PINS, 2011, 41, 80-83

A CLINIC IN THE "REAL"

Parker, I (2011) **Lacanian psychoanalysis: Revolutions in subjectivity.** London & New York: Routledge. ISBN 978-0-415-45543-5 pbk. Pages ix + 238.

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If Ian Parker's published work has created a certain level of expectation in his readers, his latest book will not disappoint them. Not only does he come across as someone who "knows his Lacan" (and, incidentally, his Marx), but also – perhaps chiefly so here – as a knowledgeable, practicing Lacanian psychoanalyst, who is aware of the potential "therapeutic value" of analysis for analysands who are willing to confront their own alienation under capitalism, and in the process question their own understanding of, and relationship with, power. At the same time Parker is clearly someone who is under no illusion about any supposedly direct translation of the "return to themselves" of analysands under clinical conditions, into social and political action outside the clinic. No doubt his familiarity with Marx and Marxism is a contributing factor in this regard. His understanding of the relationship between the two kinds of "revolution", alone, makes this book worth reading, and re-reading.

It is impossible to do justice to the richness and intellectual complexities of the book in the limited space of a book-review, hence I shall have to be selective regarding what strikes me as being most important among the many themes and questions tackled here. It is therefore important to note that, in the Introduction, Parker articulates, rather densely, the structure of a Lacanian psychoanalytic session, in the process indirectly imparting insight into the conception of the subject that underpins this practice, notably, that it is a "lacking", rather than a "full" subject. As such it corresponds with the absences and indeterminacy that characterize the Lacanian psychoanalytic session.

One might add, here, that Parker also draws attention to the (significant) "de-substantialization" of concepts that one encounters in Lacanian psychoanalysis, which subverts the all-too-human tendency of reifying events and processes. Throughout, by the judicious (if repetitive) use of "-ising" (e.g. "psychiatrising", or "hystericising"), he reminds his readers in Lacanian (and, as it happens, Deleuzian) fashion that subjectivity (in fact, the world) is always in process. In this respect he remains true to Lacan's contention, that human knowledge has a "paranoiac" structure, of which, by implication, the psychoanalyst will assist analysands in disabusing themselves, at least as far as their own subjectivity is concerned.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Parker shatters any illusions that might exist on the part of readers, that the Lacanian psychoanalyst in any way pledges his or her assistance to the client in helping them "adapt" to (alienated) capitalist society. In a manner reminiscent of Husserlian phenomenological reductions and the "epoché", he shows how the quest for Lacanian psychoanalysis pares away those alienating, ideological layers covering up the space where a disruptive, dislocating (but desirable) encounter with the limits of our symbolic horizons can occur. He broaches the historical construction of psychoanalysis as theory, as well as of psychoanalysis in the clinic, and points to the link between "revolutions in subjectivity", enabled by psychoanalytic "working through", and social revolutions such as those prompted by Marxism and feminism.

To the less historically-minded among his readers, it may come as a revelation, that psychoanalysis has, since its inception, been entangled with psychiatry as far as diagnostic categories and treatment are concerned, and continues to have a fraught relationship with it, the present signs of distancing itself from it notwithstanding. Parker's informed discussion of the reductive effects on the individual (regarding sex and pathology) that accompany the ambiguous relationship between psychiatry as medical treatment and psychoanalysis as "talking cure", should alert readers to the fact that such reductions ultimately serve the theoretical and practical governance of the individual in contemporary society. Instead, he cautions against the fatal reduction of pathology to the individual, turning instead to Lacan's insistence on the role of the signifier (and therefore, dominant societal discourses) – which surpasses the individual – in the pathologization of the subject.

Put simply, if I understand him correctly, Parker is saying that, as long as the individual is pathologized, and "medical" psychiatry can extend "treatment" to her or him, the fact of pathology being a function of an alienated society can be conveniently overlooked and the social, economic and political *status quo* maintained. And neither is it simply a (liberating) matter of following Lacan's insight into the subject-constitutive role of the signifier; as Parker (like Foucault) intimates; today, to a large degree, it is in the discursive domain where individuals are exhorted to look for "sexual meaning", and where the regulation of individual behaviour continues unabated. The task facing Lacanian psychoanalysis is indeed formidable, and – as one discovers in the course of reading this complex, but illuminating book – crucially involves the Lacanian "real" as that (the only thing) which can have a significant impact on the symbolic structures in which subjects are enmeshed.

One of the most interesting insights encountered in the book is that concerning the tacit complicity of psychiatry with feudal structures – the psychiatrist as Hegelian feudal master – which are perpetuated in psychiatric practice, and which psychoanalysis has the task of combating via a Lacanian discursive understanding of the relations between signifiers, together with a historical conception of "structure" as a function of the system of signifiers.

One cannot help noticing the compatibility between Parker's argument here and that of Foucault (whom he acknowledges) regarding normalization and pathologization of individuals through discourse. One could perhaps take issue with him on his claim that the tension between the signifier and the dominant discourse is embedded in a historical process rather than the "underlying structure of the mind". Is the latter solely a

function of historical scientific or discursive preoccupations, or is it (discursively) conceived in relation to discernible functions of the mind under (any) historical circumstances? It is no accident that one finds counterparts to Lacan's three registers – the imaginary, the symbolic and the real – in other thinkers' models of the mind (Kant's forms of intuition, space and time, as well as the productive imagination, the understanding, and the noumenon or thing-in-itself come to mind). These seem to be suggested by the common human capacities of intuition/perception, conceptualization and the awareness that this is not-all, that something surpasses their domain. Hence, I would argue that "structure" is both: it is functionally suggested by cognitive operations of the mind, themselves unavoidably discursively articulated, which means that they are always already historically mediated.

Parker leaves no doubt that the practice of ("hard-core") Lacanian psychoanalysis is difficult, in that it constantly has to face a host of challenges and temptations. It has to resist biological or neurological reductionism, the tendency to pathologize subjects as "patients" through a proliferation of diagnostic categories, and the danger – ever present in Lacan's emphasis on the signifier – of lapsing into an idealism, instead of being attentive to the "materiality of the signifier" (as evident in representations of the body as its effects). In all of this, the refusal of, and resistance to, psychiatry and normalizing psychology on the part of psychoanalysis as a revolutionary practice of/on the subject, is highlighted. There is a concomitant vigilance, however, against the all-too-easy conjoining of the space of the clinic and that of political praxis, that is, of the revolutionary self-questioning by the subject and a revolutionary remaking of society. It is only by focusing and working on the former, Parker argues, that the Lacanian psychoanalyst may hope for change in the latter.

Where Parker outlines the way that psychology has developed into an alternative to psychiatry, in the process assimilating material from it as well from psychoanalysis, his exposé of "psychologization" as a process which accompanied the rise of capitalism – in so far as it produces the ideological subject required by capital – is especially valuable. This subject is the (supposedly) "free", aggressively competitive, worker-entrepreneur. Here psychology replaces politics and, via strategies of mental health, effectively limits social change and promotes the compliance-inducing bureaucratization of society. Particularly illuminating, in this context, is Parker's account of Lacan's critique of the concept of identity, regarding both institutional wars and Lacan's own evolving theory. He helps one understand why Lacan's insistence on the "differential work of language" is revolutionary in as far as, through analysis, it subverts "identity", and with it, the kind of individual required by capitalist power. This, in turn, connects with the subtleties, foregrounded by Parker, of Lacan's nuanced understanding of life under capitalism in terms of the "hystericization of truth", as where he is careful to note Lacan's refusal to think literally in gendered terms: both men and women can, and do, "conform obsessionally" to the established order (a "male" thing), and similarly, both women and men can, and do, "resist (the *status quo*) hysterically" (a "female" thing).

Parker does not refrain from addressing the difficult question concerning the conception of the good in relation to psychology, nor that of the psychoanalytical approach to ethical issues. As intimated before, but worth repeating, one of the strengths of this book is the way it highlights the complicity between psychology and the dominant economic order of capitalism, within which psychology plays the role of "restoring

individuals", who are constantly split between their reifying relation with capital and their potentially creative, but betrayed and neutralized, relation with their own labour power. It is under these economic conditions that the exemplary ("male") psychological subject, the obsessional neurotic, is produced.

In his illuminating discussion of alienation in terms of Lacan's notion of the "real", Parker simultaneously indicates what important role Lacanian psychoanalysis plays under conditions of capitalism. Subjects who have access to it via the clinic would be afforded occasions of self-understanding, in relation to their alienation under the dominant system, which may clear the way for corresponding action.

It would surprise many psychologists and students of psychology to learn that the psychotherapy they offer potential clients merely serves to reinforce the ideological conception of the alienated "capitalist" individual, and that, by contrast, the kind of psychotherapy that Lacanian psychoanalysis may lead to, is, at best, indirect. At the same time Parker issues a timely warning, that the fashionable (but ideological) valorization of the protean, supposedly "postmodern" subject plays right into the hands of powerful economic and political forces which benefit substantially from its behaviour.

It is in this light that Parker's characterization of the space of the (Lacanian) clinic must finally be understood, namely, as a clinic in/of the "real", with a paradoxical, "extimate" relation to (exterior and yet intimately connected with) society. On the one hand, it is predicated on a theory of social revolution outside the clinic, and on the other, it simultaneously enables a revolution in subjectivity inside the clinic as a site of refusal, but a refusal of a contingently organized society, one that bears the imprint of capitalism.

This does not imply a direct causal relationship between the revolution in subjectivity (with its echoes of Kristeva) that may happen within the clinic, and a potential social and political revolution outside of it. But precisely because the subject of Lacanian psychoanalysis is enabled, or perhaps provoked, into questioning her own relationship with power, any participation in the revolutionary transformation of social reality is "prepared for" at the level of individual subjectivity. And to this end the clinic of/in the "real" – that is, a clinic oriented by "hard-core" Lacanian psychoanalysis – can contribute in a major way. I recommend this book by Ian Parker unreservedly: it may just contribute to the kinds of revolution that it thematizes so eloquently and persuasively.