

[▶ Introduction](#)[▶ EJP](#)[Publications](#)[▶ Contributors](#)[▶ Editorial Board
& IBAN](#)[▶ Editorial
Norms](#)[▶ On-paper
edition](#)[▶ Papers and
articles](#)[▶ Philosophical
Conversations
\(with Axel
Honneth, Jean-
Luc Nancy,
Richard Rorty\)](#)[▶ JEP Journal
\(1995-2011\)](#)[▶ ITALIAN
SECTION
\[I.S.A.P.\]](#)[▶ EJP Russian
edition](#)[▶ Email us](#)[▶ Links](#)[▶ News &
Initiatives](#)[▶ Reviews](#)[▶ UNBEHAGEN.
A Free
Association for
Psychoanalysis](#)[▶ Number 3 –](#)

ANSWERS BY DANY NOBUS

[Dany Nobus](#)

Answers by DANY NOBUS

II – What is the most significant contribution that philosophy has made to psychoanalysis, at least from your personal approach to psychoanalysis?

To me, there can only be one answer to this question. Philosophy has donated to psychoanalysis the idea of the unconscious, that is to say the notion that human beings are not just self-transparent thinking agencies, but that many of the mental faculties that characterize the human life form (perception, memory, affect) are to be situated at least partially outside the spheres of consciousness and individual self-awareness. Although it is tempting to attribute this view to Freud—after all, he famously said that the ego is not the master in his own house—it has its roots in German idealist philosophy, and appears under various guises in the works of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. As such, Freud did not invent or discover the unconscious, but he borrowed it from the philosophical tradition in which he would have been embedded from his student years. The fact that the unconscious is one of the main pillars, if not to say the concept without which psychoanalysis cannot operate—*pacethose* existentialist attempts at developing a psychoanalytic paradigm without the unconscious—makes this philosophical contribution all the more significant. Of course, when Freud adopted the idea of the unconscious and integrated it within his own theory, he changed its meaning and scope. Although the classical, descriptive sense of the unconscious, as a

subjectivity cannot be advanced without taking account of key philosophical strands of thought.

IV – If you have undertaken psychoanalytic training, or if you are a practicing psychoanalyst, might we ask how you view what transpires in a clinical analytic practice? In other words, what is it that really happens during a cure?

It is impossible to formulate a straightforward answer to this question, because every psychoanalytic treatment process is different. This is why Freud could never bring himself to writing a psychoanalytic manual and why, in his technical paper 'On Beginning the Treatment', he compared psychoanalysis to a game of chess. Although it is possible to calculate and describe the opening moves and the endgame, between these two moments the endless variety of possibilities, which is conditioned by the variability of the psychic processes and the fact that every patient is different, makes it strictly out of the question to try and capture exhaustively what happens. Needless to say, it is nonetheless possible to state what is supposed to happen: the analysand is invited to free associate and the analyst is expected to interpret, to handle the transference and to maintain his or her analytic position, i.e. to steer away from educating and directing the patient. How these activities on the side of the analyst should take place has been the subject of much debate, and Freud himself clearly changed his mind about some of them as he gained more experience. The same can be said for the purpose these activities serve. There is a huge amount of discussion as to what the goal of a psychoanalytic process should be and in this respect too Freud changed his mind on quite a few occasions. Lacan was notoriously critical of the idea that psychoanalysis should stand in the service of the patients strengthening their ego and becoming better adapted to the outside world, and he was equally averse to the humanistic ideal of authentic self-realization, yet it is easier to derive principles from Lacan's work as to what the goal of psychoanalysis should *not* be than it is to arrive at a clear understanding of what it should be. Many Lacanians state that the treatment should be geared to the patient's traversing the fantasy, yet Lacan referred to this principle just once (as such, it is an hapax in his oeuvre), without elaborating. In my opinion, the analytic

treatment has reached its aim when the patient has come to accept that there is no such thing as absolute certainty and that knowledge will always be a small island in an ocean of ignorance. In other words, it is the point at which the patient comes to realize that knowledge itself is the principal source of suffering and that suffering may be alleviated to some extent by accepting that ignorance and uncertainty cannot be excluded and might as well be embraced as a new set of virtues. In a sense, it is a point where psychoanalysis re-enters the field of philosophy and ethics.

V – Nietzsche and Freud. Freud admitted having never really read Nietzsche, because he feared discovering that Nietzsche had already said everything essential that Freud himself thought he had said. How do you view the relation between Freud and Nietzsche?

This question invites a lengthy answer. Whether Freud ever read Nietzsche and which, if any of his books he cared to study in depth, remains a matter of on-going speculation, and is quite likely never to be resolved. In a letter to Arnold Zweig of 11 May 1934, Freud wrote: “In my youth he [Nietzsche] was a remote and noble figure to me. A friend of mine, Dr. Paneth, had got to know him in the Engadine and had written a lot to me about him”. These days, the figure of Josef Paneth is all but forgotten, although he is immortalised in the name of an antimicrobial intestinal cell.

Paneth died prematurely from tuberculosis at the age of 32 and would subsequently come to haunt Freud in one of his dreams. This is the famous *Non vixit* dream Freud analysed in the sixth chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In this dream, Freud is sitting at a table with Wilhelm Fließ and (a deceased) Josef Paneth, when Fließ suddenly asks Freud how much of his affairs he has shared with Paneth. Freud responds with the Latin phrase “*non vixit*” (he did not live), realising (in the dream) that he has made a Freudian slip, because he had wanted to say “*non vivit*” (he is not alive). What follows, however, is perhaps even more telling than Freud’s own oneiric slip: “I then gave P. a piercing look. Under my gaze he turned pale; his form grew indistinct and his eyes a sickly blue—and finally he melted away”. Still as part of the dream content, Freud then realizes that Paneth had been “no more than an apparition, a ‘revenant’”. In the extraordinarily detailed analysis which follows this dream, Freud unpacks almost each and

every aspect of it, yet without identifying the two Nietzschean themes that may have animated his unconscious dream thoughts as much as any of the other strands. Under Freud's piercing gaze, the spectral figure of Paneth, who had written to Freud at length about Nietzsche, at a time when the latter had just published the first two parts of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and was working on the third part, grows pale (*bleich*) and is subsequently recognized as a revenant (literally 'someone who has come back', or 'who has returned').

The second mystery pertaining to Freud's Nietzsche can be derived from a passage in a letter Freud sent to Wilhelm Fließ on 1 February 1900, a couple of months after the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Seemingly out of context, or at least without any clear direct reason, Freud wrote: "I have just acquired Nietzsche, in whom I hope to find words for much that remains mute in me, but have not opened him yet. Too lazy for the time being". If, before February 1900, Freud had not acquired Nietzsche yet, where had he found the words by Nietzsche quoted in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, both those attributed and those unattributed? Secondly, owing to the displacement, it is by no means clear which parts of Nietzsche Freud had effectively acquired. In 1900, there was no such thing as a collected edition of Nietzsche's writings, so we need to assume that Freud could only have acquired individual volumes. What prompted him to do so, and in which of Nietzsche's published works would he have hoped to see his own muteness being transformed into words? There is not a single trace of a book by Nietzsche published before 1900 in Freud's personal library, neither amongst the books he decided to bring with him to London, nor in the Archives and Special Collections of Columbia University, nor in the Library of Congress.

During the Spring of 1908, the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, which gathered on Wednesdays at Freud's home, discussed the third essay, on the meaning of ascetic ideals, of Nietzsche's 1887 book *On the Genealogy of Morals*. During the exchange of views following Hitschmann's presentation of Nietzsche's work, some of the participants (Alfred Adler, Paul Federn) were keen to point out how Nietzsche had anticipated key psychoanalytic insights, yet Freud himself famously responded to the text with a statement that would become the stuff of legend. Otto Rank, who acted as the secretary of the meetings, minuted Freud as follows: "*Auch Nietzsche kenne er [Freud] nicht; ein gelegentlicher Versuch, ihn zu lesen, sei an einem Übermaß von Interesse erstickt. Trotz der von vielen Seiten*

hervorgehobenen Ähnlichkeiten, könne er versichern, daß Nietzsches Gedanken auf seine eigenen Arbeiten gar keinen Einfluß gehabt hätten". The official English translation of these sentences reads as follows: "He [Freud] doesn't know Nietzsche's work; occasional attempts at reading it were smothered by an excess of interest. In spite of the similarities which many people have pointed out, he can give the assurance that Nietzsche's ideas have had no influence on his own work". If we take these sentences as an accurate transcription of Freud's intervention on that day, a number of new questions emerge, which again revolve around a series of displacements and negations. Although he had been regularly informed of Nietzsche's ideas by Josef Paneth during the early 1880s, Freud claimed he did not know him. Although he claimed he did not know him, he admitted that he had occasionally tried to read him. Although he did not know him, despite Paneth's letters and his own occasional attempts at reading him, he did know that his thoughts had had no influence on him. Whereas it might make sense to argue that direct influence could only have occurred on the basis of some in-depth knowledge (awareness and understanding), for late 19th Century Viennese intellectuals Nietzsche was more than a book.

And then there is a passage from his 1925 'autobiographical study', in which Freud reflected briefly on his critical engagement with philosophical thought. After admitting that the theory of psychoanalysis finds an echo in the works of Schopenhauer, despite Freud's alleged unfamiliarity with his teaching and his having read him only late in life, Freud says of Nietzsche: here is "another philosopher whose guesses and intuitions often agree in the most astonishing way with the laborious findings of psycho-analysis, [and who] was for a long time avoided by me on that very account; I was less concerned with the question of priority than with keeping my mind unembarrassed". Should we interpret this statement as indicative of the fact that Freud had at one point succeeded in overcoming the obstacle of the "excess of interest", and had finally opened his Nietzsche, thus accepting to embarrass his mind with his guesses and intuitions? If this is (and shall no doubt forever remain) a rhetorical question, then the other question—the question of priority—provides another instance of a Freudian negation, because according to Richard Sterba, who had become a member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in the same year Freud composed his autobiographical study, Freud once confided in him that "he who wants to be original should not have read Nietzsche". Freud can

hardly be excused, here, for not knowing all that much about the mechanism of negation, and thus of negating negation, because his own essay on the topic had been published two years before the autobiographical study.

If Freud's Nietzsche from 1900 has mysteriously disappeared, without even leaving as much as a file-card symbolizing its absence in his library, then he made a surprising, spectacular and massive re-appearance in 1926, on the occasion of Freud's 70th birthday. Indeed, in May 1926, Nietzsche returned to Freud in a wholly unexpected and totally excessive fashion. The exact circumstances of Nietzsche's return to Freud are again somewhat couched in mystery, insofar as it remains unclear how and when he arrived. However, since the day of his re-appearance, and unlike his previous incarnations, he definitely has not left Freud's side, and has become a constant visible presence in his work-environment. For his 70th birthday, on 6 May 1926, Otto Rank sent Freud a most extraordinary present, the Musarion-edition of the complete works of Nietzsche, of which only 1,600 copies were ever printed. On 23 September 1926, Jones felt the need to write to Freud from London about it, seemingly in response to a remark Freud himself had made previously, although not in writing, since none of the previous letters contain any mention of it. "The Laforgues [the Paris-based psychoanalyst René Laforgue, founder of the Paris Psychoanalytic Society, and his wife Delia] are in London this week. He told me that Rank told him in June of this year that he was on most amicable terms with you (*im besten Einvernehmung*), in proof of which he cited the fact that he had recently given you a present that cost \$300. Your interpretation of the Nietzsche *Symptomhandlung* was thus confirmed". Where and when Freud interpreted Rank's gift as a *Symptomhandlung*, i.e. as a symptomatic act, is unknown, and it also remains unknown whether he merely shared his interpretation with Jones, or also mentioned it in exchanges with other loyal friends. Over the years, many historians of psychoanalysis have produced their own interpretations of Rank's gift, many of which have highlighted the fact that Rank, who had been deeply immersed in Nietzsche's works for a long time, and would go on to develop the first explicitly Nietzschean psychoanalytic approach around the notion of the will, had probably also wanted to remind Freud how much he had been indebted to the philosopher's ideas, despite his own recurrent denials.

Poisoned chalice as Freud's 1926 Nietzsche may have been, when in

June 1938 the time came to pack his belongings and to go into exile in London, Nietzsche traveled with him, and became one of the most conspicuous, if not *the* single most striking part of his library, if only because the 23 volumes occupy a central space in the main bookcase, and their white colour makes them stand out from all the other books in that section. There are no annotations in any of the 23 volumes, yet that in itself does not prove that Freud's new Nietzsche remained a closed book.

At this point, I should also mention a slightly less symptomatic gift, which has hardly received any attention at all. Far less conspicuous than Rank's collector's edition of the Musarionausgabe, much smaller in size and much more difficult to locate in Freud's library, there is an unknown essay by Freud on Nietzsche, published in 1932, in a collection entitled *Unter falscher Flagge: Ein Lesebuch der deutschen Sprache für Fortgeschrittene*. The two-page text is entitled "Nietzsches Verdauungsbeschwerden als Symbol einer praeembryonalen Tantenliebe" (Nietzsches Digestive Problems as a Symbol of his Pre-embryonic Love for his Aunt). If the title sounds hilarious, then the content of the paper is even more farcical than the title suggests. Before anyone gets too excited, or perhaps bitterly disappointed that Freud would have indulged in this foul type of applied psychoanalysis, I should point out straight away that the paper in question was not actually written by Freud himself. It is a jovial satire of psychoanalysis produced by the Austrian writer Robert Neumann, who gained a reputation during the 1920s for elevating the genre of parody to a literary art-form. In November 1932, Neumann sent Freud, by way of gift, an inscribed copy of his book *Unter falscher Flagge*, undoubtedly convinced that the founder of psychoanalysis would appreciate seeing his ideas being employed for the purposes of literary humour.

Here, of course, we have another instance, and perhaps the supreme example of Freud's Nietzsche—an unambiguous illustration of how Freud had recuperated Nietzsche beyond the grave as a spectral patient whose symptoms could be explained with the tools of psychoanalysis. Nietzsche returned to Freud, here, not as a philosopher whose works were unapproachable on account of an 'excess of interest', but as a human, all too human comical figure, whose persistent ailments provided psychoanalysis with fertile soil for playful interpretation. And whereas one could easily dismiss Neumann's parody as a misplaced attack on psychoanalysis, I think

this Nietzsche comes closer to the Nietzschean inspiration of psychoanalysis than anyone has ever identified, because it captures Freud's theory as a gay science, saturated with humour in the seriousness of its doctrinal aspirations, and permeated with playfulness in its very attempts at mastering the secrets of the human soul. Throughout his life, Freud acted towards Nietzsche like the child who tried to come to terms with the traumatic absence of his progenitor by repetitively engaging in a game of *Fort/Da* (absence and presence). Yet over and above the mechanism of the repetition compulsion that Freud recognized, here, in the opening pages of 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', one must not forget that the activity of *Fort/Da* was also staged as a game, and was therefore also endowed with the affective qualities of joy, fun and laughter. Tragic and symptomatic as many scholars have designated Freud's negation of Nietzsche's influence on his work, one should not ignore that Freud also played with Nietzsche, and that if Freud's Nietzsche was a persistent haunting presence, his ghostly re-appearances as a pale revenant were also part of Freud's own gay science, much like Nietzsche's own notion of the eternal recurrence was set against the backdrop of an on-going critique of stale, dogmatic thinking. If Nietzsche had not collapsed in Turin, he may have recognized in Freud an anti-philosophical ally in the psychoanalyst's profound wariness of all-encompassing views of the world. Fate decided otherwise, but it should not stop us from thinking about psychoanalysis, and Freud's Nietzsche, as the ultimate epitome of a gay science.

VI – From its start, psychoanalysis—including Fenichel, Bernfeld, Reich, Fromm, and others—developed a Freudian-Marxist current among both analysts and philosophers, which still flourishes today. How should we view today the relation amongst Marx, Marxists, and psychoanalysis?

The link between Marx and Freud pre-dates the development of Freudo-Marxism by Reich, Fenichel and others, because it already appears in a 1926 volume on Marx and Lenin by the American writer

Max Eastman. In a letter to Eastman, Freud expressed his appreciation for the book, although he simultaneously admitted that he was as little interested in politics as he was in philosophy. Eastman's attempt at combining psychoanalysis with historical and dialectical materialism attracted much criticism from people who felt that psychoanalysis had always been and continued to be a bourgeois science. And when Stalin exchanged Lenin's new economic policies for a hard-line communist ideology, psychoanalysis became officially prohibited in the Soviet Union. Of course, away from Stalin's totalitarian regime, in Europe and in the United States, scholars continued to forge theoretical links between Marx and Freud, and to this day the combination of Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxist ideas on the trials and tribulations of the capitalist production process is still proving to be extraordinarily fruitful as a critical tool for dissecting the fallacies of neo-liberalism. The Slovene philosopher Slavoj Žižek, more than anyone else, has re-activated this paradigm, although he tends to rely much more on Lacan than on Freud when it comes to psychoanalysis. His penchant for the counter-intuitive observation, not to mention his tasty cocktail of high-brow theory and examples from popular culture, has given Marxist psychoanalysis or psychoanalytic Marxism a new lease of life, albeit as a theoretical doctrine rather than a concrete political constellation. I'm sure Freud would have distanced himself from these contemporary configurations, even in their cutting-edge critical power, because he would not have wanted his discipline to be amalgamated with any kind of utopian politics.

VII – Do you believe that psychoanalysis can be a useful tool for interpreting political and social phenomena and customs today? And if yes, in what way?

For Freud, psychoanalysis encapsulates three things: a theory of the human mind; a clinical practice for treating neurotic patients; a methodology for interpreting socio-cultural phenomena. For all his outspokenness about the 'discontents in civilization', he had very little to say about politics, and what he did say tends to be profoundly ambiguous. When Eastman asked him in 1927 "Where do you stand politically", Freud responded "Politically, I am nothing", yet at the same

time he expressed his visceral aversion towards American culture and a distant, critical interest in the 'great Communist experiment'. However, Freud's own equivocal position towards politics does not reappear at the level of his theory. At the risk of overstating my case, psychoanalysis is a methodology that can be applied to politics as much as it can be used for interpreting other socio-cultural phenomena, and it has in and of itself a political dimension, on account of its conception of the human being. Eli Zaretsky has captured this very accurately in his recent book *Political Freud*, in which he states: "Psychoanalysis . . . posited a new and essentially postaxial conception of the individual. According to that conception, stimuli that come to the individual from the society or culture are not directly registered but are first dissolved and internally reconstituted in such a way as to give them personal, even idiosyncratic, meanings. As a result, there is no direct or necessary connection between an individual's subjectivity and the social order. The goal of analysis, then, is not the internalization of any particular value but that of the analytic attitude itself: the capacity to examine one's thoughts, wishes, and conflicts without judging them, at least at first." If this sounds more like a moral than a political point, then it is only because of the language in which it is couched. The psychoanalytic concept of the individual (the subject, Lacan would say) is political, insofar as it has repercussions for how human beings relate to others and to themselves, and although it does not hold the keys to a new utopia it offers a perspective on identity politics and the mechanisms of social integration, as Freud himself endeavoured to analyse in 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego'.

VIII – A part of philosophical phenomenology has dealt with psychoanalysis. Even those in Heidegger's wake have often theorized on psychoanalysis. How do you feel about this phenomenological "appropriation" of psychoanalysis?

The fact that some phenomenological philosophers have welcomed,

and on occasion even embraced psychoanalysis, again shows that the realm of psychoanalysis is rich in philosophical questions, despite Freud's visceral unwillingness to show his philosophical hand. I think that the phenomenological tradition can offer psychoanalysts valuable insights on the quality of human lived experience, provided it recognizes the irreducibility of the unconscious. Having said that, psychoanalysts have probably been more keen to integrate phenomenological ideas into their work, starting with Minkowski, than that phenomenological philosophers have been prepared to recuperate psychoanalysis.

IX – Starting with Popper, over the past decades a trend of radical criticism of psychoanalysis has developed that denies its scientific plausibility, comparing it to a mythology, and contesting any validity of the analytic practice. Where do you fit in this debate, if you do at all?

Here, my position is strictly Lacanian. If there is one conclusion to be drawn from his 'Science and Truth', it is not that psychoanalysis suffers from a lack of scientificity and should aim to be more scientific, for example by joining forces with cognitive neuroscience, but that science is not psychoanalytic enough, insofar as it continues to live under the spell of the self-transparent individual and under the delusion of the correspondence criterion of truth, i.e. the famous *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, which relies on the possibility that knowledge can be unequivocally truthful. As such, the problem does not lie with psychoanalysis; the problem lies with science. Of course, Freud himself aspired to be recognized by the scientific community as a proper scientist, and he was only willing to consider the scientific *Weltanschauung* as a feasible framework for psychoanalysis, yet at the same time I doubt that his own conception of science had much to do with identifying the appropriate methodologies for developing 'absolute knowledge'. In sum, the critique that psychoanalysis is not scientific does not bother me. What bothers me, is that scientists themselves continue to believe that they know exactly what science is, or should be, i.e. the empirical search for unassailable truths, which is nothing more nothing less than an irrational 'un-scientific' belief in the idea that absolute certainty is achievable and will bring enlightenment, new hope and psycho-social

happiness.

X – Do you find it important that psychoanalysis today confronts itself with biological knowledge (evolutionary sciences, neuroscience), and with science in general?

I think it is important that psychoanalysis keeps track of each and every development in each and every discipline, from neuro-biology to quantum physics and from art history to literary theory. This is not to say that it should do this in order to adopt the methodologies and research protocols in these disciplines, but with a view to learning about what other disciplines may have to offer on the history, the place, the function and the nature of the human condition.

XI – Today, psychoanalysis compares itself with rival psychotherapies and theories—behavioral and/or cognitive psychotherapy, systemic-relational psychotherapy, and an assortment of other types of cures. Where do you situate psychoanalysis in all of this? And in particular, can we say that psychoanalysis is a psychotherapy, and if it is, in what sense?

To me, psychoanalysis is one amongst many ‘therapeutic approaches’ that are currently available, and it should not consider itself superior (more effective, more truthful, altogether better) than any of the other approaches. There is no doubt that some people benefit from humanistic counseling, cognitive behavioral therapy, family therapy etc. and there is no doubt that some people will not find psychoanalysis particularly effective for them. I think it is good that people who suffer have a range of options available to them, and so psychoanalysis should be part of the smorgasbord of therapies that is on offer. In addition, I do not find it inappropriate to think of psychoanalysis as a form of psychotherapy, if only because it is designed to alleviate psychic suffering, yet at the same time it is more than a mainstream psychotherapy, because it does not focus on the suffering *per se* and because it recognizes that a certain degree of suffering is both inevitable and an essential part of the human condition. Freud famously said that the best one can hope for with

psychoanalysis is that someone's grand tragedies are transformed into the misery of everyday life. Of course, the problem, as always, is that under conditions of neo-liberalism the criteria of cost-effectiveness, evidence-based practice and value for money have damaged the recognition of psychoanalysis as a valid type of therapeutic intervention, much like they have interfered with other 'alternative' approaches that are allegedly unscientific or insufficiently grounded in reliable outcome data. When taking into account that, in these statements, effectiveness is often a synonym for the patient being able to return to work and to contribute to an economic production process, psychoanalysis will have a hard time recouping the status it once had, because psychoanalysts are generally reluctant to become complicit with this type of ideology.

XII – Many philosophers are particularly interested in the thought of Jacques Lacan. What value or meaning do you attribute to the Lacanian après-coup?

Truthful to the spirit of the *après-coup*, I should say, here, that time will tell whether Lacan was indeed the greatest psychoanalyst after Freud. What is already quite clear, however, is that the extraordinarily wide scope of Lacan's theoretical contributions, and his conceptual apparatus, have proven extremely versatile to inspire a cornucopia of thinkers in the social sciences, the arts and humanities and even in some of the so-called 'natural sciences'. What is also clear, is that his ideas have sometimes been employed and expanded by people who think that new wisdom can only be achieved if one is more Lacanian than Lacan himself. I mean by this that Lacan's thought has not only attracted interest from serious critical scholars, but also from not-so-serious uncritical opportunists, who have seen in it an easy and sometimes lucrative way to enhance their intellectual and clinical reputation and to tap into a common desire amongst young intellectuals for non-mainstream, anti-establishment and 'progressive' ideas, behind which one can just about discern—to use the title of Richard Wolin's critical dissection of postmodernism's surreptitious infatuation with, of all systems, the ideological tenets of fascism—the perennial seduction of unreason.

As Francis Wheen put it in his highly entertaining volume *How Mumbo-Jumbo Conquered the World*, notably with reference to

Lacan's infamous statement, in 'Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire', that "the erectile organ can be equated with the $\sqrt{-1}$ ": "What does it matter, Barbara Ehrenreich once asked, if some French guy wants to think of his penis as the square root of minus one? 'Not much, except that on American campuses, especially the more elite ones, such utterances were routinely passed off as examples of boldly 'transgressive' left-wing thought'. Few progressives dared to challenge this tyranny of twaddle for fear of being reviled as cultural and political reactionaries—or, no less shamefully, ignorant philistines". In response to Sokal and Bricmont, who have been far less indifferent towards Lacan's statement than Ehrenreich, insofar as they conceded in their *Intellectual Imposture* that they found it positively distressing to see their penises being equated with $\sqrt{-1}$, Bruce Fink has endeavoured to demonstrate that Lacan's declaration is less nonsensical than it may appear at first, yet I am not at all persuaded that his careful unpacking of Lacan's text will in any way alter Sokal and Bricmont's diagnosis of Lacanian theory, let alone their distress about their penises, or the phallus for that matter. For even if reason can be restored behind the surface of unreason, the latter will still be regarded as Lacan's main, and most conspicuous accomplishment, with the added complication that it may very well have been a consciously crafted scheme for tapping into the vulnerable minds of the younger generation and for securing a large group of enthusiastic adherents.

The debate surrounding Lacan's significance is likely to continue for many years to come, yet in the meantime it is clear that Lacan is a central figure of the 21st century intellectual landscape, and that his influence does not seem to wane just yet.