

Society On The Couch

Conference on Lacanian psychoanalysis and social theory

A conference organized by Sociologisk Forum, Kritisk Profil and The Research Network "Emotions, Knowledge, and Culture" (University of Aarhus).

Wednesday the 3rd of May, 2006.

Preben Hornungstuen, Studenternes Hus, University of Aarhus.

Registration is not required. Lunch is available for DKK. 120,-. Please contact Carsten Bagge Laustsen (cbl@ps.au.dk) no later than Monday the 1st of May.

Social theory has gotten itself a new friend: Lacanian psychoanalysis. Within the past ca. 20 years, a new approach based on psychoanalytic theory has developed to analyze contemporary society and its symptoms. Questions ranging from the sublime objects of nationalist rhetoric, identity politics, religious faith, terrorism and global political power structures, to the libidinal economy in capitalist consumer societies are being scrutinized and discussed among scholars within a number of fields, such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, art studies, and anthropology. Among the leading figures in this new approach to social theory are the members of the Ljubljana based so called "Slovenian School". In this conference, one of the prominent members of this group, Alenka Zupančič, will be among the speakers. She will be supplemented by Kirsten Hyldgaard (Danish University of Education), Lilian Munk Rösing (University of Copenhagen), and Henrik Jøker Bjerre (University of Aarhus). "Society on the Couch" will discuss problems in contemporary society connected to the concepts of knowledge, discourse, desire, drive, and enjoyment.

PROGRAM:

9.15-9.30: Carsten Bagge Laustsen: INTRODUCTION TO THE CONFERENCE

9.30-10.30: Lilian Munk Rösing: THE NEED FOR A NEW UNIVERSAL

Our time and culture is characterized by a division of society into still more particular subgroups, whether speaking of (sexual, ethnical, cultural) minority groups fighting for their rights or segments of consumers being identified for commercial purposes. As a counterpoint to this cult of the particular identity psychoanalysis offers a concept of the universal subject. This paper wants to qualify the universalism of psychoanalysis, taking its starting point from the strange alliance between Freud and

Saint Paul in Der Mann Moses, and confronting Alain Badiou's concept of "universal singularity" with Juliet Flower MacCannells defense of "the negative universal".

10.30-10.45: Coffee and tea.

10.45-12.15: Alenka Zupančič: WHEN SURPLUS-ENJOYMENT MEETS SURPLUS-VALUE

In his Seminar XVII (L'avers de la psychanalyse), held in Paris in the year following the events of Mai 68, Lacan has first developed his theory of four discourses or "social bonds". The paper will propose a reading of Lacan's formulas, and will focus especially on the relationship between the master's discourse and the university discourse or, as Lacan puts it, the relationship between the discourses of "the old and the new masters". Lacan indicates a certain connection between the university discourse and the functioning of capitalism, which opens up an interesting perspective for further examination of the predominant social bond we live in.

12.15 – 13.00: Lunch

13.00-14.00: Henrik Jøker Bjerre: THE ORIGINAL LINGUISTIC ACCUMULATION

In his monumental work Making It Explicit, Robert Brandom establishes that "communication is the social production and consumption of reasons." Curiously, his version of linguistic philosophy comes close to some of the basic assumptions of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. In this paper, I will therefore suggest a reading of Brandom's book as an elaborated exposition of how the big Other works: the fundamental social character of knowledge, the logical priority of the big A (in Brandom the Ascriber, in Lacan L'Autre) in deciding on the validity of utterances, the constraints on the access of the interlocutor to what she herself is committed to and believes, etc. What Brandom does not investigate, however, is the question of the libidinal structures that generate and uphold linguistic practice and its accompanying power relations. It seems that he, like most of his contemporary analytical friends, presupposes what I will call an "original linguistic accumulation". By adding a Marxist-Lacanian perspective to Brandomian philosophy, the attempt will be to open some of the critical perspectives on the "knowledge society", which analytical philosophy tends to ignore.

14.00-15.00: Kirsten Hyldgaard: THE SUBJECT, TRUTH, AND KNOWLEDGE IN LACANIAN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Psychoanalysis is a theory of the subject of the unconscious, an issue which transcends the traditional dichotomy between psychology of the ego/the self and sociological concepts of the social. This point will be presented in connection with the concept of desire and the four discourses. The Lacanian concept of desire neither implies the intentional consciousness of phenomenology nor a question of the fight to death for the other's recognition. There are two dominant fathers of contemporary discourse analysis: Foucault and Lacan. In distinction to Foucault discourse analysis in Lacan does not exclude the

question of truth and the subject. The outset of this paper is also Lacan's seminar L'envoers de la psychanalyse from 1969.

15.00-15.30: Coffee and tea.

15.30-17.00: Panel: Lilian Munk Rösing, Alenka Zupančič, Henrik Jøker Bjerre, Kirsten Hyldgaard, Nils Mortensen: IS IT VIABLE TO COMBINE PSYCHOANALYSIS AND SOCIAL THEORY?

Society On The Couch focuses on the employment of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in the interpretation and critique of contemporary society. But is it at all viable to combine psychoanalysis and social theory? Isn't psychoanalysis exactly a question of individual treatment of personal experiences and traumas? And even if it is viable to employ the theoretical framework of Lacanian theory on societal discussions, which concept of therapy does it bear on, and which understanding of a "healthy" society follows?