

A Response to Bruce Fink's *Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique*

MICHAEL G. PLASTOW

Prior to the addressing the content of this book, it is worthwhile to consider the place of such a work. After all, a self-styled book on the technique of Lacanian psychoanalysis is something of an oddity. Fink himself notes in his afterword, 'English-speaking analysts reputedly love to talk about technique whereas French-speaking analysts avoid it like the plague' (p. 275). If there is some truth to this claim, the division on the basis of native language surely obscures more than it reveals.

If there is a division regarding the propensity to speak and to write about technique in psychoanalysis, the division pertains more to psychoanalysts from the

International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) and those of a Lacanian persuasion. The IPA, whilst permitting a certain degree of theoretical diversity, does so through the means of orthodoxy of technique. Thus a book such as *The Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique* (whose title is virtually replicated by Fink) by R. HORACIO ETCHEGOYEN (1991), ex-president of the IPA, follows this logic. This book produces a type of synthesis of various theoretical orientations precisely through the means of an emphasis on technique. However, in contrast to Fink's Anglo-phone-Francophone partition, Horacio Etchegoyen was an Argentine and thus a Spanish speaker.

Jacques Lacan's exclusion as a training analyst from the IPA occurred precisely because he did not conform to its technical orthodoxy. As Roudinesco writes, this was principally on the basis of Lacan's technique of the variable-length session, known as the 'short session' (1986, pp. 367–77). It was on the basis of this exclusion that Lacan founded the Freudian School of Paris. Subsequently different Lacanian schools of psychoanalysis have been set up in many places around the globe. The fact that Lacanian schools have not needed to be united under one umbrella group like the IPA may be, in part, a consequence of there being no orthodoxy of technique.

Of course LACAN'S first year of his seminar was addressed to *The Technical Writings of Freud* (1953–54). However in no way did he make of this seminar a technical guide, quite the contrary. This is what Lacan had to say, precisely in this same seminar, about the use of technique in regard to those who practised analysis of resistance, but also in regard to the emphasis on technique more generally:

The question is that of the sense that we must restore to the precepts of this technique which, since they will soon be reduced to catchphrases, have lost the indicative virtue that they could maintain only in an authentic understanding of the truth of the experience they are designed to guide. Freud, of course, could not have been without such an understanding, no less than those who put his opus into practice. But, and you have experienced this, this is not a strength of those who, in our discipline, loudly barricade themselves behind the primacy of technique, perhaps to hide behind the certain concomitance effectively granted by the progress of theory, in the dumbed-down use of analytic concepts which is the only thing that can justify their technique (1966, pp. 369–70, my translation).

In any case, when confronted by such a book as Fink's, one cannot help but recall LACAN'S proposition that each analyst must reinvent psychoanalysis: 'It is necessary that each psychoanalyst reinvents, according to what he succeeded in drawing from the fact of having been a psychoanalyst and for a time, that each analyst reinvents the means by which psychoanalysis can last' (1979). If the psychoanalytic

method, whose mainstay is free association, is a constant structure, the field of invention and intervention that each produces, according to the effects of his own analysis, is that of technique. Hence there is something problematic in the endeavour to produce a book on the technique of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

JEAN ALLOUCH puts forward the position that Freud's 'invention was that of a method' and further that 'The method is not the technique' (1994, p. 193). Allouch's distinction between the two is critical but the particular element of his argument that we can bring forward here is that, in distinction to technique, 'the method is a "subjective exercise"'. The forerunners to Freud's method, on which Allouch elaborates, include Montaigne and Descartes, the latter in reference to his *Discourse on Method*, a discourse that Descartes articulates in the first person in the vulgar French rather than in the academic Latin of other philosophers of his time (PLASTOW, 1997, pp. 19–22). That is, it is the subject of the analyst that is at play in the psychoanalytic method—the analyst who has undertaken his own analysis and who has been an analysand. In his seminar, Lacan placed himself in this position: '... in regard to you I can only be here in the position of analysand ...' (1972–73, 12/12/72). Thus the place of subject for the analyst is critical.

It is here that the difficulty in 'talking about technique' arises in regard to psychoanalysis following Lacan. To talk about technique is then to objectify the method, to objectify what is in essence a practice of the subject, that of the analyst. So then to produce a book on technique is by definition a non-Lacanian activity, or at least an activity, which makes Lacanian psychoanalysis into something that it is not.

This is certainly the greatest difficulty with Fink's book, the fact that he makes of psychoanalysis a type of technique, which could be applied by all those to whom he directs this tome. For instance, his quest for a broad audience leads him to refer repeatedly to 'therapy' instead of to psychoanalysis. Here it seems his book on technique becomes a type of 'applied psychoanalysis' to whatever might be encompassed by the term 'therapy'. We must be cautioned by FREUD: 'One gives way first in words, and then little by little in substance too' (1921, p. 90).

Indeed Fink subscribes to the notion of 'genuinely therapeutic work' (p. 217). This is despite his articulation that the notion of therapeutics is the central target of Lacan's critique of traditional ethics (p. 251). The traditional ethics of the field of therapeutics is the promotion of the Good, as articulated by Aristotle. Fink writes, 'the point is ... for the analysand ... to change' (p. 142). Here we are not too far from SCOTT MILLER and colleagues, the contemporary outcome-driven therapists based on a business model, who state that they are in the 'change business' (2004, p. 50). By contrast LACAN observes: 'Freud clearly emphasised that the analyst must not be possessed by the desire to cure' (1979).

In the place of this, Lacan put forward a different ethics, an ethics of psychoanalysis. This psychoanalytic ethics is articulated as ‘do not give way on one’s desire’ (LACAN, 1959–60, 6/7/60). Let us cite Lacan on this question:

I will note in effect that there is no possible definition of therapeutics if it is not the restitution of an original state. A definition that is precisely impossible to put forward in psychoanalysis. As far as the *primum non nocere* [First do no harm] is concerned, let’s not speak of it since it is unsettling to not be able to be determined from the outset: to what can we choose to do no harm? Let’s try. It is too easy under this condition to put into action in any psychoanalysis the fact of not having harmed something. The only interest of this forced trait is perhaps that of holding to an undecidable logic (2001, p. 246).

Thus for Lacan the *primum non nocere* is an impossible wager in psychoanalysis in which any intervention must carry a risk. Fink, however, in the ‘therapy’ or therapeutics promoted in this book, clings to this counterpart of the Aristotelian universal Good. He articulates it from the traditional Hippocratic oath: ‘*Primum non nocere*: Our first duty is to do no harm’ (p. 236).

A similar difficulty perhaps is carried over onto the translation of important concepts and phrases of Lacan upon which Fink expounds. For instance Fink entitles a section of Chapter 6 ‘Man’s desire is the Other’s desire’, citing Lacan here (117–8). In the French this is given as *le désir de l’homme est le désir de l’Autre*. In many places Lacan is specific that such formulations regarding desire are both subjective genitive and objective genitive (eg. 1971–72, 19/1/72). In other words, *le désir de l’Autre* signifies both ‘the Other’s desire’ and ‘the desire for the Other’. So to translate this phrase as ‘the Other’s desire’, which only conveys one part of an intentionally ambivalent term, is a distortion of huge theoretical and practical implications.

Similarly Fink renders Lacan’s *discours du Maître* as the ‘Master’s discourse’. However Lacan is quite clear that this discourse is *of* or *about* the Master, it is not *his* discourse as implied by the possessive that Fink gives in English (1969–70). Such translations convey both a misunderstanding and a reduction of Lacan’s theory. In addition, Fink cites Lacan as referring to the illusion that ‘leads the [neurotic] subject to believe that her truth is already there in us’ (p. 246, my italics). Fink’s addition of the term ‘neurotic’ already substantiates the notion of the subject. But if the subject is the subject of the unconscious as Lacan puts forward, then it has no sex and must be translated by the neutral ‘it’. But in using a personal pronoun Fink ontologises what Lacan conceptualises as an effect of speech. In addition Fink uses the pronoun ‘she’ rather than ‘he’, which he uses in the same passage of his translation of *Écrits* because of the politically-correct device of putting the analyst as ‘he’ and the analysand as ‘she’ and reversing these in alternate chapters. Surely it

is here that we see the effects of the Discourse of the Master at work in the submission to another order, such that Fink's citation of his own translation of Lacan is tampered with according to the dictates of political correctness.

Fink also devotes Chapter 4 to what he refers to as 'scanding' (p. 47). This is an attempt to translate the notion of *scansion*, which refers to a particular mode of listening and of punctuating the session in different ways. In Fink's hands this is reduced to the ending of the session. Such fundamental distortions are of great concern, particularly when Fink is a translator of published versions of some of Lacan's works. Fortunately other translations exist, particularly of Lacan's seminars, if not as the 'official' published versions.

While reading Fink's book, one has the uncanny experience of reading something that resembles an account of Lacanian psychoanalysis, whilst at the same time not quite being such an account. Fink explicates Lacan's theory and gives citations from Lacan, but his own writing and clinical vignettes do not convey what is essential in Lacan's teaching. If Lacanian psychoanalysis endeavours to exhaust the usual significations in order to produce an encounter with castration, Fink's interventions and explications seem squarely placed in the basket of Oedipus, in the form of the so-called 'figures from the past' (p. 151). In this way Fink's notion of psychoanalysis strikes us as more Freudian than Lacanian. This is no less so than in Chapter 10 on psychosis where the structural notion of the foreclosure of the name of the father becomes conflated with a developmental experience of the psychotic as a child (p. 248). Here Fink returns to a type of aetiological formulation. In contrast, Lacan proposed, and precisely in his seminar on *The Freudian Structures of the Psychoses*, that: 'the great secret of psychoanalysis is that there is no psychogenesis' (1955–56, 16/11/55).

Perhaps the most interesting and useful sections of Fink's book are those devoted to a critique of commonly held clinical notions such as that regarding empathy in Chapter 1, his critique of projective identification in Chapter 7 and the discussion of normality and associated concepts in Chapter 9. Such discussions might be useful for those who are new to the clinical field as well as to those who work in modalities other than that discussed here.

The description of some of Fink's techniques, however, from his various forms of 'hms' and 'huhs' (p. 9, 234); his 'raising of an eyebrow or giving the analysand a quizzical look' (p. 24); the proposal that the analyst should 'show signs of boredom' (p. 146), not to mention coughs make a type of charade out of psychoanalysis. Chapter 8 on 'Phone Analysis' is also perturbing, not so much on the question of conducting psychoanalysis on the telephone *per se*, but because other fundamental questions are left unaddressed. The section 'The Analyst's Presence'

seems promising but in the end Fink reduces this question to that of the physical presence of the psychoanalyst (p. 193). Lacan's concept of the presence of the analyst is essential to address here, a presence that pertains to his notion of the real (1967–68). If Fink has not taken it up, ZUBERMAN has elsewhere (2004). However, the fact that 'phone analysis is 'far easier on the environment' is cold comfort to our concerns regarding its theoretical and technical rigour (p. 199).

Lacan's work is considered difficult to access for the psychoanalytic neophyte. However, the advent of introductory texts such as Fink's only serves to compound the difficulty. By reducing psychoanalysis to a technical manual, the Freudian method becomes distorted into an objectified set of techniques. In this version of 'Lacanian technique', what is specific to psychoanalysis is lost. However, if one is to study psychoanalysis seriously, nothing can forestall the necessity of reading Lacan directly, preferably with others, and to lose oneself in his texts. For that matter, nothing can replace one's own psychoanalysis, and supervision. It is only through these means that the analyst in formation can come to reinvent psychoanalysis by his own interventions in a way that might constitute a technique.

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Michael G. Plastow

679 Rathdowne Street

Carlton North, Victoria 3054