

David Lichtenstein: “Institute No Institute” – Historical Context – Has
Something Changed? The Contemporary Period

When we speak of the *authorization*, rather than the certification, of the psychoanalyst we introduce a significant dialectic. It derives from the relation between the words author and authority, both terms that are linked to authorize but from two different sides, as it were. An author causes something to come into being. An authority exercises power or judgment over those things once they're created. The *authorization* of a psychoanalyst is rooted in this ambiguity of author and authority. Lacan's remark that a psychoanalyst authorizes himself—which does not mean *by himself*—reflects and plays upon this dialectic.

The root of these words is the Latin *augere*, which means to become, to grow, or increase, as in augment. It suggests a futurity as in the word *augur*. Clinical psychoanalysis concerns both the authority of the past and the futurity of authorship: where it was, there I shall become. The German word Freud used here to convey futurity was *werden*.

In clinical work, this dialectic of authority is ever present. ‘By what authority do I say this’ is a question that each party encounters in analytic work. The only true answer to the analyst's question: ‘What authorizes my intervention’ is the unprepared (unauthorized) speech of the analysand. The author in this exchange is indeed not present in either place.

We are here to examine the question of *authorization* on the professional level rather than on the level of personal analysis. However, it is because the question functions uniquely at the root of our professional practice that its function in the governance of our profession is also unique. To the question, why should the authorization of the professional psychoanalyst be different from the authorization of any other professional, the response may be that it is because we are in the profession of interrogating authorship and authority, and their relationship, that we must also recognize the problematic in our professional authorization.

My task in these few minutes is to sketch a history of the present regarding the question of authorization in Psychoanalysis. It is of course a fool's errand to attempt to write present history. However, I will begin by suggesting that this conference itself and the organization that is sponsoring it are expressions of an historical shift in the terms of the question we are addressing today.

Recognizing a problem in professional authorization, as we have heard in the previous presentations, goes back to the beginnings of our field. However, in the 1970's and 80's I think a shift began to occur in the balance of both knowledge and power, a shift that has redefined our field over the past 35 years especially regarding questions of authority and authorization. It is this shift that makes an event such as today's gathering possible.

Throughout this contemporary period, and while this shift has been taking place, we've continued to have trenchant critiques of the training analyst system, of the course curriculum at established institutes, of the deadening intellectual climate that seems to prevail at some of them. (Critiques like those

of Ken Eisold, Douglas Kirsner, Immanuel Berman, Kernberg and of course Sandra Buechler's important work). These accounts suggest that longstanding problems in designing adequate institutes for the formation of analysts remain unsolved.

On the side of reform, we've seen a shift of psychoanalysis from its medical base to a more interdisciplinary frame, a significant increase in the proportion of women in the field, a greater sensitivity to feminism and to critical and progressive ideas regarding gender and sexuality, although perhaps less so questions of social class. While these various critiques and reforms are significant for the history and character of our field, there are conceptual questions about authorization as such that put the whole system as it is currently organized in doubt, and offer a framework for new possibilities.

The shift that I am thinking about concerns the working principle that there is a central authority regarding psychoanalytic theory and practice and that becoming a psychoanalyst —the authorization in question here today-- is a submission to and acceptance of that authority. According to this principle, one undergoes an analysis of a certain type and it is insofar as the type of analysis properly conforms to the authorized type, one is in turn authorized to be an analyst. While this principle still is in force at many institutes, the real multiplicity of the field now makes it impossible for psychoanalysts to agree as to the nature of the authorized analysis, and in so doing casts doubt on the validity of this approach to authorization.

In our contemporary period, which I am dating from the late 1970's on, rigor and multiplicity within psychoanalytic theory and practice have come to an

impasse. Freud's, and later Lacan's, continual reconfiguration of their models reflected their recognition of the inherent multiplicity within psychoanalytic thought and were indeed efforts to maintain rigor across that multiplicity and to avoid stasis. I would suggest that in historical terms impasse has instead risen to the level of being an organizing feature of the field itself. The question that is inherent in our meeting today is can we articulate new truths out of this impasse, can we too reconfigure our models, or will the impasse instead constitute a dead end.

I would like to briefly discuss three events that marked for me the crisis in rigor and multiplicity that I think characterizes our contemporary period. They are, in the United States, the publication of two books, *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Contemporary Psychology*, by Russell Jacoby, first published in 1975 and *Psychoanalysis: The Impossible Profession*, by Janet Malcolm published in 1981. The third event, on a very different level, is the dissolution of Lacan's School in Paris in 1979-80, his subsequent death in 1981, and their effects on the French psychoanalytic scene.

Jacoby's 1975 book claimed that there is a dialectical core in Freud's work that lends a radical authority to psychoanalytic theory. He revisited a debate that had started two decades earlier between Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm, former colleagues at the Frankfurt School, over the importance of drive theory to this radical dialectic at the heart of psychoanalytic thought. Jacoby expanded on Marcuse's critique of Neo-Freudian ideas such as those of the interpersonal and humanistic psychotherapies that developed in post-war America, approaches that Fromm was then embracing. Without going into Jacoby's arguments in depth here, the question was posed whether the turn toward

interpersonal, relational, and self-realizing theories did not in fact risk a profound loss of the original and radical dialectic in psychoanalysis—the very dialectic that led both Freud and later Lacan to continuously rework their models. My point is not to take sides with or against Jacoby’s position here but to point to how he set the terms of a problem regarding rigor and multiplicity, how he asserted that there is a radical core to psychoanalytic thought and questioned how it might or might not function across multiple instantiations. The question I take from this debate is: how can the authorization of the analyst be properly rooted in this dialectical core rather than in the rigid authority of any one instance.

[Is the authorizing event of psychoanalytic work akin to a fulfilling experience of self-realization or is it instead more a coming to terms with its impossibility?]

[Mention the formation, 1979, of GRHS?]

Janet Malcolm’s book, published in 1981, posed very similar questions but from a very different place. As a journalist, she investigated the state of authority at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute in the face of challenges to that authority from within the field. For Malcolm it was especially the work of Heinz Kohut in the 1970’s and his theories of narcissism and the self and also Otto Kernberg’s use of object relations theory that posed the challenges to the authority of what was then the dominant school of so-called Ego Psychology. As with Jacoby’s book, one comes away with the idea that there is a core truth that is threatened by contemporary theoretical reform and that one faces a forced choice of either losing this truth in accepting liberalization or holding it at the cost of submitting to authoritarian excess. In Malcolm’s tale, Psychoanalysis is trapped between the devils of a diluted reform, on the one

hand, based on the wooly optimism of anything goes and a soul crushing orthodoxy, on the other.

In the wake of Lacan's death in 1981 and the dissolution of the school that he had created and directed since 1964, the psychoanalytic community in Paris was in considerable disarray regarding authority and authorization. According to Roudinesco, in the early 1980's no less than 13 and as many as 20 (according to Jacques Sedat), schools, new centers, or study groups emerged out of the community that had been the *Ecole Freudienne de Paris*. They were in many instances quite unfriendly to one another.

This splintering reflected difficulties in tolerating the complex differences not within the overall field of psychoanalysis but even within the body and history of Lacan's teaching. The inclination to determine what was the right emphasis and to enforce it as the way to think and to work made it impossible for disparate inclinations from within Lacan's school to work together in one organization. The topic of authorization, and what is known in Lacanian circles as the 'passe' was and remains a key point of difference.

One little splinter group called *le cercle freudien*, created in 1981, became a point of contact for me in the years after Lacan's death. It was a companion group to the small association that would become *Après-Coup*, in New York in 1985. As I experienced them in those early years after the death of Lacan, both the *Cercle Freudien de Paris* and *Après-Coup* in NY were loosely organized study groups for clinicians where one could find colleagues to work with both for supervision and for intellectual exchange and research. The circumstances that had surrounded the last days of the *EFP*, indeed the violent collapse of Lacan's

school, introduced a wariness regarding the powerful forces at work in psychoanalytic societies, a wariness much like that of the group that is sponsoring today's event. It was combined in both instances with a profound respect for the dialectic core of psychoanalytic thought.

The defining conflict of the current period field is that between rigor and multiplicity. This is in no way a new conflict; Freud faced it from the start. However, it has greater effects due to the development of the different schools in the field. It can no longer be contained by asserting the authority of a particular school of thought as the representative of rigor. I think instead that there must be a return to the dialectical core of psychoanalytic thought in a way that can address the multiple expressions that characterize the field. I don't think this work has yet been accomplished, far from it. To do so is the defining challenge of our time.

It is easy but useless to support multiplicity without rigor. Equally useless are the expressions of rigor that fail to see the possibility of anything new. To become a psychoanalyst today--to be authorized as an analyst--is to traverse this impossible crossroad.