

**'if I hadn't seen russell I
would have been fucked'**

justin clemens

I feel moved that I have been invited to contribute to this event in honour of Russell Grigg. Part of the problem in doing so is that Russell is partially associated for me with an older Australian milieu which has now lamentably receded: that is, a social democracy in which nobody would ever say anything nice about anybody else publicly, mainly because to speak well of anybody in such a frame was smarmy and embarrassing. The covert social injunction was rather that one should be witty, self-deprecating and, indeed, other-deprecating too. For better or worse, however, the present age seems to demand new signifiers—often quite simple signifiers of approbation, assent, and affirmation to be passed from hands to mouths in a subsistence economy of semblance—but such aggressively altered forms of address shouldn't stop us from acknowledging essential residues.

I have known Russell now for over 15 years, since I began teaching at Deakin University in Geelong in 2000. Over that time, I was lucky to be able to work with him in the now lamentably-defunct Psychoanalytic Studies, which he established and ran with a rather motley crew of psychoanalytically-inclined personages such as Ron Gilbert and Douglas Kirsner. As a supplement to the official subject listings—which included dedicated courses on the history and theory of psychoanalysis as well as on specialist technique—Russell and I also organised an ongoing sequence of fortnightly seminars on topics pertinent to psychoanalysis. Oliver Feltham, Geoff Boucher, Jon Roffe, Robert Sinnerbrink,

Dominique Hecq, Lizzy Newman, and the great table-tennis player Tamas Pataki were among the many local presenters. Eminent foreign guests included Santanu Biswas, Makoto Hirano (also a doctoral student of Russell's), Eli Zaretsky, and Pierre-Gilles Guéguen. I remember one seminar at which Russell arrived late, mainly because he had himself sent out the notice of the seminar to his email lists ... but he never received the notice, as he wasn't an addressee of his own missive: this phenomenon is now known as 'Russell's Paradox.' We were awarded a large ARC Discovery Project on 'Psychoanalysis and Science' with Henry Krips. I helped Russell organize a double international conference on the topics of Jacques Lacan's *Seminar XVII* (a text which Russell of course translated into English) and on 'Psychoanalysis and Science.' We also organized a symposium around and co-wrote an article condemning 'The Crime of Torture,' after two legal academics from this very same university had very publicly proposed the utility of torture in the treatment of so-called 'ticking bomb scenarios.' Finally Russell was founding President of the Lacan Circle of Melbourne, which continues to run study days, cartels and conferences to the present, and for which, as Secretary, I enthusiastically took the minutes for five or so years.

I hope then that it is neither too maudlin nor mawkish to add that Russell has therefore been a very important person throughout my adult life, or, more precisely, my post-PhD life, which is what I suppose passes for adulthood for academics. He has transformed my intellectual orientation, not least in his commitment to and his thinking about psychoanalysis, especially in regards to Freud and Lacan. Russell is an important exegete and commentator on psychoanalysis and philosophy, particularly regarding the operations of language, as the title of a collection of his essays has it, *Lacan, Language and Philosophy*. He is a great translator of major Lacanian texts, including *Seminar III: The Psychoses*, *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, and now *Seminar V: Formations of the Unconscious*. He has also advised many other English-language translators on their versions of the seminars: one fun thing to do is look for idiomatic Australian expressions in the lingo of some of the US translators. He has edited and co-edited major collections on *Female Sexuality* (with Dominique Hecq and Craig Smith) and on *Seminar XVII* (with myself). If you read his books and essays, you will find that there is no melodramatic grandstanding, only exceptional clarity, which offers, alongside or with the clarity, strange, striking, and singular propositions. Russell is also a purveyor of the now-threatened Australian art of ironic understatement. He is the only person who's ever said to me: "You've got to remember, Justin, that Athens at the time of Socrates was the size of Horsham." Yet much of his real work was,

is, and will always remain inaccessible to the university. As one of his analysands said to me recently: “If I hadn’t seen Russell I would have been fucked.”

So what I would like to do in this presentation is pose the question: *what does Russell really want?* Part of the answer hinges on the specificity of psychoanalysis. And part of the problem of this answer is that psychoanalysis is truly hateful: otherwise apparently quite reasonable people can still become uncontrollably incensed at the very mention of the word. Freud is out-of-date, non-scientific, patriarchal, offensive, plain wrong, etc., etc. To adopt Oscar Wilde here: “The dislike of psychoanalysis is the rage of Caliban seeing his face in a glass. The dislike of psychoanalysis is the rage of Caliban not seeing his face in a glass.” Russell himself insists on the distinction between analysis and academy, following Lacan in particular, who, in his famous matheme of the four discourses, identifies the linked but irreducible modes of master, hysteric, analyst and university. Psychoanalysis is not just one form of thought among others, to be adjudged and placed in context, and critiqued, and adapted to applications of culture—precisely unlike most modern philosophy has been. “After Kant,” as Maurice Blanchot writes, “the philosopher is for the most part a university professor.” So if much of Russell’s work could (and should) be read by students of philosophy and culture more generally, much of what he writes bears on technical issues in the practice of psychoanalysis. Hard for universities, their routines, and their personnel to take.

Yet what I want especially to point to is the way in which in Russell always focuses on the possibility and actuality of transformation in the theory and practice of psychoanalysis under the pressure of contemporary events, whether those events are political or utterly personal. Take Lacan’s early brilliant retheorisation of psychosis around the problematic of *foreclosure* (*Verwerfung*), to be strenuously distinguished from repression proper (*Verdrängung*) and disavowal (*Verleugnung*). As Russell points out, foreclosure forces our attention to the real, as well as sharpening Lacan’s division between the imaginary and symbolic registers. Yet Lacan later departs from this theory, insofar as “the symptom is no longer to be regarded simply as a message excluded from the circuit of communication, but also as a site of *jouissance*”³; in Lacan’s later work, we find entirely new and different figurations of the stakes of psychosis, where it is not the symptom but the *sinthome* that will come to knot the rings of the subject.

As Lacan is developing his new theory, Russell notes how he requires a different appreciation of the role of the father in ontogenesis. Hence Lacan first defends,

then mocks Freud's Oedipus. Indeed, there is trouble from the start for Freud: if Oedipus is allegedly a key developmental moment in modern childhood (in which there is a struggle against the father in the situation of the nuclear family), then *Totem and Taboo* and *Moses and Monotheism* would indeed be applied psychoanalysis, illicitly imposing the local fillips of the bourgeois unit onto universal history, thereby adding nothing substantial to our understanding of the role of the father in psychopathology, while inventing an anthropology. Of course, it would still be possible to argue that it is not the illicitly-projected limitations of the nuclear family that is at work in Freud's speculative anthropological texts, but that it is only under the experimental social conditions of the nuclear family that certain invariants are able to emerge—but this is not really Russell's point. For Freud is not engaging in an application, but himself falling into contradiction (e.g., does enjoyment precede the law or vice-versa?), a feature which should induce us to attend more closely to the complex forces at work in and through his writings.

For Freud, there are ultimately three different kinds of identification, which are often reduced or confused: 1) the primordial identification with an object, fundamentally ambivalent; 2) the formation of the ego ideal and superego in the wake of the dissolution of the Oedipal complex (as the precipitate of the internalization of the law); 3) the hysterical identification, an identification with an other in relation to a third party. The father becomes simultaneously norm and exception across these divisions, instrumental in all types of identification. But this inconsistent double act of the father as norm-and-exception is precisely what comes into question for Lacan in his very attempt to remain faithful to the Freudian discovery.

In his earlier work, Lacan tried to sharpen the distinction between the name-of-the-father and the phallus, insofar as the former functions as a 'pure signifier,' while the latter always comes immixed with imaginary elements. This first phase of Lacan's (limited) critique then debouches to a later form, taking place between Seminars XVI and XVIII (1968-71), where Lacan criticizes Oedipus as 'Freud's Dream,' that is, as an inadequate response to presentations of hysteria, and criticizes the father of enjoyment as the reflex of an obsessional. Note that this also means that Lacan's critique is a critique of psychoanalysis's own origins in hysteria qua neurosis: as Eric Laurent somewhere puts it, this can be considered Lacan's move from a special to a general theory. From the name-of-the-father and the phallus in Lacan's earlier seminars, we move to a theorization of castration-qua-cut and the priority of the master.

Notably, with the rise of the master the notorious *object a* takes on an ever more central role. Moreover, the questions posed by philosophy and science concomitantly become more and more crucial. The philosopher comes to be figured as an agent of the master, his insidious job to extract and transform the slave's *savoir-faire* to *savoir*, and, in doing so, repudiate the un-known knowledge that is the unconscious, and reduce the diversity of *techné* to expropriated abstraction. This is a foundational operation of philosophy: an irremediably corrupted extraction device in the service of the master. Modern science, however, is not simply an extension of this inaugural philosophical expropriation of know-how. It is an entirely different proposition, at once incarnated in a bogglingly-complex material network of research and transmission institutions, and requiring the modern form of the subject of science for its elaboration. One should turn to Russell's essay 'Descartes and the Subject of Science' for an elegant and persuasive elaboration of Lacan's doctrines in this regard.

Today, however, it is possible that we have already entered a post-scientific world. For Lacan, it was a crisis internal to science that first impelled it to auction itself off to the highest bidder as a purveyor of gadgets; science has since kept itself going by turning technology into its symptom. Today, the convergence of information technology and capital means that science itself can be dispensed with in favour of pure technology, and everyone can go back to believing that we live in the Matrix or that climate change isn't real, while continuing to enjoy (*jouir!*) the manifold fruits of ever-accelerating technical innovation. This is an issue that Lacan registers under the heading of "furrows in the *alethosphere*," whereby language is subordinated to information, to *lathouses* ("false objects," industrial parasite devices), and where *semblants* proliferate.⁴

But of course this poses a new difficulty for psychoanalysis itself, given that, instead of gadgets, pills, and their *promesse de bonheur*, psychoanalysis offers only *an ethics of ordinary unhappiness*. Remember that Freud claims that the aim of analysis is to turn 'neurotic misery' into 'ordinary unhappiness.' So that's a big part of the analyst's task. Happiness, as Freud said, is not a cultural value; and it certainly isn't an analytic value. As he puts it in a footnote to his case history of Frau Emmy von N. in *Studies on Hysteria*: "We must not vaunt our happiness on the one hand, nor, on the other, must we talk of the worst or it will happen. The fact is that we do not boast of our happiness until unhappiness is in the offing, and we become aware of our anticipation in the form of a boast."⁵ And even if, as Saint-Just declared, happiness is, after the Revolution, a political value, psychoanalysis

itself is clearly not a political technology of happiness.

The analyst is not to *educate* the patient in happiness; the analyst is not to *dominate* the patient's desire; the analyst ought not *condemn* the patient's acts; the analyst should not *negotiate* with the patient's desire; the analyst should not simply *invest* in the patient's desire (though there's nothing wrong with an analyst liking money); the analyst is not to *manage* the patient's desire; the analyst is not to *martyr* themselves for the patient; the analyst is not simply a *repository* for complaints; the analyst must not enter into sexual relations with the patient (whence Susie Orbach's great title, *The Impossibility of Sex*); the analyst's relation to the patient is neither 'rare' nor 'elective.' So, although analysis is now "practised in couples" as Lacan says,⁶ the analyst is not a teacher, nor master, nor judge, nor diplomat, nor entrepreneur, nor administrator, nor saint, nor complaints department, nor lover, nor friend (whether 'true and perfect' or 'vulgar and mediocre,' to invoke Cicero's distinctions).

So WTF does an analyst want then? Lacan will add that: "The desire of the analyst is for absolute difference."⁷ What does that mean? Most crucially, the 'ordinary unhappiness' the analyst desires of the analysand should not be understood as a commonplace affect or emotional state; it is rather, in analytic terms, a *knowledge*. Ordinary unhappiness is a knowledge. Why? Because the 'desire for absolute difference' is not a pure desire. Lacan says precisely this: "the analyst's desire is not a pure desire."⁸ Why is this desire not a pure desire? There are several major features of this impurity to note. First, as Russell reminds us: "a pure desire will always be a pure desire for death."⁹ The desire of the analyst is an impure desire because it does not simply desire death. Analysis always and only operates in the realm of the living—if it certainly complicates any of the familiar ways of distinguishing between 'life' and 'death,' and indeed insists that the letters by which we live are already the articulations of death.

But why then does this impure desire render ordinary unhappiness a kind of knowledge? Lacan emphasizes that an impure desire is always bound up with knowledge as its condition. This is not the 'knowledge' of pre-scientific discourses such as scholasticism, which do not and cannot adequately acknowledge desire—and *to that extent* can never quite separate themselves from religion. Nonetheless, psychoanalysis, as Lacan himself notes, can itself come to resemble an institutional religion—which it is indeed often accused of being. Moreover, this proximity of religion brings us immediately to the central problem of 'axiological neutrality'

that the analyst ought to evince towards the analysand's presentations. As Serge Cottet notes, "Apathy, ataraxia, silence have for a long time passed as the cardinal virtues of the psychoanalyst."¹⁰ Indeed, as Harold Bloom has put it, psychoanalysis is the greatest contemporary example of wisdom literature, an heir to Stoicism and Epicureanism, those great ancient rival enterprises for which achieved forms of indifference (*ataraxia, apatheia, adiophora*) were *the* ethical goal.

So it's no accident that Lacan invokes both in *Seminar XI*, noting "This discipline [of indifference] which, in order to find a way out of the impasse of the Socratic interrogation, was practised by people who were not only specifically philosophers, but, in their own way, some kind of practitioners of religion—the Stoics and the Epicureans."¹¹ Moreover, these post-Socratics often, much like psychoanalysts, insisted on the absolute authority of the Other. But—and this is absolutely crucial—their understanding of this Other necessarily failed to understand this Other as the locus of *desire*, precisely because they preceded the Cartesian *ascesis* that founds modern science. This fact ensures the Stoic's and Epicurean's shared incompetencies *vis-à-vis* desire. So, insofar as its field is that of indestructible desire, psychoanalysis differs from its predecessors in that the analyst—as against the autarchy of the Stoic or Epicurean master—is differently detached in his or her indifference. Confronted with desire, Stoic and Epicurean indifference is unsustainable. Indeed, the indifference of the analyst can come to resemble its opposite, to the point of terrifying malignancy. As ever exaggerating for the sake of truth, Slavoj Žižek has interpreted (in too many of his texts to cite) the brain-eating serial-killer intellectual Hannibal Lecter as popular culture's pathetic attempt to image the analyst. As Žižek remarks, the Lacanian analyst is in fact far more evil than Lecter could ever be: "Eat your *Dasein*!"

It remains for us to understand this peculiar form of analytic indifference correctly. After all, not only is desire always 'a desire to desire,' but simultaneously a 'not wanting to desire,' which is, in its turn, always a 'wanting not to desire.' Whence the necessity of indifference—notwithstanding its desirability. Or impossibility. So, as Cottet argues and Russell exemplifies, the analytic *apatheia* is far from a total detachment: on the contrary, it has to pass through the defiles of love, a love of the analyst for analysis. In fact, without love, analysis is impossible, but it is only on the other side of love that one can return to an indifference that is neither hatred nor impotence. For the place where the transference-effect known as love emerges is the place where the desire of the patient and the desire of the analyst encounter each other. But love is 'essentially deception' and is therefore in itself

neither absolute difference nor ordinary unhappiness. It is rather the supposition that the analyst is the *sujet supposé savoir* on the part of the patient that provides the support for transference and, as such, it is only transference that provides the traction and material for a genuine interpretation of symptoms on the analyst's part, and a deflection towards knowledge for the patient (whose unconscious is itself a relentless interpreting machine). After all, there is no innate passion for knowledge in Lacanian psychoanalysis; the "three fundamental passions" being rather for "love, hate, and ignorance."¹²

Rather, the knowledge gained from interpretation discerns a hole for the subject, *a hole which is non-substitutable*: "Interpretation is a signification that is not just any signification....It has the effect of bringing out an irreducible signifier.... What is essential is that [the subject] should see, beyond this signification, to what signifier—to what irreducible, traumatic, non-meaning—he is, as a subject, subjected."¹³ Now that's *absolute difference*: the non-substitutability of the primal signifier, the master-signifier, towards whose discernment the analyst concentrates his or her efforts.

But this brings us to my third point about the statement that 'the analyst's desire is not a pure desire.' If my first point was that the analyst's desire is impure because analysis interrupts the pure desire for death, and the second outlined the bond between 'impure desire' and 'knowledge,' the third has to do with the sense of impurity as waste-product, residue. Enter the object: "Up till the advent of psycho-analysis, the path of knowledge was always traced in that of a purification of the subject, of the *percipiens*. Well! We would now say that we base the assurance of the subject in his encounter with the filth that may support him, with the *petit a* of which it would not be untrue to say that its presence is necessary."¹⁴ Now *that's* impurity.

We are now in a position to answer the question: what does Russell want? He wants life-death, un-knowledge, and inassimilable filth—that is, absolute difference and the common unhappiness of us all. If only more people wanted the same, then we wouldn't be in this fucking mess.

The University of Melbourne

NOTES

1. Jacques Lacan cites an interlocutor who offers this interpretation of his, Lacan's, own position: "Human language would then constitute a kind of communication in which the sender receives his own message back from the receiver in an inverted form.' I could but adopt this objector's formulation, recognizing in it the stamp of my own thinking; for I maintain that speech always subjectively includes its own reply," in Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*. Trans. B. Fink with H. Fink and R. Grigg. New York: Norton, 2006, 246.
2. Maurice Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*. Paris: Gallimard, 1969, 3.
3. Russell Grigg, *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy*. Albany: SUNY, 2008, 23.
4. See Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XVII*. Trans. R. Grigg. New York: Norton, 2007.
5. Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume II (1893-95)*. Trans. J. Strachey et al. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955, 76.
6. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. A. Sheridan. London: Penguin, 1994, xxxix.
7. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 276.
8. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 276.
9. Grigg, *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy*, 130.
10. Serge Cottet, *Freud and the Desire of the Psychoanalyst*. Trans. B. Khiara et al. London: Carnac, 2012, 3.
11. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 235.
12. See Jacques Lacan, *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge 1972-1973*. Ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998, 121.
13. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 250-1.
14. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 258.