

russell's choice

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I. PSYCHOANALYSIS AND/OR PHILOSOPHY

Many of you will have seen a wonderful film with Meryl Streep and Kevin Kline called *Sophie's Choice*. Well I'm not going to speak of 'Sophie's Choice' today, I'm going to talk about 'Russell's choice'. The cast is not quite so glamorous but the stakes are far higher and I think for many of us who have a passion, or a desire, for psychoanalysis and have somehow become university lecturers, this choice concerns more than one individual's destiny: it is an example for us, perhaps even a model, of what someone can do, someone who could have chosen to continue to chair committees, fill in assessment grids, verify student learning outcomes, write twenty page grant applications with line by line budgets with a 5% chance of success, resubmit syllabi again to fit the latest template, renegotiate their workload, haggle over a 0.2 workhour per week lack to be filled with the internships committee, adopt the university's new branding strategy, drive 400 km a week to repeat the same lecture, a dancing clown, to 600 almost entirely but not completely indifferent students in three satellite campuses, and frequently dodge flurries of voluntary redundancies become so familiar they not only have their own acronym but it usually comes in the plural form—'VRs'.

Make no mistake, Russell's choice serves as a diagnostic, it gives us a sudden vision of what is happening in these times in the space of the university as contrasted with psychoanalysis.

What is at stake in such a choice, between becoming a psychoanalyst and becoming a university professor? What logical operator can one admit between these two vocations: exclusive disjunction or inclusive conjunction? *Both* psychoanalyst *and* professor of philosophy? *Either* psychoanalyst *or* professor of philosophy? Colleagues and friends have spent their working lives trying out one conjunction or another. What would lead one, in these times, to move from the first articulation to the second, to make 'Russell's choice', to become a full-time analyst and to leave the university professor behind?

To be clear, what I call 'Russell's choice' has little to do with Deakin and little to do with the success of a particular clinical practice; in the end it doesn't reflect that much on either. Why? Because it's a *second* choice, it's a choice to remain faithful to an *original* choice.

Russell is mildly sceptical concerning Badiou's systematic philosophy; indeed, after I had already written half of my doctoral thesis on Badiou under his supervision he once said to me, "it really is all or nothing with Badiou isn't it?" Now despite this carefully argued scepticism—see his technical yet illuminating paper on intuitionism and classical logic between Lacan and Badiou—despite this reluctance, Russell has actually proved to be thoroughly Badiouian. The original choice was his recognition of an event, the event of the emergence of the unconscious, and its nomination in Freudian and then Lacanian psychoanalysis; this second choice is part of his fidelity to that event, a fidelity in the form of painstaking enquiries into the nature of the unconscious, the clinical categories of hysteria, obsessional neurosis and psychosis, the nature of unconscious enjoyment, its manifestation in symptoms, in jokes, in melancholy, but also enquiries that have taken the shape of building a community of psychoanalysts in Australia and internationally, and ensuring the transmission of the Lacanian orientation, no easy task given not only the internationally volatile and fragile nature of Lacanian schools but also the ongoing battle with the state for recognition of the capacity of psychoanalytic schools to train their members in a profession and to sustain their clinics in accordance with the letter of law and insurance policy. This was not talk about justice as recognition, it was the work of justice as recognition.¹

There are two great figures of refusal in contemporary critical theory: “I’d prefer not to”, and “No Creon, I think I *will* bury my brother”. Russell is neither Bartleby nor Antigone because his choice is not a refusal but an affirmation, a carrying-forwards, a further exploration and expansion of an already existing fidelity. What this also means is that in posing this question for us of becoming a psychoanalyst and/or being a university professor, Russell’s choice is not about some romantic escape. There is no invitation here to throw your watch in the desert sands, abandon your life, and ride off on your Harley with Peter Fonda. This is part of the lesson: one can modulate the conjunction between psychoanalysis and the university from inclusive to exclusive, from *both/and* to *either/or*, on the basis of the patient construction of another profession.

But Russell’s *second* choice, his modulation to an exclusive conjunction: psychoanalysis *rather* than the university, has taken place at a particular historical moment—now—and so it does open up a question about the general state of the university and its relationship, or non-relationship, to psychoanalysis. This is a big question. It must be narrowed down.

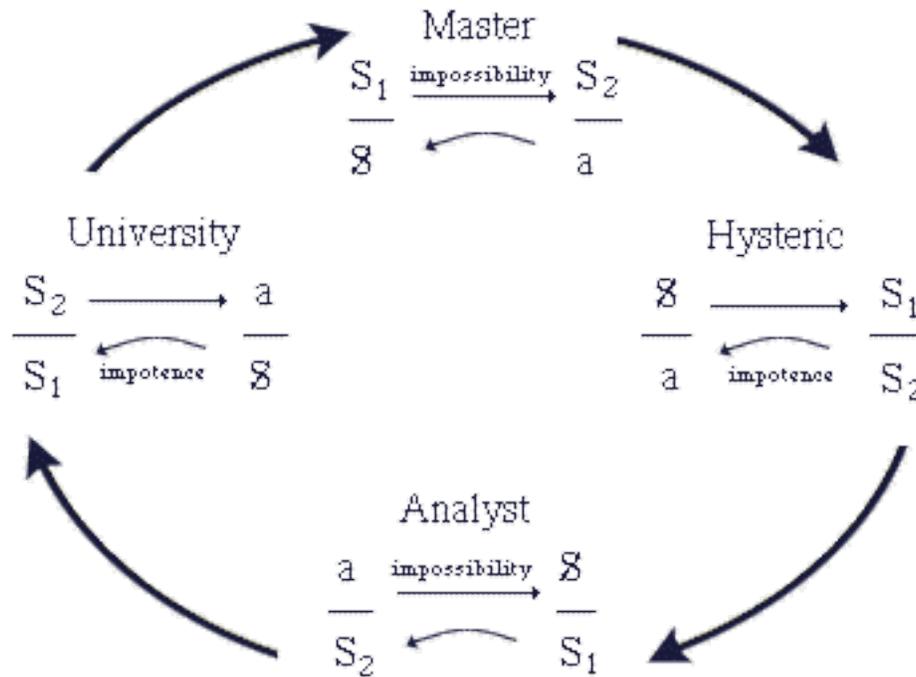
It just so happens that in Russell’s publications there is one philosophical theme that comes back again and again, and that is freedom. So our question for the decision on the university and psychoanalysis will be that of freedom: what is the freedom of the analyst, and what is the freedom of the university lecturer? Don’t laugh. In the American system, where I work, we still speak of ‘academic freedom’: that is to say, a freedom that risks being merely academic.

II. THE FREEDOM OF THE ACADEMIC

Russell places the philosophical concept of freedom under the condition of the unconscious, that is to say unconscious desire. Thus our decision on freedom in psychoanalysis and the university becomes a question of desire: the desire of the psychoanalyst and the desire of the university professor of philosophy.

In the second of the three Lacan seminars that Russell has translated, Seminar 17, the *Other side of psychoanalysis*, Lacan sets out his theory of social structure, or of the social bond, which comes in four kinds that have emerged throughout history: the Discourse of the Master, the Discourse of the Hysteric, the Discourse of the University and the Discourse of the Analyst. The virtue of this theory lies in its Ockhamian simplicity. Each discourse has a specific structure that can be written

with four terms: the split subject (the barred S), the master signifier (S1), the battery of other signifiers (S2), and the *objet petit a* (a). Each of these four terms can occupy one of four places: that of the agent (or the dominant), the other, truth and production.²



The ‘agents’ of these discourses are not Aristotelian self-movers, and thus cannot be seen as incarnations of freedom and autonomy: rather Lacan says the agent is always a “double agent” and is thus what is “made to act” (SXVII, 197). In the discourse of the university we find ‘S2’ in the position of the agent, signifying “structured knowledge” which for Lacan can be instantiated by both bureaucracy and science and technology (SXVII, 34, 120).³ Thus when a university is functioning correctly, what is referred to in the resolution of any problems or dysfunction, what is made to act, is the institution’s ground: structured knowledge, or the disciplines, in all of their dynamism. Since, as ‘agent’, structured knowledge is a kind of ultimate reference, something that is “made to act,” one cannot identify with it nor incarnate it; it is not actually a subjective position. To understand what happens to subjective identification and incarnation in the university—and thus to freedom—the other coordinates are essential. For example, in the position of ‘truth’ one finds the master signifier. In the discourse of the university it operates

as a command to “continue to always know more”, and to be an author, that is, to attach one’s own proper name, as signature, to a unique and original piece of writing thus sealing one’s self-identity as unique (SXVII, 120, 70). So another structural element of the university as discourse is an ideal, or a regulatory idea—authorship—and also a cruel imperative in the style of the superego which positions the subject as lacking enough knowledge. But that is not all. In each discourse the agent puts an ‘other’ to work, the other is thus a kind of material for the discourse, its field of operation. In the case of the university we find the little ‘a’ in the position of the other. From Lacan’s theory at the time Lacan claims that here this ‘a’ signifies surplus enjoyment in the shape of the consumable product, and for the university the consumable product is none other than the precious youth of today, our hope for the future, the student (SXVII, 35,120). So in the discourse of the university the students are set to work by structured knowledge, and the result of this operation is found in the place of production, the barred S, or split subject, which in this discourse Lacan calls the subject of science.⁴

There are two characteristics of this subject-position that are essential for our argument.

First, at the lower level of each of the four discourses there is an arrow that represents a relationship of impotence. In the discourse of the university this relation of impotence affects the subject of science in its capacity to respond to the commands “continue to always know more”, and “be an author”. As such, in so far as we are subjectivized by the university as the realm of structured knowledge we will always struggle with our incapacity to know enough, and our incapacity to become a fully original author.

The second characteristic of this position on the lower right-hand corner of the *matheme*, the position of what is produced by the discourse of the university, is that it is filled with split subjects. The split subject is also the hysteric. So the university produces hysterics: split from their enjoyment, full of unsatisfied desire, and aching for a master, aching for the split, the fault in the master, wishing for the failure of the master to capture what the hysteric knows about enjoyment. I am reminded of the lament of a French expert in which he bemoaned the tremendous numbers of young French people studying critical sociology: all of these students become experts on society, but the vast majority cannot get employment as sociologists, are not trained for any other employment, and so they cannot even take up an active role in the very society on which they are such experts. Whether

or not our university students suffer a split between the realities of the job market and the promises of their education, the virtue of the hysteric is that in complete contrast to the pervert he or she holds open the gap between articulated discourse and enjoyment.

The evident objection at this point is that Lacan's matheme for the discourse of the university no longer corresponds to the university of today. The latter would be better characterized by the Discourse of the Master whose contemporary form, according to Lacan, is capitalism. How does the Discourse of the capitalist master work? In the position of the agent we have the command 'fix it', 'make it work', 'be effective', 'just do it'. In the position of the other we have S₂, the signifier of knowledge put to work, in other words the know-how, the technology, the *savoir-faire* of the sub-contractor or the wage-slave. In the contemporary university the knowledge that is put to work is innovative and assessable pedagogy in the contemporary university: nobody teaches anymore, we're all pedagogues, fountains of fulgurating innovation, brimming with statistics on the reaching of learning outcomes. In the position of production within the capitalist discourse there is the *objet petit a* or 'surplus enjoyment' in the variant of 'surplus value'. This time in the position of the truth there is the split subject; that is to say, the truth that the master does not know his or her own desire, the master does not know what he or she wants, the truth that the master's desire is hysterical and thus a desire to be unsatisfied (SXVII, 34). But then how does the relationship of impotence occur in the Discourse of the Master? It affects the relationship between surplus value and the split subject. Whatever is produced within the Discourse of the Master, however successful the production of surplus, there will never be any address of this ignorance of desire. No subjectification of surplus-enjoyment, of profit or of the consumer bewitched by the promise of a commodity, will ever lead to knowledge of desire, to any genuine motivation.

In response particular universities may well be operating partially or fully through the discourse of the master in its capitalist variant. But, there are two qualifications to be made.

First, Lacan himself claims that in his time the Discourse of the Master is turning into the Discourse of the University, wherein it is structured and formalized knowledge that reigns, not the command.⁵ One might think here of the rise of Total Quality Management and a million other management theories.

Consequently, the situation of the contemporary university is precisely that of an unstable oscillation and interpenetration of the Discourse of the Master and the Discourse of the University.

In my eyes it is precisely this oscillation, this lack of a stable symbolic framework, that could go some way to explaining the epidemic of depression that assails young English and Australian academics, depression that in its extreme forms has resulted in suicide, characterized by a loss of any illusion and a lack of vision of any alternative. How so? Well, it is fine to be subjectivized by one's impotence to become a real author, a self-identical and unique 'I'—that is precisely what allows one to contribute to the contemporary structuring of knowledge, to participate in the dynamic of one's own discipline. It is also fine to be subjectivized by one's impotence to find genuine motivation, to encounter desire, from a position of fascination with commodities and the production of profit—that is precisely what allows one to moderate the demands of chief financial officers and anxious board members. There are all kinds of stories that one can tell oneself, coping mechanisms, one can become a hysteric, one can even become surplus human resources, one can become a harassed and melancholy administrator who does the best job they can whilst dreaming of writing the perfect sonnet. What is unbearable, however, is being caught between two impotencies; as a university professor with a few administrative duties I can't become an author *and* I can't know desire. This is academic freedom in the current state of the university, the freedom to fall from one impotence to another, the freedom to fail as author, and then to fail as a modern subject, as a subject of desire.

III. THE FREEDOM OF THE ANALYST

What then, of the discourse of the analyst, and what of freedom? This is where I want to cite some of Russell's findings on what happens to freedom under the condition of psychoanalysis. These findings come in two forms: first, the disqualification of false freedoms, and second, one of the fundamental ideas behind the Lacanian school, that of self-authorization.

The false freedoms that Russell disqualifies are not so much errors in a philosophical or conceptual register, they are rather existential illusions or traps that may lead the would-be analyst astray. The matheme for the discourse of the analyst is designed to guide the analyst around these traps. There are a series of questions in Russell's writings about particular subjective positions: what or who

is the father, nowadays? how is a father different to a master? What is a master nowadays? What occurs for subjects when the father function, or what lies beyond the father, does not work?—namely psychosis—and finally all of these questions turn towards one question, what is the desire of the analyst?

The first answer is that the analyst's desire is one that he or she has managed to identify, to articulate around certain master signifiers that emerged from the unconscious during the work of their own analysis. It is a desire that can be kept at a slight distance, a desire whose onset and whose mechanism—fantasy—can now be anticipated and toned down or not taken quite so seriously, a desire that doesn't need to get blocked up in a fantasy: so this is one determination of freedom for the analyst—the freedom to not act in the name of one's fantasy. Conversely a false freedom from the analyst's perspective is that kind of freedom that is felt—that enjoyment—when one does act in the name of one's fantasy.

Another trap for the analyst's desire—and this is why analysts do not exist in a solitary condition but come in schools and usually, at least when they are still young, come with a supervising analyst—is that of assuming the position of Kantian freedom, subtracting oneself from the pathologies of affect (such as counter transference), and adhering to reason alone so as to achieve autonomy and become the author of the moral law. Indeed Christine Korsgaard's neo-Kantian philosophy of freedom suffers in Russell's hands. The analyst is free precisely in so far as he or she avoids announcing the law.

The third trap for the analyst, the third false freedom, is that of the master, the one who commands, who possesses and organizes and can put to work all know-how when it comes to making society work for the analysand, and the analysand work for society. Model yourself on my ideal ego is the implicit claim of interwar American ego psychology, model yourself on me and you will be integrated, you will adapt to society. This misconception of the talking cure was one of the first targets of Lacan's return to Freud.

So far we have nothing but negative freedoms for the analyst: the freedom not to act on one's desire, the freedom to avoid announcing the law, the freedom to avoid taking the position of the master. But there is one positive freedom, or rather positive test or ordeal of freedom as desire in psychoanalysis, and it is intimately connected to transmission and the construction of the school: it is the practice of self-authorization. In the 2011 article "The analyst's desire and analytic

training”, Russell writes:

For while Lacan declared that “a psychoanalyst derives his authorization only from himself”, there is no such thing as a solitary analyst; he or she depends on being recognized by an Other, even if this Other cannot be reduced to a normative, authoritative, regulatory or standardized Other.⁶

I will end this brief enquiry into the freedom of the university professor and the freedom of the analyst, an enquiry invited by Russell’s choice, with a set of three questions inspired by this passage:

- What might it mean for us to be recognized, in our work, not just by our friends, at the level of the other with a lowercase o, but by an Other with a capital O, and specifically an Other that cannot be reduced to a normative, authoritative, regulatory or standardized Other? What kind of institution would this require?
- How can we develop some new practices that support self-authorization for the young philosopher, but a self-authorization such that she or he is no longer alone, nor strongest when identified with a single proper name?
- At the same time we should not ignore the political economy of the academy, and so we should keep another very simple question open: philosophy has survived outside the academy in the past. If you want to write philosophy and survive (the conjunction allowing the good life), is it always the best idea to work for a university?

If we find our answers to these questions—and I suggest the answers lie in the direction of the hystericization of discourse by holding open a gap between university and psychoanalysis, and a modified practice of the pass—if we find answers to the questions of recognition, self-authorization, and the good life, we will have made our own return, a return not to Freud but to Athens and to Egypt and to Turkey, to other origins of philosophy, a return to what has been not forgotten but obliterated, the school.

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NOTES

1. Initially with the Australian Centre for Psychoanalysis, the École de la Cause Freudienne, then with Deakin's Masters in Psychoanalysis, and then the Lacan Circle of Melbourne, the New Lacanian school, the World Association of Psychoanalysis.
2. Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*. Trans. R. Grigg. New York: Norton, 2007, 47. Henceforth cited in-text as SXVII.
3. For a nuanced explanation of Lacan's distinctive claim that technology embodies scientific knowledge and restructures our world, see Russell's paper on the philosophy of technology: Russell Grigg, "On the need for a philosophy of technology in its own right", *Umbr(a)*, No. 2, 2012, 1-11.
4. A thorough investigation of the condition of freedom within the contemporary university would look at Lacan, Jacques Alain Miller and Alain Badiou's diverse arguments. See Jacques Alain Miller's original reading of Frege in Jaques-Alain Miller, "Suture: Elements of a Logic of the Signifier", *Cahiers pour l'analyse* no.1, 1996, Lacan's reply concerning the absence of the subject from the field of modern science, and Badiou's article critiquing Miller in which what is at stake is nothing less than rescuing, in an Althusserian manner, within the field of logic, the distinction between science and ideology: "Marque et Manque: sur le zero", *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, no. 10, 1969. See the excellent resources on the "Concept and Form" website that has translated and archived the *Cahiers pour l'analyse* journal at Kingston University.
5. This mutation is marked by the passage from Hegel's dialectic of master and slave through Marx and then on to the formalized quantification of work as energy in thermodynamics. See SXVII, 89-91.
6. Russell Grigg, "The Analyst's Desire and Analytic Training", *Bulletin of Lacan Circle Melbourne*, no. 1, 2011, 2.