***Free Associations: Psychoanalysis and Culture, Media, Groups, Politics***

**Number 90, December 2023 ISSN: 2047-0622**

**URL:** [**http://www.freeassociations.org.uk/**](http://www.freeassociations.org.uk/)



*Psychoanalysis, Politics, Oppression and Resistance: Lacanian Perspectives* edited by Chris Vanderwees and Kristen Hennessy (London/New York: Routledge, 2022)

Reviewed by Keren Zhang

Can Lacan help us to rethink connections between psychoanalysis and politics, and between oppression and resistance, in productive ways? Is Lacanian psychoanalysis politically relevant? This thought-provoking book contains a dozen insightful and affirmative responses to these questions. Alain Badiou and Élisabeth Roudinesco (2014, 60-61) argue the Lacanian framework is a robust weapon of subversion against the capitalist system. To that end they attempt to incorporate his psychoanalytic system into discussions of ideology, power, constructivism, feminism, revolution, identity, and subjectivity. They trace theoretic relations between Lacan and other radical theorists such as Marx, Laclau, and Althusser.

Scholars have combined psychoanalytic theories with the social sciences so as to refine a means to re-interpret desire, subject, and identity – and to propose solutions to pressing social concerns. Andreja Zevnik (2019) proposes a distinct ontology for comprehending global politics. Yannis Stavrakakis (1999, 2007, 2022) and Samo Tomi (2015, 2019) utilize notions of phantasy, *jouissance*, and dialectics to develop a Lacanian theory of left politics. Obviously, Slavoj Žižek (1989, 1991, 1992, 2006, 2016, 2022) devised a unique political path by renovating and reinterpreting Lacan’s concepts, such as ‘objects of excess’ and ‘*objets petit a*’, and applying them to ideology, film, and politics. It is encouraging to see Lacanian researchers moving from closed counselling sessions to a larger community. Indeed, many articles in the book offer ideas on how to utilise Lacanian psychoanalysis as a tool to support politically under-represented groups.

Ian Parker and Clint Burnham discuss the role of resistance in Lacan, and endorse Mari Ruti’s (2018, xvii) contention that the heteropatriarchy must dissolve as a result of the binary logic of the haves and the have-nots (racial discrimination and economic disparity). Christopher Meyer and Debora Kirschbaum Nitkin draw on their clinical expertise to give insights on immigrant community mental health. Both pieces may be regarded as elaborations of Julia Beltsiou’s (2016) book on psychoanalysis and immigration and of Amy Buzby’s (2013) argument for community mental assistance. Eve Watson and Sheila L. Cavanagh then explore psychoanalytic organisations and their professional ethics. Cavanagh highlights current conflict between predetermined treatment plans and tailored therapeutic procedures. A new Canadian law appears to discriminate especially against Lacanian *laissez-faire* therapeuticconduct. Cavanagh serves as an example of how Lacanian psychoanalysts could ‘fight’ a pervasive ‘customer-centred’ therapy. Watson urges that every analyst internalise their favoured group’s working ethics. Chris Vanderwees and Kristen Hennessy also discuss psychotherapy inside under-represented communities which, they argue, very much need Lacanian *laissez-faire* treatment: open conversations, games, and listening. Daniel Adleman and Bo Earle strive for the transcendence of ‘Real’ equality in today’s world. Vanderwees, Hennessy, Adleman, and Earle side-step an academic setting that would instrumentalise psychoanalysis.

Vanderwees and Hennessy disrupt the binaries that have privileged whiteness, heterosexuality, and wealth (Gaztambide 2019, 16) by incorporating real-world job experience into their analysis. Adleman and Earle base their own studies on the individuals’ semiotic relationship with their surroundings (Tateo 2016, 435). They can serve as a handy model for including a signification-based Lacanian method to connect the three components of the symbolic, imaginary, and real in cultural products.

David Pavón-Cuéllar contends that Lacan unites illuminatingly with both political economy and Freud’s sexual economy, and describes how the capitalist world works to monopolise our enjoyment. Alireza Taheri proposes that only by returning to Hegel’s God, Marx’s commodity mysticism, and Freud’s dream can we balance the ‘scientific style of thinking’, and resist resurgences of pre-modern superstition. Cuéllar’s article maps how Lacan crossed the border from sexuality to the sphere of political economy, while also providing guidance to combat the vicious loop of surplus-enjoyment, a notion also taken on by Žižek (2022). Given the uncertainties of the present—resurgent nationalism, digital capitalism, neofascist populism, rampant inflation, spiraling xenophobic violence—the book serves as a weapon to shake us awake when confronted with deluding master discourses.

**References**

Badiou, A. and Élisabeth, R(2014) *Jacques Lacan, Past and Present: A Dialogue*. Trans. from the French by Jason E. Smith. New York: Columbia University Press.

Buzby, A (2013) *Subterranean Politics and Freud’s Legacy: Critical Theory and Society*. London: Palgrave.

Gaztmbide, D (2019) *A People’s History of Psychoanalysis: From Freud to Liberation Psychology*. Lanham/Boulder/New York/London: Lexington Books.

Ruti, M (2018) *Penis Envy and Other Bad Feelings: The Emotional Costs of Everyday Life*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Tateo, L (2016) Toward a cogenetic cultural psychology. *Culture & Psychology*, 22 (3), 433–447.

Žižek, S (2022) *Surplus-Enjoyment: A Guide for The Non-Perplexed*. London: Bloomsbury.

**Keren Zhang** is a doctoral candidate in literature, translation and cultural studies at Sichuan International Studies University, China. He thanks Carolyn Laubender and Matt Ffytche from University of Essex for their assistance.