, je ne faisais que passer.’” And then what follows is part of a resignation letter, which is an interesting, angry

document, testifying to a moment of madness and fragility at a precise time in a group situation when Lacan was ill and intense power struggles in a school both internationally isolated and nationally exposed were happening. But what is the connection to our connection to Lacan now? What is appropriate about this passage with respect to the question we have about a tendentious misreading of Lacan? And what does it mean to extract this testimony from a complex moment in history as proof of the fact that Lacanians are what? Given to dogmatism, wild interpretation, and arrogance? For Lacan, arrogance and dogmatism are never on the side of individuals but institutions, which an individual may attempt to identify with. Such was his generosity, even to Laplanche whom he felt bitterly betrayed by. This is why our argument was with JAPA or the *Psychoanalytic Review*, the International Psychoanalytic Association by proxy, and not with our friend Jonathan House.

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