

Psychoanalysis for anthropology: An introduction to Lacanian anthropology

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Abstract

This article revisits the theoretical junctions of anthropology and psychoanalysis, two of the *impossible* disciplines, and explores the potential for re-interpreting key anthropological questions from the psychoanalytic perspective, focusing mainly on the work of Jacques Lacan and his followers. Over the years, there have been many attempts to fuse ideas from both disciplines. This co-operation began with Freud and continues on the basic conceptual level to this day, and is (rightfully) rejected by most of the anthropological community. In contrast, attempts to reevaluate some fundamental constants of anthropological theory from the Lacanian perspective have been scarce and lacking the effort or courage to outline the binding points of the two overlapping fields of knowledge. This article tries to do exactly that: to outline the scope of the interrelationship and to identify important areas, such as subjectivity and its relation to the social reality and vice versa, methodology and epistemology, where Lacan's 'return to Freud' can offer new insights into old problems.

KEYWORDS: anthropology and psychoanalysis, Lacan, psychoanalysis, epistemology

Introduction

The most general of definitions about the nature of the broad field of inquiry known as anthropology defines anthropology as the study of Man. This definition clearly avoids the problem of what can still be interpreted as the object, or rather the subject of anthropology, whether it be the kinship system of a specific ethnic group, or the progressive systematisation of the evolutionary history of mankind, as if the object of study floating somewhere in the vast, uncharted space-time between poetry and pottery. However, the question, of what Man is, cannot simply be set aside, since the very epistemological essence of anthropology lies in the answer, or more specifically in a mutual consensus about what this peculiar animal is.

Among the many definitions on the essence of human nature, one must make a difficult but always fully subjective decision between those that are more compatible with one's personal worldview and those that are less so. Such a choice resembles a leap of faith into the unknown. I choose language and the act of speech as that universal and simultaneously the most unique feature of humanity that separates us from other species to the greatest extent.

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It is impossible to write a poem with all the concomitant wordplay in the rigid form of computer language; the final result would make no sense. *Language* as meant here is not a mere simple coding system for transferring messages, as with other social animals, but a coding system that contains in its essence a discord or gap between what it represents and the means of representation. It is this dimension of pure potentiality of meaning that gives rise to poetry and all the misunderstandings and misinterpretations of everyday communication that some believe is crucial. While its aim, in a strict sense, always misses the point, we somehow still manage to decipher what the other subject tried to say, or even what he did not. 'The word goes out but the message is lost', says a Corsican proverb. This miscommunication can be bridged only by the belief that the other is not lying, not telling a truth that can never be wholly told; this is, again, an act of faith. When Hermes agreed to become Zeus's messenger, he promised never to lie, but also not to tell the whole truth either.

To use a further illustration of the problem, let us re-use the story of the *Cree hunter who (the story goes) came to Montreal to testify in court concerning the fate of his hunting lands near the new James Bay hydroelectric project. After describing his way of life, he was administered the oath, but he hesitated: 'I'm not sure I can tell the truth ... I can only tell what I know'* (Clifford 1986: 8). This fundamental belief, identified with an act of speech as such, has to suppose the existence of a guarantor of meaning, which can be found the Lacanian articulation of this locus: the *big Other*.

As long as Man speaks, psychoanalysis is relevant to anthropology. Moreover, Man thinks as much as he speaks. Without a doubt, this *logocentrism* is an extreme epistemological position, already taken by Heidegger, for whom language was 'the house of Being' (Heidegger 1998).

The importance of language was crucial even to the early tradition of Boasian cultural anthropology, especially to Edward Sapir, who together with Benjamin Lee Whorf developed the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*, focusing on the principles of linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism. For Sapir, language was foundation of culture, the gateway to a world of meanings, which are linguistic in their essence. The individual, his perception of the world and his concrete behaviours are all defined by the language of his /her culture.

This belief in the supremacy of language and also its tyranny and its consequences for the speaking subject may constitute a necessary meeting point between psychoanalysis and some schools of institutionalised anthropological thought.

How did the encounter between anthropology and psychoanalysis begin?

Anthropology and psychoanalysis: encounters of the third kind

In the beginning, there was Freud. His 'exercise in anthropology', *Totem and Taboo* (Freud 2001), although regarded as a simplification and reduction of social phenomena par excellence, if read in a specific, structuralist manner, remains a ground-breaking work, a quantum leap in linking individual psychology and socio-cultural phenomena. This special

reading of Freud and his work some decades later revolutionised psychoanalytical theory as well as influencing other social sciences.

Just as we have, on the one hand, the Freudian, classic, psychoanalytical tradition and, on the other, its spin-off interpretations, linguo-structuralist, Lacanian, being one of them, so we also have two different encounters of anthropological theory with psychoanalysis.

The first studies fully or partially incorporated strict, descriptive readings of Freudian psychoanalytical concepts: from students of Boas – Mead (Mead 1928; 1930; 1935) and Benedict (Benedict 1934), although the latter never used Freudian terminology, to Malinowski (Malinowski 2001) and his study of the Oedipus complex in the Trobriand Islands, national character studies and modal personality studies associated with Kardiner, Kluckhohn, Linton, DuBois, Gorer and Wallace, to child rearing practices studies and cross-cultural testing of Freudian hypotheses by the Whitings, Spiro, LeVine (Heald 1994), and finally to the ethnopsychiatry of Geza Roheim (Roheim 1930; 1934; 1945), Georges Devereux (Devereux 1951; 1967; 1976) and others. These last studies represent the ultimate theoretical dead-end of the encounter between anthropology and Freudian psychoanalysis.

If this first collaboration was on the level of context, i.e. field material was interpreted through Freudian and Jungian concepts, the second happened on the level of structure, the structure that supposedly lies beneath the manifested social phenomena and which in argumentation differed considerably from Radcliffe-Brown's dead, skeletal structure of social institutions.

My focus is on this second encounter, which started with Sapir, with an almost Saussurean interpretation of the logic of the cultural pattern as the earliest manifestation of this 'beyond the Freud' approach and which peaked with the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who was clearly influenced by Freud.

Lévi-Strauss's line of argumentation follows the Freudian notion about symbolic associations (metaphoric and metonymic), latent and manifest formations, together with the structure of the human mind, made of layers of consciousness, unconsciousness and preconsciousness. Like Freud, Lévi-Strauss was a universalist seeking a universal logic and principles functioning in the human mind independent of time, space, race or culture. Freud sought the universal logic in the deciphering of dreams (Freud 2001); Lévi-Strauss used the same principle in the study of myth (Lévi-Strauss 1969; 1973; 1978; 1990). Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss followed Freud in claiming that the incest taboo is the cornerstone of human society (Lévi-Strauss 1969). If Freud was concerned with manifestations of repressed desires and impulses from the Unconscious, later called the Id, in the individual psychopathologies of his patients, Lévi-Strauss focused on 'the unconscious nature of collective phenomena', as stated in his *Structural Anthropology* (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 18). The idea of an unconscious aspect of the human mind, which is nevertheless constantly manifested in material form, is the common basis and the most fundamental starting point for Freud and Lévi-Strauss.

The crossroads on the unconscious avenue

In contrast, psychoanalysis was not immune to the temptation of using anthropological material for its purposes.

Freud's work, *Totem and Taboo*, was the first text of its kind. The text was an attempt to establish a breakthrough from psychoanalytical practice to the field of *ethnopsychology*, which at the time had been extensively written about by Jung and Wundt. Freud used the most up-to-date anthropological literature of his time, citing most works of the fathers of anthropology: Frazer, Morgan, Durkheim, Westermarck, Haddon, Fison, Spencer, Gillen, etc. (Freud 2007).

Jacques Lacan, perhaps the most notorious figure of the French psychoanalytic 'return to Freud', was also influenced by the anthropology of his era: Malinowski's material on the Oedipus complex (Lacan 1938) and particularly that of Claude Lévi-Strauss, with whom he shared an interest in the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. In the schismatic *Discours de Rome* from 1953, Lacan emphasised the return to Freud and a revaluation of Freud's often confusing terms with new insights from (structural) anthropology, semiotics and philosophy, or as he states in the concluding paragraphs of the preface:

But it does seem to me that these terms can only become that much more clear if their equivalence to the Language of the contemporary anthropology is established, or even to the latest problems of philosophy, where psychoanalysis has often only to take back its own (Lacan 1956 in Wilden 1968: 26).

For Lacan *Elementary Structures of Kinship* from 1949 was Lévi-Strauss's most influential work. Marital laws and rules in primitive, simple societies were to reflect the basic structure of the society itself. The essence lay not in the exchange of real women, but in their symbolisation into signs in a system of symbolic exchange. Lévi-Strauss's interpretation of the exchange of women as regulated by an unconscious (linguistic) formal system convinced Lacan of the existence of a general unconscious structure that regulates social reality. The symbolic function defines the human social order, or, as Lévi-Strauss wrote in an introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss, 'what is called the unconscious is merely an empty space where the symbolic function achieves autonomy' (Roudinesco 1999: 211). Lacan also identifies Mauss as having shown that 'the structures of society are symbolic' (Lacan 1966: 132).

Logic of the signifier: Sapir with Lacan

It is unclear whether Lacan was familiar with Sapir's work, but it is obvious that the science of semiotics, particularly that of Ferdinand de Saussure, had a major influence on the theoretical perspectives of both authors.

For Sapir and other American cultural anthropologists from the 1930s, the definition of culture was associated with patterned behaviours, symbolic structures and values, the *cultural pattern*, a 'configuration of aesthetic form ... Cultural pattern is equivalent to a grammatical form ... into which a particular behavior or event may be fitted' (Sapir

1994: 118–119). This corresponds to Saussure’s dictum that a *language is ‘a form, not a substance’* (Saussure 1974:122).

His understanding of the structure and dynamics of cultural elements was clearly linguistic in nature, as was his academic background. He was, after all, and still is considered as one of the most influential American linguists.

Just as in structural linguistics, where Saussure introduced his understanding of the relationship between the signifier and the signified (Saussure 1983), so did Sapir distinguish between two constitutive levels which make up a particular cultural element. There is *meaning* (signified, *signatum, semainomenon*) on the one side and concrete *behaviour* (signifier, *signans, semainon*) on the other: mental and material aspects of the same element.

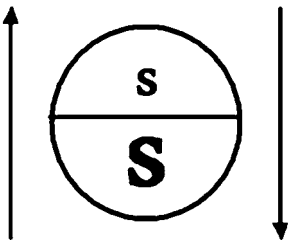


Figure 1: *The Saussurean sign*
(Saussure 1916)



Figure 2: *Lacan's Saussurean algorithm*
(Lacan 1966)

For Sapir, the actual behaviour of an individual is the actualisation of meaning intuitively derived from the cultural pattern. Meaning (what the colour black means in a particular society, for example) is not directly rooted in a concrete behaviour or cultural element; on the contrary, these by themselves tell us nothing about culture: ‘It is the culture of a group that gives the meanings to symbolisms without which the individual cannot function, either in relation to himself or to others’ (Sapir 1994: 244).

The Sapirian cultural element is therefore not an element of positive value. It is defined by its differentiality to the other elements in the signifying chain of the cultural pattern. This corresponds well to Boas’s notion of the contextuality and relativity of cultural elements (Boas 1896). Similarly, there are only differences in language. Saussure argued that ‘concepts... are defined not positively, in terms of their content, but negatively by contrast with other items in the same system. What characterises each most exactly is being whatever the others are not’ (Saussure 1974: 117).

Lacan later modified the Saussurean concept of the sign, interpreting the relation between the signifier and the signified as extremely unstable (Lacan 1996: 154), since for Saussure their relation is inseparable. The notion of a fundamental discrepancy between the representation of the world and the world itself, between the signifier and the signified, can be found in Hegel, especially in Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel (Kojève 1980), which was an important influence on Lacan and other French intellectuals of the era (Homer 2005). Representation, the process of naming things, is not a simple reflection of the world, but

a violent act, present in the Hegelian phenomenological idea that the word is a death, the murder of a thing (Žižek 2008).

The *structure of the signifier* differs from that of the sign in the necessary condition of the double inscribed differential element, the constitutive exception (phallus, mana, the primal Father-of-enjoyment in Freud's *Totem in Taboo*, etc.), the 'holy paradox' which totalises the system, the symbolic structure (Žižek & Močnik 1981). Lacan also emphasises the primacy of the signifier over the signified. Moreover, the signified is only a by-product, an effect in the shift of the signifier in the signifying chain. It is a play between signifiers, which produces the illusion of the signified, meaning via processes of metaphor and metonymy.

The structure of symbolic exchange between the subjects can exist only insofar as it is embodied in a pure material element, a circulating object of exchange, a signifier of the *Other without a lack-S(A)*, which acts as its guarantee. In its pure particularity, it is the structure; it embodies it. Why? Because the *great Other*, the symbolic order, is always *barré*, blocked, failed, and the circling material element embodies this internal circumscription of the symbolic structure. The significance of an object, put in the place of a unifying signifier, saturating the symbolic network was already crucial to Freud, who identified it as an important element around which the identification of a group is fabricated:

A primary group ... is a number of individuals who have put one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego (Freud 1921: 116).

The symbolic structure must include this element which embodies its stain, its own point of impossibility around which it is articulated: this is in a way the structuring of its own impossibility (Žižek 2008). Ethnography is full of such examples: red shell-disc necklaces (*veigun* or *soulava*) and white shell armbands (*mwali*) in the Kula ceremonial exchange system (Malinowski 1999); food and *taonga* (treasured possessions) in the Maori *koha* custom (Mauss 2006; Firth 1959); circulation of pigs in the *Moka* exchange system in the Mt. Hagen area (Strathern 1971) or the Sepik Coast exchange system of Papua New Guinea (Welsch and Terrell 1998) to name a few. All embody this formal structure, as such.

Sapir's cultural pattern is therefore a structure, a configuration or a culturally determined set of *point(s) de capiton*, as articulated by Lacan, 'passage(s) of the signifier into signified' (Lacan 1966: 164), where meaning 'crosses over the bar', to be placed into the concrete behaviour or gesture upon which the constant movement of the parallel signifying chains is (temporarily) halted. A minimal number of these fundamental anchoring points are necessary for the individual to be considered a normal, functioning member of society, in line with the significant uniformities of the society's cultural standards, as in Sapir's *as-if psychology* (Sapir 1994: 182). Culturally different 'knotting' of the signifying chains may be experienced in the effects of culture shock, a collapse of the metalinguistic function par excellence, where one is confronted with an alien configuration of the cultural pattern and is unable to participate effectively in a particular symbolic universe.

The proper individual interpretation of the cultural pattern therefore depends on the *intergenerational transmission of social rules and norms*. No one is born with decoding software that automatically recognises the cultural 'source code' and guides the individual

through the maze of potential situations toward the culturally appropriate interpretation and manifestation of the norm. Referring to Lacan, it is the *paternal function* (of the Name-of-the-Father) which introduces the individual into the symbolic order of a particular culture, the rules of the social game and also signifies the metaphorical nature of the Oedipal prohibition.

The very socio-cultural system of normative rules and standards of behaviour, the ‘as-if psychology’, is nevertheless not a totally closed and repressive structure limiting the individual to generalised, culturally prescribed behavioural patterns: ‘The cultural pattern is a powerful system of canalised behaviour which actualises certain basic impulses and gives the possibility for personal realisation’ (Sapir 1994: 91). Realisation of the cultural pattern always abberates from the ideal pattern. It is open to a diversity of personal realisations and individualisations via the system of ‘mental substitutes’ (Sapir 1994: 91) and ‘offers endless opportunities for the construction and development of personality through the selection and reinterpretation of experience’ (Sapir 1994: 176).

The nexus of limitation and realisation, determinism and relativity, is the *Oedipus complex*, the foundation of all discontinuities and conflicts in the process of inculturalisation: the incest taboo – the limitation on the one side, with the resolution of the Oedipal complex, and the individual’s (un)acceptance of his own castration, on the other – result in a whole spectrum of clinical personality structures from the neurotic and the psychotic to the perverse (Lacan 1988; 1993).

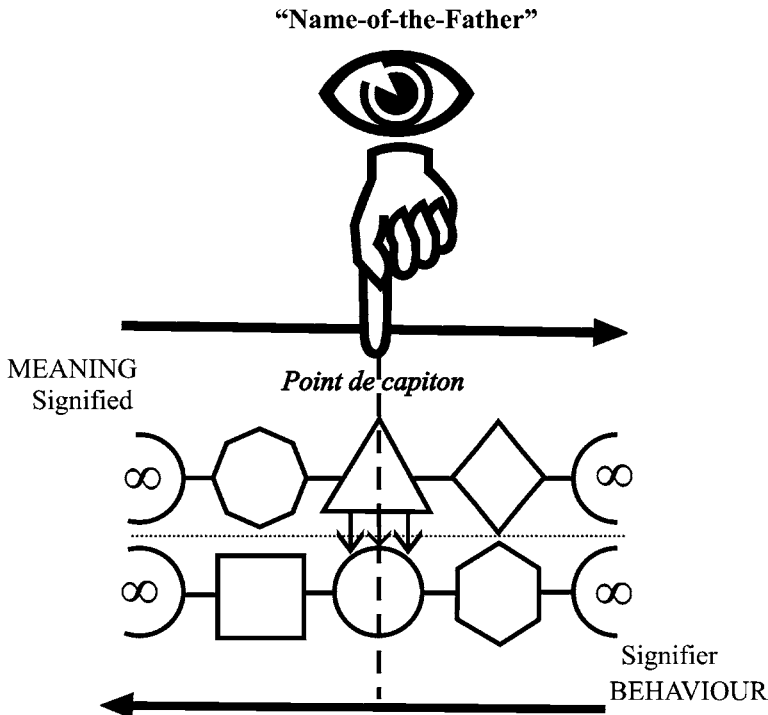


Figure 3: Sapir’s cultural pattern with Lacan’s logic of the signifier

The emperor's new clothes: the culture that does not exist

Nevertheless, the Lacanian notion of the symbolic order should not be understood in the same manner as Lévi-Strauss's. For the latter, the symbolic law that governs human relations, myths and kinship is a universal set of formulas, a universal structure that can be penetrated and deciphered, since it functions by means of logical operations independent of subjective activity. This logic is innate and characteristic of the human mind, which classifies the objects it encounters through sets of binary oppositions: up-down, water-fire, raw-cooked; it is the analogy and the permutations of these basic dyadic relations that are reflected in cultural and social formations as diverse as myth and kinship organisation. What lies beneath is the universal 'grammatical' structure of the human mind.

In contrast, the Lacanian *Symbolic* is fully integrated with the subject and vice versa; furthermore, the most intimate human states and the very human subjectivity itself are effects or products of the shift of the subject's position in the inter-subjective network, which is closely connected to the notion of the linguistic referential system, the *big Other*. 'Individual in isolation from society is a psychological fiction' (Sapir 1994: 244), he insists, and exists (the individual) only if fully integrated, actualised and expressed through culture, via the Other, 'the battery of signifiers' (Lacan, 1993: 184) which 'represent a subject for another signifier' (Lacan 1977: 207).

Lacan's *Symbolic* is a system of differentiated signifiers, an order that in its blind automatism disrupts the *Imaginary* homeostasis of the pre-Oedipal relationship between the child and the mother; it is beyond the pleasure principle. These unseen rules of the social game may seem like an omnipotent puppet master who pulls the strings, but it is also a mere fiction: *the Other does not exist*, a presupposition driven by the activity of subjects that act as if it exists. Similarly, for Sapir, culture is a form of 'collective lunacy' (Sapir 1994: 245).

The focus here is on the performance, the activity, 'how the gestures of symbolisation are entwined with and embedded in the process of collective practice' (Žižek 2006: 15). Even more, this rigid impersonal software, the big Other, becomes subjectivised in the form of divinities, oracles and gods, exempt from the sphere of mortal interactions; the other has to stay the Other, forever elusive and mysterious.

Most of the anthropological tradition remains to some extent Durkheimian; social reality is not simply an extension of the individual psyche. It makes no sense to show that these two parallel universes overlap; however, what is different in the psychoanalytic, Lacanian notion of the relationship between the individual and the social sphere is the complete annihilation of the barrier between the two. Not only this, but the most individual and personal characteristics and emotions, the *person* itself can be interpreted as a reflex of the social order, a radical break with the tradition of the reign of the cogito as the master of his domain. The psychic, inner world of the individual extends to the outside social reality and is inhabited and to some extent ruled by the symbolic order with language as its agent. It is here, in the realm of the *big Other*, that the subject is constituted: 'The dichotomy between culture and personality is not real because they reinforce each other at

all points' (Sapir 1994: 179). The subject is nothing but the point of failure in the process of its symbolic representation, a lack – a lack of *jouissance* around which the big Other is structured (Myers 2003).

The Symbolic order and human trans-individuality

The Lacanian subject is the *Subject of the Unconscious*. However, the Lacanian notion of the psychic agency that runs the show behind the curtains of the misleading ego, the 'I', is not to be understood simply as a reservoir of irrational biological drives and instincts, but seen as a psychic domain that clearly demonstrates a linguistic structure, a logic that can be deciphered when it passes into words. Even more, the *language* of the Unconscious, which articulates itself in linguistic formations, is the very effect of language on the subject: 'the unconscious is the discourse of the Other' (Lacan 1966: 16). Since language is not an individual phenomenon, but is socially shared and therefore external to speaking subjects, the very essence of subjectivity is located *outside*, in the Other. Plessner developed and named this distinctly human mode of existence as *eccentric positionality* (1928).

The *Other* is the realm of radical alterity. It is also the realm of the Law that regulates desire in the Oedipus complex. It is imposed on the subject by the symbolic order, by all those rules and laws we call culture. The same could be said of Durkheim's social fact, which is characterised by its externally manifested and coercive nature.

Or, as Sapir put it, so tyrannical are our methods of mapping out experience that we do not do what we think we do; we do not see what we think we see; we do not hear what we think we hear; we do not feel what we think we feel' (Sapir 1994: 245).

This echoes the basic definition of ideology, as developed by Marx in his *Das Kapital*: 'Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es' (Marx 1988: 88). Again, the essence of this ideological illusion lies on the side of 'activity', not *knowing*.

The dimension of the Other transcends the individual. It existed before one's birth and will (most likely) outlive the individual, but unlike Lacan's Symbolic order, it is not a separate reality, but a system, which can be understood only if we consider the connections and interrelationships among a whole series of relevant social facts. There is little or no room for individual psychology in Durkheim's sociology, but Lacan does exactly that, merging the spheres of the individual and the collective.

This is the point where culture and personality studies could benefit from the (Lacanian) psychoanalytic understanding of the subject, the holy grail of cultural anthropology, written in the often obscure and impenetrable writings of a French psychiatrist, Jacques-Marie-Émile Lacan. Lacan is gaining popularity, owing to the use of his concepts and those purified and elucidated by his son-in-law, Jacques-Alain Miller, in many different fields of inquiry, ranging from contemporary art, literature and cultural studies to politics. Although one should be cautious because of this very popularity, his insights can be useful for anthropological theory.

The subject, the individual, entered the anthropological discourse with Boas and his students, but it was Edward Sapir in the USA and Bronislaw Malinowski in Britain

who took the individual as a starting point of their methodologies in search of a new understanding of the concept of culture.

The (Lacanian) Subject of the Unconscious is a being driven by a 'phantasmatic propulsion'. Its key point is that part of his primal fantasy, his 'phantasmatic kernel' (Žižek 2006: 55) remains and must stay inaccessible to him. A radical gap exists between the most fundamental, unconscious coordinates of a subject's being and his conscious, everyday dimension. Fantasy and each clinical structure (neurosis, perversion, psychosis) function as defenses against castration, lack in the Other (Evans 1996: 59–61). Fantasy therefore constitutes our reality and at the same time protects us from the traumatic *Real*, resisting symbolisation, one of the three basic orders in Lacanian topology, constituting a subject's horizon of cognition. The concept of the Real is also linked to the realm of biology (Evans 1996) and consequently, to Nature. The functionalist revolution of Malinowski and his students (Firth, Schapera, Richards etc.) identified culture and social institutions as the necessary tools human beings invent to satisfy their natural drives and instincts (Malinowski, 1995). In his *The Origin and Function of Culture*, Roheim states that civilisation originated in

delayed infancy and its function as security. It is a huge network of more or less successful attitudes to protect mankind against the danger of object loss, the colossal efforts made by a baby who is afraid of being left alone in the dark (Roheim 1943: 100).

The same can be said of Freud's understanding of culture in his *Totem and Taboo*. Human culture is a mechanism for regulating human biological drives. It is *neurotic* in its form; it constantly invents new ways to satisfy human needs.

Culture, the concept closest to the Lacanian *Symbolic* order, was for the British functionalists in the service of Nature. However, if we consider the role of fantasy, partially as a defensive mechanism against the overwhelming from the Real, this brings us in line with Lévi-Strauss's notion of Culture as opposed to Nature. Even more, culture functions to keep Nature at a safe distance, with its institutionalisation of the incest taboo. The symbolic network is a reactionary form to this mythical constitutive act, organised around a traumatic kernel, which separated Man from Nature. The dyad of Culture/Nature is thus an effect of symbolic organisation and not its cause. The prohibition (of incest), the Law, therefore acts as a structural condition and a starting point for the structuralisation of the Symbolic, failing to encompass the register of the impossible, ever returning and intruding Real. Since the emergence of the Symbolic register is associated with a certain failure, then it is structured around a void, a singularity, which holds the structure in place. This point of impossibility, the 'lapse of the Symbolic' (Žižek & Močnik 1981: 350) is surrounded by prohibitions and has to be prohibited; one single element (*woman*) has to be the exception to the rule (*forbidden*), so all others are set in a system (*permitted*).

The 'S/object' of anthropology: science, knowledge and truth

Anthropology may be the only scientific discipline in which the observer and the observed object implode into the same point. The observer observes but is also the observed – perverse. This singularity is highly problematic and places the anthropological enterprise directly beside the *Hawthorne effect* in sociolinguistics or the bizarre world of quantum events like the infamous 'double-slit experiment', where the very presence of the observer (the scientist) collapses the wave function of quantum particles simply by observing.

Lacanian epistemology revolves around the problem of knowledge (*savoir*), truth and science. Knowledge is made into science by a special, formalised way of dealing with a specific content, whether it is ethnographical material or yearly precipitation values. It is this very handling, articulation and argumentation, established and sustained a scientific model with its object of inquiry that constitutes the essence of a specific scientific discipline. It is the form, not the content that matters. The relationship with the object therefore follows strict conventions, which are always linguistic. Via the institution of the university, the notions of knowledge and science are naturally associated one with the other and thus kept as a whole.

So, is the absolute truth about our object of enquiry possible? Is it possible to become 'one with the object', to 'feel and understand like natives do', as Malinowski has put it, to take the emic approach to our anthropological endeavours? Anthropology is dealing with an even more complicated situation, since the *object* is at the same time also the other subject. For Lacan, this harmony of subject and object is just an ideal, unobtainable in its essence. This notion culminates in one of Lacan's most notorious statements: *Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel* (Lacan 1975: 17); there is no such thing as a sexual relationship and consequently, *Il n'y a pas La femme* (Lacan 1975: 68), the Woman does not exist, only women. Absolute knowledge, as the final stage in the phenomenological journey of the Spirit, as formulated by Hegel, its manifestations in reality and its awareness of the Self, where the circle of apparent difference between object and subject is finally closed, is therefore impossible. Modern Western science, born from the mathematised physics of the 17th century, conditioned the same discrepancy between subject and object; moreover, the scientific approach demanded the 'desexualisation of the world' (Miller 1983: 53) and separation of the signifier from every imaginary value and form. Only under such conditions could room be created for Newton and his mathematical formulations on the elliptic and therefore imperfect in regards to divinely circular trajectories of the heavenly objects (Koyre 1957).

The emic position of the observer will evade, just as desire can only circle around its object-reason of desire, never to fully grasp it. It is precisely the issue of an anthropologist's desire, his/her unconscious modes of enjoyment, the *jouissance*, and also that of the informants, that should be taken into account, since the lens of one's desire always distorts the reality. Why does someone want to become an anthropologist? Why is this indigenous X so generously helping me with my field survey? What will my colleagues in academia think of my contribution to the field (of anthropology)? These are the

questions Obeyesekere (1990) explores in the final chapters of his book. The importance of *fantasy*, this imaginary prosthesis that enables us to articulate our desire, is therefore crucial. Even more, considering that is not truly *ours*, but an attempt to solve the enigma of the Other's desire.

This clearly undermines every attempt towards viewing anthropology as an objective science and puts Malinowski's (and also Rivers's) methodological instructions – namely, remaining unfamiliar with the socio-historical background of the research unit prior to departure for field – in a new light. Paradoxical as it may seem at first, this 'safety measure' may function as a vaccine against premature, phantasmatic constructions about observed phenomena, attempts to cultivate and domesticate it (*noble savages*, etc). However, it is also true that all reality is discursively constructed. Anthropology did not enter the Western scientific arena 'fantasy-free' about 'primitive man', since it was only a reflection or extension of the general European attitude towards the other (Kuper 1988).

Consequently, one can only *know*, as long as one also *believes*. Let us just recall the now almost mythical debate between Freeman and Mead on the problem of adolescence in Samoa. Who are we to believe? Who is that authority, the guarantor of meaning, the one who is *supposed-to-know*, the one onto whom we displace our knowledge and beliefs, if we are to believe Lacan (1977)? Who/what is this *master signifier* around whom the discursive field is organised and that has, supposedly, a special connection to the *Real*?

The classical books that the keen student of anthropology is supposed to read are sort of a *rite de passage* in theoretical schooling but are also building blocks and sources of inspiration for one's future paradigmatic framework. We could argue that we are entering the strange domain of *presupposed meaning* and the anthropological enterprise, just like every other scientific one, is based on such activity, at least when one is trying to anchor and fit his or her field observations into an existing theoretical paradigm. This is, perhaps even more true for anthropology than for other sciences, since observations from the field, although coded in the form of a scientific discourse, always reflect subjective interpretations of the *objective* reality. Again, we are dealing not with solid facts but with interpretations (of interpretations) and have a 'tendency to read another society from one's own experience' (Sapir 1994: 58). Or as Geertz wrote in his classic, 'every man has a right to create his own savage for his own purposes' (1973: 347).

One could also draw parallels with the phenomenon of *transference* (projection of a patient's emotions from past relationships onto the analyst; the speech (p)act between the two) in psychoanalytical treatment: a patient can arrive at a meaning of his symptoms, coded messages from the Unconscious, only if he *presupposes* that the analyst already knows the solution, the meaning of his problems. When Malinowski's personal field diary was published in 1967, it must have been a bitter and sobering experience for his most devoted (and by then aged) followers and students. The illusion of a guru of the modern ethnographic method slowly dissolved the image that was held in place only by the authority of the subject that was supposed to have known how the natives really think.

Mapping desire

Some simple conclusions that can be drawn from the above are that anthropologist's list of preferred literature (written by the founding fathers of the discipline) and his or her theoretical background tell us a great deal about himself/herself, and secondly, that anthropology can never be a hard science, the type Radcliffe-Brown (1940) wanted it to be, since the work of desire is omnipresent; a speaking subject cannot escape it; it is reflected in our work and beyond. For Lacan, Truth always concerns desire, something which is not and cannot be a matter of exact science, a (postmodern) view which imposes limitations on anthropology's scientific aspirations and directs it towards a more 'soft', interpretative science of subjectivity, based on comparative field research. Just as there can be no culture without individuals, so there can be no (non-biased, scientific) *metalanguage* to 'tell the truth about the truth' (Lacan 1966: 867-8), without bearing the traces of a desiring subject.

This does not mean that anthropology is destined to become nothing more than a kind of reflective literature. The deadlocks of *jouissance*, the 'painful pleasure' (Lacan 1992: 184) the subject derives from his symptom, can be brought to light by passing the analysis, something that was recommended by Leach and even earlier by Rivers, enabling a critical distance on the subjective interpretation of field material.

However, problems with desire do not stop here. One of Lacan's many popular formulations is 'Man's desire is the desire of the Other' (Lacan 1977: 235). The implications of the problem, *what the other desires from us*, vis-à-vis our failures in objective science have already been established in the previous paragraphs.

Desire therefore transcends the individual, as it is the effect of the subject's early entry into the domain of the Symbolic. The gap between the actual individual psychology and what Sapir called 'as-if psychology' (Godina 1998: 225), a totalising, culturally standardised and enforced model of what an ideal member of a society should 'be', his predetermined symbolic identity (the duties and roles of a member of 'X' Australian clan or a middle-aged married Slovenian woman) is what Lacan calls *symbolic castration* (Lacan 1994). This is the gap between what people say they do or are supposed to do, what place (social status) in the symbolic order they occupy, and what they actually do. 'What really goes on' was the very issue Malinowski was so eager to resolve in his Trobriand monographs.

Articulation of the enigma of incompatibility between one's imagined and symbolic identity is the definition of hysteria. The fundamental question the hysteric asks is, who am I, what do I want (Lacan 1993)? Is not anthropology that discipline which attempts to answer this same question – *who are we as human beings?* – by studying different cultures and social organisations? Is not the culture shock anthropologist encounters when living in an alien environment, this painful second symbolic birth, the feeling of never fully fitting in, the inability to understand the rules of the game, the very reincarnation of the violent act of castration everyone goes through in early childhood? Hysterical self-questioning in the form of scientific research on the tropical island may not only expose the different operational layers where society and the individual function and interact, but maybe even more importantly, anthropology indirectly thematises the gap, the very effect of its much cherished method, in the anthropologist's personal experience in the field.

Epitaph

Since the times of Freud and Whorf it has been stated that *truth* lies in the linguistic domain (Benvenuto 1986; Lemaire 1977; Whorf 1940). What we understand and how we understand something is determined for some by the horizon of our language. It is precisely at this point that the linguistic approach of psychoanalysis becomes useful.

For Lacan, the subject is constituted by the three interrelated orders of the *Real*, the *Imaginary* and the *Symbolic*. The *Real* is the inaccessible space beyond the subject's 'I', the void encircled by the symbolic structure that resists being caught in the *Symbolic* and is at the same time the 'fissure in the symbolic network itself' (Žižek 2006: 72). The signifier is the foundation of the *Symbolic*, which is a set of differentiated signifiers and the produced meaning. The signified and signification belong to the *Imaginary* register. Language is therefore involved in all three orders, the *Symbolic*, the *Imaginary* and the *Real*.

What keeps the subject in motion and constitutes him as a processual being is the continuous effort to 'domesticate' the *Real* into meaning with the power of imaginary forms, projected into symbolic objects. Since the dawn of mankind every society has developed an abundance of various imaginary and symbolic structures to accommodate each member in this existential quest.

The scientific discourse of anthropology is a specific kind of argumentation and articulation regulated by strict linguistic canons and historic processes, just like any other, and is as such a product of speaking beings whose relationship with the world is by default based in the three registers of the Lacanian topography. What applies for the subject (of the signifier), also holds true for anthropology as a *science*.

In anthropology, aspirations towards an understanding of Man are caused and pushed forward by the *Real* of the other fellow human being (the primitive, the neighbour, the other sex, etc.), the eternal enigma which can never be fully symbolised. It is impossible to know and to tell everything about other people. Objects of interest, like the illusion of a 'primitive society' are forms of the *Imaginary* register, the domain of signification. The *Symbolic* provides the framework for formalisation of the signified. All three registers need to be in balance to maintain a harmonious and functioning system.

From the Lacanian perspective, the problem of modern science, especially of the natural sciences, is that they overstress the *Symbolic* register, by focusing too heavily on formal abstraction, objectivity and belief in access to absolute knowledge with the pragmatic intention of mastering the universe. The *not-whole Real* is represented as a unified totality in the system of symbolic reductions, simplifications and formal representation. Consequently, everything resembling or pointing to subjective dimension is strictly pushed aside in the *objective* discursive circles of the positive science(s) as fiction or even literature, holding no true value for representing factual reality. Not much has changed since the 19th century; the role of the subjective position in science causes nothing but interference and is thus excluded as noise from the formula leading to Truth.

Recent developments in neuroimaging techniques, including the widely accessible and relatively cheap *fMRIs* and the discovery of *mirror neurons* combined with major breakthroughs in (*epi*)genomics have created a buzz in the wider scientific community.

It seems that sociologists, anthropologists and other social scientists are on the verge of finding their holy grail – again. For the first time in history, advanced neuroimaging techniques enable us to see what is understood as the human mind at work, to see the ghost in the machine. Nevertheless, these attempts to explain the human soul and culture are deeply rooted in the grand evolutionary Western paradigm of the deterministic universe, within which scientists believe they can predict events with complete certainty. It started with the first Greek materialists and passed through Newtonian mechanics, Herbert Spencer, John Hughlings Jackson to Einstein's relativity. The arrow of time is still seen only as an illusion (Prigogine 1997). Armed with this logic, Western man has (temporarily) conquered Nature. Everything makes sense, is predictable and comprehensible. However, with chaos theory and similar spin-offs from established theories comes a new threat to the idea of the universe as an automaton. These new perspectives on certainty and simple causality picture these more like a misapprehension, and a universe governed by simple laws of physics seems more like white man's anthropocentric foolishness. Psychology, neurology, psychiatry, medicine, sociobiology and all the hybrids among them follow in the same dogmatic footsteps.

Anthropology, psychoanalysis and other 'irrational, impossible professions' are more than right to be wary of these (appealing) appearances. Ideally, scientific discourse should resemble the analytic, where the unconscious truth of the subject, inscribed and manifested in the act of speech, is presented to the analysand. Anthropology and its discursive apparatus offer a fine example of the variety of opposing models and theories explaining the same social institution, ritual or organisation. Every grand anthropological theory, from 19th century evolutionism, functionalism, structuralism, sociobiology and cultural materialism, was a child of its era, revealing an unconscious structure of hidden agendas and ideologies under the surface of objective scientific discourse. Since anthropology (sometimes) aspires to be a 'hard' scientific discipline that explains and investigates Man in his totality, the illusion of an unified field theory disclosed by psychoanalysis must be in sight at all times, as this 'self-analysis' by scientific (anthropological) discourse relies on the structural conditions in which the production of science is carried out.

Conclusion

Some similar points of interest exist between anthropology and psychoanalysis, or at least we can say some universal problems in the anthropological theory seem to exist, which can be addressed from a psychoanalytical position. Since language and its effects are a universal human feature, we could say that psychoanalytical notions of the subject and his relation to social reality and vice versa, problems of methodology and epistemology implicit to anthropology, could provide a normalising effect on a discipline that lacks a meta-theory or even a strictly defined object of enquiry. For Habermas, psychoanalysis is an ideal meta-theory in human sciences, owing to its 'meta-hermeneutic' nature (1971). The *science of man* often shifts its focus, whether it is kinship structures and terminology, magic, religion, rituals, totemism, political structures, myth, evolution or culture. Of course, this apparent meta-theoretical convenience of applied psychoanalytical theories

can lead to dogmatism and perhaps the true value of the diversity of the many contrasting anthropological theories and schools is in its diversity and free spirit.

The path to the Truth always leads through deception and error. The disparity between error and Truth emerges from the very inner fabrication of the representation itself and not from some external condition or obstacle blocking access to the Truth. Renewed critical approaches to ethnographic writing as a fundamental method of registering, constructing and interpreting cultural phenomena have shown how different modes or styles of (literary) representation result in various and often invigorating insights (Clifford 1986), in true fictions exposing the subjectivised objectivity by the artisans of anthropology. It is the anthropologists, if anyone, who have the best evidence in the phenomenology of theories about the *other* that the object of science is always a mirage, an elusive object of desire, *objet petit a* in Lacanian terminology. These theories do not stand in the way of an actualisation of the Truth about the Other but represent a testing ground for the validity of certain claims and judgments. Anthropology will never nor can ever be a 'real' science in the sense the other 'neurotic' disciplines claim to be.

One of the sub-headings in this text is *Anthropology and Psychoanalysis: Encounters of the Third Kind*. The heading aims at a certain close and intimate *rendezvous* of both disciplines, i.e. in the subject of the socially (linguistically) entangled Subject. The term is taken from the crypto-scientific terminology of what is called the alien abduction phenomenon, signifying a physical and often traumatic encounter between humans and extraterrestrial beings – an ultimate Real of the Other, one could add. Just as alien abductions and UFOs are nothing more than a mass-hysterical fiction to the general scientific establishment, lacking hard evidence, so is the wishful theorising of the meta-epistemological third option. Combining anthropology and psychoanalysis is always just that: a dream, in which the *Real* of the failed encounter, a misencounter, speaks its Truth.

A new unified, positive discipline of social analysis is not possible, although it seems that both anthropology and psychoanalysis share a common goal: to explain the ahistoric, abstract and ontological issues of human nature, observed in a specific historic, socio-cultural environment. These attempts will always miss the common object; whether they are trying to explain the concrete totality of the relationship between the individual and his socio-cultural milieu, focusing on the process of symbolisation as in social sciences, or focusing on the traumatic kernel of the *Symbolic*, the *Real*, as in psychoanalysis, their objects of investigation remain incommensurable. The bar separating, splitting the terms *Anthropo* and *Analysis* in the title of this article aims at the resistance inherent in signification and the very incompleteness and failure of the consistent episteme. If sociology or history are incapable of incorporating the dimension of the unsymbolisable *Real* in their models and just as psychoanalysis makes no official claims for being the most suitable instrument for social analysis, then anthropology, established on a specific methodology of participation and observation, already transcends the usual *complementary* (Devereux 1990) abyss. The *Real* of culture shock, the *O(o)ther*, is what makes the anthropological method unique among the other social sciences and what gives anthropological conceptual output a special dimension, more akin to art than to strict science.

We could argue that the ethics of anthropology lies in its project of presenting the universality of cultural differences as our common human experience. Certainly we have different rituals, kinship terminology, religious beliefs, values and skin colour, but beneath our symbolic mask, we are all human. It would seem possible to solve the current ecological crisis, economic inequalities, political conflicts and all the sorrow of this planet, if only those in power could finally see through the misleading veil of cultural particularities and differences. Intercultural use of psychoanalysis and anthropology could humanise (Jones 1924: 49) the Other, by showing the fundamental commonality he shares with Western Man. Anthropology should be the lighthouse, illuminating the paths of our common humanity. Since the time of Boas, this cultural relativism has been an anthropological ethical standard.

Is not this cultural relativism and particularism, however a sort of a fake relativism or at least a misleading one, since this very relativism is also absolute, a dogma, a common unifying signifier of difference? The very search for a single *elementargedänke*, the annihilation of the particularity of human existence could well serve the ideology that needs and produces this abstract, and alienated global individual, who is emptied of all essence: the consumer. Politics has always (mis)used anthropology for opportunistic purposes, and this potential exploitation of theory is not my main focus here. If the absolutism of relativism leads to a deadlock, how do the observations from psychoanalytical experience, the clinical version of anthropological observation with participation, help us?

Psychoanalysis is not so much a medical treatment or a psychiatric therapy; it is also a theory, an *ontologic*, which confronts the speaking subject with his truth, lying beyond the wary appearance of ego.

It may seem that this notion of subject is in some way depressing or even humiliating, as it uncovers a lack of being, an inconsistency in the symbolic order that we, the 'symbolic animals' (Cassirer 1944) try to fill with our pathetic but necessary fantasies that give ground to our existence. Plain as they might seem, they are to some extent truly ours alone – and what makes us unique individuals. What we, as interpreters of the human condition, are left with in the end is an insistence on our differences. This may be the only ethical and truly scientific thing to do.

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POVZETEK

Prispevek predstavlja oris ključnih teoretskih stičišč antropologije in psihoanalize, dveh *nemogočih* disciplin in je hkrati poizkus iskanja novih interpretacij temeljnih vprašanj antropološke vede. Članek daje poudarek francoski psihoanalitični tradiciji in delu Jacquesa Lacana ter njegovih kasnejših interpretov ter učencev. Medsebojno oplajanje med obema disciplinima ima dolgo tradicijo in sega do samih začetkov nastanka psihoanalize – Freudove objave prve obsežnejše antropološko-psihoanalitične študije, *Totem in tabu*, leta 1913. Nadaljne sodelovanje je bilo predvsem enosmerno, v korist psihoanalize, ki je predstavljala in še vedno predstavlja skoraj neizčrpen konceptualni vir za številne humanistične vede. Čeprav so številni psihoanalitični koncepti splošno uveljavljeni, redukcionalistično, parcialno in kvazi-transcendentalno branje Freuda danes (upravičeno) ne predstavlja pomembne vloge in doprinosa antropološki teoriji. Poizkusi naslovitve nekaterih teoretskih konstant antropološke teorije z lacanovske perspektive, ki v svoji hegelijsko-strukturalistični 'vrnitvi k Freudu' predstavlja odklon od uveljavljenih etnopsihiatričnih in drugih antropološko-psihoanalitičnih pristopov, so še vedno redki in ne zajemajo celotne širine in sprejemajo aplikabilnosti lacanovskega teoretskega polja. Članek poizkuša ravno to: povezati skupne točke obeh polj, kot so subjektivnost in njen odnos do družbene realnosti, vprašanja metodologije in epistemologije v celoto in na novo osvetliti nekatera stara vprašanja.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: antropologija in psihoanaliza, Jacques Lacan, psihoanaliza, epistemologija

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