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On: 03 August 2015, At: 22:12

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London, SW1P 1WG



European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling

Publication details, including instructions for authors
and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rejp20>

Lacan, discourse, event: New psychoanalytic approaches to textual indeterminacy

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Published online: 25 Jun 2015.



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To cite this article: Nebojša Blanuša (2015) Lacan, discourse, event: New psychoanalytic approaches to textual indeterminacy, *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling*, 17:2, 216-218, DOI: [10.1080/13642537.2015.1034468](https://doi.org/10.1080/13642537.2015.1034468)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13642537.2015.1034468>

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BOOK REVIEWS

Lacan, discourse, event: new psychoanalytic approaches to textual indeterminacy, edited by Ian Parker and David Pavon-Cuellar, London, Routledge, 2014, 370 pp., £31.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-52163-5

Lacanian discourse analysis (LDA) is not new for scholars in the field of discursiveness (discourse studies) but this programmatic book announces its emergence and deserves to be considered as a new *point de capiton*. It tries to open the field up by positing a series of stimulating questions and (per)forms an assemblage structured according to Lacan's discursive postulates. If we start from the three little title words – Lacan, Discourse, and Event – they seem at first sight to act as discontinuous and mechanically ordered categories whose interrelatedness is rather like a friction, which aims to expose the tranquilizing ideological effects of the Text. Maybe we should consider them as three preparatory acts for the Real event – the irruption of discourse through the introduction of indeterminacy, an encounter which disintegrates narrative outcomes as smooth stories, and complete explanations. But this ensemble of a broad spectrum of heterogeneous illustrations and applications of LDA has also several guiding threads. Little coding of the title makes it readable as a master discourse: Lacan (S1) → Discourse (S2)/Event (a). So the truth of this book must be a barred subject and its unknown knowledge, expressed in a new way of sewing up Lacanian psychoanalysis with Marxism, subjectivism, and symbolic encounter with the Real. Through the 27 chapters, various angles of psychoanalysis, political science, psychology, psychiatry, pedagogy, and philosophy bring their own encounters with indeterminacy of discourse and uncertainty of the subject, produced by the event.

At the beginning of the book, editors have tried to contextualize LDA in the heterogeneous tradition of discourse analysis. Their first steps are bold, due to assuming the coexistence of the human and the discursive, as well as due to making an epistemological distinction from positivist and mechanistic research procedures, such as content analysis. This section also includes the argument that discourse is a kind of connecting signifier between the 'human and social sciences', and focusing on the reality of discourse itself, which interweaves different aspects of all those sciences. Its closer ancestors are traced from Marxist–Structuralist and Marxist–Historical analysis, as well as from Foucauldian archeology, Derridian deconstruction, the Essex school of discourse theory, and critical discourse analysis. These tendencies prepared the cradle for an explicit proposal of LDA in the realm of critical discursive psychology, at the juncture of debates around the integrity/fragmentation of the subject.

In the very introduction, Michel Pêcheux is proclaimed as the first Lacanian discourse analyst. Such a proclamation of the one is always an ungrateful



reduction, especially if you compare him with other illustrious figures, e.g. Fredric Jameson and his meticulous methodological considerations from *The Political Unconscious* (2002) or the *Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan* (1997). For the occasion of such a book, Jameson deserves more than just to be merely mentioned as some overseas Marxist, at least because of his contribution to unlocking the classical opposition between the individual and the collective, by referring to Lacan's conception of the three orders. Unfortunately, it is not possible to find even parts of Jameson's seminal texts in this book. He remains almost completely invisible as potentially eventful in radical historization of psy-complex.

How to include the limits of discourse and the extra-discursiveness of the event – without attempting to erase it, reabsorbing it as the structural position, and keeping it as the messenger of trauma – is the main question of LDA and its *differentia specifica* to other discursive approaches, which try to read out regularities and determinations of discourse. Here, LDA considers the event 'as something clearly irreducible to the discursive structure ... but that simultaneously occurs in the "scene" of that signifying structure ... and as being "produced" by the same signifier...' (p. 7). So, LDA considers language as a producer of the event, and as reaction to its real interruption, but never capable to neutralize it or reduce it to the matrix of the Symbolic. Such is the common denominator of all the chapters, the division of which is also symptomatic. Whether these symptoms are performative, as an expression of a universe of mastery, I will leave to the readers' judgment. The first part is conceived as a discursive formation of six canonical and already published texts with the foundational role of delineating a new research paradigm. As highly impregnated, or better to say possessed by the ghost of Lacan, these pioneers of discourse theory and analysis bring to the reader the first articulations and general tenets of LDA. This part of the book can be read as well as a master's discourse, which disintegrates and dislocates old paradigms, establish new rules as master signifiers, and discursive conditions of possibility for enunciating the 'act' (p. 63) and its relation to the enunciated fact (p. 67). Finally, through the words of another ghost, Michel Pêcheux, discourse becomes structured as an event, as 'the potential index of a movement within the sociohistorical filiations of identifications, inasmuch as it constitutes, at the same time, an effect of these filiations and the work ... of displacement within their space'. (p. 94).

The second part of the book, as an elaboration of concepts for analysis has a function similar to the discourse of the university. It offers a wider conceptual network or interpretational machinery for reflective, but eventually limited, domestication of discourse *qua* event. For system reproduction, this may look good, but structured in this way, it carries the danger of reification. Here, we speak about the reification of constitutive lack as a way of attaining enjoyment, as well as of other constitutive concepts that appear in this part of the book. But this is a problem of the form of message transmission, not of its content.

The third part of the book has the form of the **analyst of discourse**. The main agent is the event in its oscillation between the real and structural determination, analyzed through practical examples, such as capitalism, mental health, trauma, apartheid narratives, critical subjectivity, art, brothering, history (of psychoanalysis), law, politics, and narco-messages.

Based on their consideration of the event, papers from the second and the third parts of the book are valorized by editors on 14 theoretical dimensions. Some of these supposedly shared values are singular (*value of critique* or *to something that just happens*) and some repetitious, but more important is that they are not distributed evenly among chapters. According to the editors' vectorization, it seems that two texts are more imbued with the ideals of LDA. These are chapter 9. *The unconscious is politics: psychoanalysis and other discourses* and chapter 20. *Agonistic discourses, analytic act, subjective event*. Why those two relatively short chapters? Maybe because of the politics of a barred subject, politics of the unconscious as a truth of the book. Furthermore, these chapters analyze four discourses as topology of the political (119) and their struggle (249). Politics of totality or of impossible would be expressed in master's, capitalist's, and discourse of the university, while the politics of the symptom is a matter of the analyst's discourse. Politics of psychoanalysis is also structured through the analyst discourse. Contrary to capitalism, which promotes belief in complete enjoyment of self-sufficient individuality, and contrary to science, which forecloses the subject and rejects the unconscious – as well as contrary to their consequent silencing effects – psychoanalysis recognizes surplus as a cause of discourse and gives way to the impossible, situating it as an agent of discourse (pp. 125–126). As such, psychoanalysis was and is confronted with the so-called common sense. Nowadays manifestations of this common sense are in the form of neoliberal technocracy, humans conceived as neuro-behavioral machines, *Je-cratie*, and proliferation of the new forms of psycho-pathologizations.

Articulation of the four discourses is described in chapter 20 as politics again, but now with the focus on their mutual agonistic relationships. These are the structures of subject's entrapment and its formation, or in other words structures of power, which at the same time limit and enable subjects. In a civilization where the psy-sciences serve to standardize, normalize, medicalize, and stigmatize 'dangerous' behaviors and consequently to perform the procedure of exclusion for the sake of control, the proper political act offered by this book is the analytical one. Such an act questions the hyper-managed alienated subjective position, its desires, unconscious phantasms, and *jouissances*. This is the anti-conformist questioning with the aim to change coordinates of meaning and to produce new subjective event. But it could appear in our deeply saturated eyes only *après coup*. And I hope it will.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13642537.2015.1034468>