

Title	<b>Psychoanalysis as a dialectic of the negative</b>
Candidate	Dorotea Pospihalj
Supervisor	Red. prof. dr. Alenka Zupančič
Co-supervisor	doc. dr. Bara Kolenc
Study program	Comparative study of ideas and cultures
Module	The transformation of modern thought: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, Culture

The PhD thesis presentation summary:

A practice that is constituted by antagonisms, psychoanalysis is a conflictual theory (Althusser, 1991). Similarly to Marxism, it deals with the crisis in such a way that its very articulation and working creates antagonisms that are perpetuated internally. Because of this, we can say that psychoanalysis is in crisis from its very beginning, and we cannot speak about it without at the same time speaking about crisis.

Psychoanalysis in this sense, is *crisis as such*. At the same time, psychoanalysis is a form of phenomenological and epistemological repository, *topos*, of various discourses that permeate and constitute the social structure and bonds; it is a decentered space, a site that is displaced, through which the *zeitgeist* passes and articulates itself. Precisely because psychoanalysis is posited on the border of the social (regulated) space - never truly accepted as legitimate science, or as legally and formally determined clinical practice - it is subversive in its very structure. Following this structural condition, psychoanalysis is under constant pressure of recognition, potential translation and certainly, detection of social structural dynamic, although it 'intervenes' indirectly through interpretation and the clinical process which takes place between the analyst and the analysand. The latter means that the mediation of psychoanalysis to the world is mostly happening through the analysand. The analysand is bringing into the analytic space the 'outsiderness', which in other words, is the 'world'. The general expectation might be that the analysand within the analytic space is dealing with their subjectivity, their intimate side, hidden from the world, and to some extent, independent from the state of the world. Paradoxically, the current state of the psychoanalytic clinic is pointing to the exact opposite.

My experience as a psychoanalyst, which finds confirmation in the experience of other colleagues, and analysts of the Red Clinic<sup>1</sup> is testifying to a very specific situation within the clinical space; analysand in question here is not speaking directly and necessarily about himself, but he is clearly and with a great amount of care, speaking about the world. The world worries him in several ways, fate of the world affects him personally. The situation perhaps becomes more interesting when we consider a certain specificity of this analysand - 'the worrier of the world'; not infrequently, these individuals have a depth of knowledge about the psychoanalytic theory, they are formed through humanities, and their decision to undergo analysis was partly informed by their interest in philosophy, on numerous occasions, identify with Marxist theory and socialist political position. In this sense, what the analysand is bringing into the analytic space and process is not necessarily and exclusively linked directly to his crisis (trauma), rather he addresses the crisis of the world as such. Frequently, he is addressing the climate crisis, social crisis, economic crisis, 'the apocalyptic crisis', which he sees as the ultimate crisis that brings about the end of the world. Interestingly, through witnessing and addressing the crisis of the world, at the same time he is addressing psychoanalysis with a question; What is psychoanalysis in this constellation, and whether it (still) has the radical potentiality? In other words, does psychoanalysis 'know' what it is doing, is it capable of thinking all the images of crisis, and finally, is it capable as a discourse/practice of the *real*, to detect the real today that it seems to be

---

<sup>1</sup> The clinic established recently, drawing from the idea of the free clinics established by Freud, with the internationalist reach and scope. Website: <https://www.redclinic.org/statement>

exploding everywhere? We can conclude that through the analysand the questions are pointed directly to psychoanalysis and are directed to its conflictual structure - the structure of crisis. In some sense, through this dynamic, we could think of this address and the question coming from the analysand as the unconscious of psychoanalysis as such.

In the doctoral thesis we want to address the following questions:

Is psychoanalysis - perhaps for the first time since its conception - faced with a particular category of the analysand, the analysand that comes prepared with political and philosophical but equally psychoanalytic knowledge, which means precisely that we are dealing with the category of the 'analysand that knows'? Does this category, namely, 'analysand that knows' effectively change the relation between the analyst and the analysand? Traditionally, the analyst, in the eyes of the analysand is the one that supposedly bears all the knowledge (about the signification of his speech), and if the inversion of the positions is true, not only is it necessary to reconsider the classic notion of transference - does it still have the function and does it still work? - but equally, the position and the role of knowledge as such. Who is 'the one that knows', and knows what exactly?

"As soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere there is transference."<sup>2</sup>

Needless to say, the analyst of this attribution of knowledge, supposed and placed upon him by the analysand, knows nothing<sup>3</sup>. This latter point is also in direct connection to the relation of psychoanalysis to philosophy, not the relation itself is questioned but rather: What is psychoanalysis going to do (think) when philosophy - through the analysand - comes directly from within its process, the psychoanalytic process? Could this be a moment of *ersatz*, that something other is taking the place and working of the psychoanalytic process? Is this moment bringing psychoanalysis to a particular form of the dialectical process of negativity, into a new stage of crisis as such? And also the question arises, whether psychoanalysis can survive this crisis.

On the other hand, if we consider the 'analysand that knows' only as a form of a symptom and resistance to the analytic process, through which he is protecting himself from the process of desubjectivisation - which essentially psychoanalysis is - then it begs the question as to what is it that the analysand is trying to disavow<sup>4</sup> with this particular form of knowing? Namely, whether what is being 'disavowed' is in some sense connected to a specific form of knowledge that is elaborated through philosophical, political or psychoanalytic concepts and categories. Why does the analysand need the *analysis* of the whole world so that he can escape the analysis of his own subjectivity? What are the dimensions and consequences of his trauma, 'personal crisis', that he would prefer to think about the external rather than his internal *world*? Should we suppose that indeed the question is about a particular form of trauma, that is hiding behind the radical care and preoccupation with the world and also what is the psychoanalytic act in this particular situation. The act that can address this situation could be the insistence on the *real*, the point of resistance, to reach the *real* as such - the traumatic core - or perhaps with the creation of a completely new approach, a method through which the radical care as such is addressed and used as a method at the same time. The latter means that the analyst accepts to 'believe' the analysand, that his only way of addressing (perhaps excessive)

---

<sup>2</sup> Lacan, Jacques. The Seminar. Book XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1977. p. 232

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Freud's concept of *Verleugnung* which denotes a specific form of refusal of the traumatic dimension, usually linked to perversion as a structure. Later elaborated by Lacan as a way of responding to the fact that the other is castrated. Lacan's theory differs from Freud's initial elaboration in that the disavowal is precisely double sided, it is at once a recognition and a denial of castration.

trauma is through excessive care and preoccupation with and about the world. Perhaps one way of responding to this specific situation is precisely with the radical form of care- *radical gentleness* on the side of the analyst.

In this doctoral research we will elaborate Freud's and Lacan's theories of defence mechanisms concerning trauma, specifically, linked to the psychoanalytic clinical process. We will attempt to define a new concept that might be adequate for a particular clinical situation and equally, serve as a new dialectical mechanism with an impact on a broader theoretical field - the radical gentleness. The concept of gentleness will be situated within the psychoanalytic and philosophical theory: We will use the psychoanalytic concepts of desire, the symptom and the feminine principle, as well as the philosophical formulation of the negative dialectics (Adorno, 1973). We will confirm whether the category of radical gentleness can be thought of as a process of negativity, with its dialectics that would be able to address the current situation within the social field, where the incessant flooding of various discourses of care (different care and well-being ideologies, psy-professions, self-help discourses, personal development etc.) are effectively erasing all traces of negativity and with that the radical potential. We are noting general disappearance of the dimension of the *real* from the discourse of trauma, the tendency to disavow the *real* and core of its dimension, ab-sense<sup>5</sup>. It means that perhaps it is necessary to rethink the dialectics of the negative. In connection to the negativity, we will examine whether it is precisely the structure and working of the neoliberal ideology with its various discourses of care to some extent constitutive of the trauma that 'the analysand who knows' desires to disavow through knowledge.

---

<sup>5</sup> Lacan's play of words meaning that the real is the absence of sense, but not to be equated with non-sense. Lacan tried to evoke a particular modality of meaning or sense rather than simply lack of any meaning. "L'Etourdit", Scilicet 4 (1973) pp. 5-52