

What might a School be?

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This paper is a response to Lacan's reference to the ancient philosophical schools when he was launching the school in 1964. It aims to shed light on the reference through a consideration of material which describes the ancient schools. This material indicates that Lacan's school differs in its arrangement and aims from other educational and training institutions.

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In one of the closed seminars during the *Crucial problems for Psychoanalysis Seminar*, in January 1965, just some months after the act of founding L'Ecole Francaise de Psychanalyse / L'Ecole Freudienne de Paris Lacan indicates that it is 'a school ... in the sense that this term has been employed since antiquity.' Importantly he emphasises that it is "elsewhere", that it is not the Seminar.

In the *Preamble* of 1964 Lacan describes his idea of a school as having the sense of 'certain places of refuge, indeed operational bases against what could already be called the discontents of civilisation'.¹ What follows are some points gathered from a cursory consideration of some key texts describing the ancient schools of Athens with a view to, one, better appreciating Lacan's proposal for a Freudian school in Paris in 1964;² and two, allowing this material to shed light on the current project of the Irish School for Lacanian Psychoanalysis.

The ancient schools are represented most famously in the collage that is *The School of Athens* by Raphael. This anachronistic allegory is most misleading if it suggests a homogeneity, a set, indeed *the* set of all philosophers. The picture of philosophical activity in ancient Athens could not have been more different. There were many very different *Schools* of Athens and even within these there were fundamentally different positions

¹ 'Preamble' by Jacques Lacan, 1964, translated by Cormac Gallagher, version May 2010.

² Aulus Gellius is a rich source for the anecdotes from which scholars build up a picture of the ancient schools and we know from the reference in 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis' that Lacan was familiar with his *Noctes Atticae*.

There is no mention of a school in this will. Dillon points out: 'If the school were not strictly a legal entity, as John Lynch has cogently argued, then there would be no call to mention it in a legal document.'¹¹ Without confusing the distinction made above between teaching and the work of a school, it can be said that both took place in public areas and on private property. But any private property used for these educative purposes did not have a distinct legal status as a place of education.

Indeed three of the four principal schools of ancient Athens came to be known by the name of the location where their activities were carried out rather than by the name of the founder or the subject matter which occupied the school, *philo-sophia*. What have come down into the English tongue as the names *Academy* and *Peripatos* and *Stoa* all referred to locations in the city of Athens or environs. Plato's Academy was a public space '...on the outskirts of the city...' but nonetheless a crucial place for the life of the city: exercise, athletics (gymnasium) and walking (*peripatein*).¹² It was outside the defences of the city and therefore vulnerable when the city was attacked. It was there that Plato's school met and worked and at some point there was acquired, or gifted, a private property adjacent – Plato's famous garden, or *kepos*.

According to Lynch, *Peripatos* refers to a location due east of the Acropolis of Athens. In other words he rejects the theory which derives it from the activity of walking about – *περιπατειν*. This theory holds that the scholars following Aristotle gained their description *the peripatetics* because they carried out their work while walking up and down. As Lynch points out, this would not distinguish them from the Academicians or the Stoics, all of whom engaged in their school work walking about in open areas of the city. The *Peripatos* was a place where the citizens of Athens strolled in their leisure time, *passear* as the Spanish have it.¹³

What kind of organisational and administrative structures were there in the ancient schools? John Dillon says it straight out that '...it is less clear

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9. The reference is to Lynch (1972) p. 106ff

¹² Baltes, M., 'Plato's School, the Academy', *Hermathena*, 155, 1993, pp. 5-26. The fact that the locations were associated with local cults gave rise in the 19th Century to the theory that the ancient schools were thiasoi, religious brotherhoods along the lines of how we know the Pythagoreans were organised. This is now strongly dismissed by scholars in the field.

¹³ Lynch, 1972, p. 12.

taken up. By the end of the fourth century, beginning of the third BCE there existed in that city the Academy of Plato, the Lyceum of Aristotle, as well as the school of the Stoics (founded by Zeno of Citium) and that of the Epicureans, named after Epicurus. These would constitute the four major philosophical Schools of the ancient Greek world.³ A further misleading aspect from Raphael is his locating the philosophers in a finely vaulted classical hall. The Schools of the ancient world were not determined by specific buildings but by a certain activity which took place in mostly open public areas. The activity was given the name *φιλοσοφία*, the loving of *σοφία*, (*sophia*), that is, the loving of sound judgement, practical wisdom as well as learning.⁴

The proliferation in higher education played a major role in the unique trajectory of the city state of Athens in the late 5th century BCE. The most obvious, often notorious, figures in this explosion in the provision of higher education were the sophists. The sophists, however, did not establish schools. They were itinerant teachers. A concern with some kind of continuation of the work initiated by a teaching marks off the sophists from the actions of teachers such as Plato and Aristotle in founding schools.⁵ This concern with the continuation of the work is based on a separation of the teaching from the person of the teacher, of the personality of the teacher and his powers of seductive persuasion. This distinction is absent in the sophistic movement where the teaching of a sophist was represented solely by that sophist. With this innovation there immediately appear the problems of transmission of a teaching authored elsewhere; of the adverse effects of institutionalising the transmission with the formulae known in the ancient world of the *αυτος εφα* or *ipse dixit*; and of succession and control, or

³ Within these philosophical schools were traditions such as that of Scepticism, most notably within the Academy itself under the headship of Carneades, fourth Scholarch after Arcesilaus, c160 – 137/6. Another tradition was that of the Cynics, associated with disparate itinerant teachers, such as Antisthenes and Diogenes who followed in the tradition of Socrates.

⁴ Liddell, Scott and Jones provide the following on *sophia*: *cleverness* or *skill* in handicraft and art, as in carpentry, in music and singing, in poetry, in driving, in medicine or surgery, in divination; *cunning, shrewdness, craft*; as well as noting that Aristotle uses it to describe *speculative wisdom, natural philosophy and mathematics*. Liddell & Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* revised and augmented throughout by Henry Stuart Jones, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1940.

⁵ Many of the early schools did not survive the death of their founders. From the time of Socrates' death in 399 there had come and gone schools of the such teachers as Isocrates, Antisthenes and Aristippos. The latter two were followers of Socrates.

influence, on the direction following on the death of the one who originated the teaching.

Underlying this act of founding a school is the recognition of a distinction between a teaching – its production and delivery – and an arrangement for work as a response to that teaching. In other words a teaching that is innovative and the work of a school tasked with responding to that teaching are not the same thing. Lacan clearly distinguishes his Seminar as elsewhere to the Freudian School which he founded.⁶

There is also the question of the relation of a teaching and a school to the State. Again the delivery of a teaching and the question of its transmission do not initially arise from the agencies of State. In the course of his seminal account of Aristotle's School John Lynch clarifies succinctly the status of the philosophical school in ancient Athens: 'In the late fifth and early fourth centuries BC all schools of higher learning, whether temporary or permanent, were products of individual initiative and grew up in a vacuum without the regulation of the state or of any other outside agency.'⁷ For this reason they can rightly be described as 'certain places of refuge, indeed operational bases against what could already be called the discontents of civilisation.'⁸

Lynch further points out that the schools of ancient Athens had no clear legal status in terms of ownership or bequeathment.⁹ In John Dillon's evocatively titled *The Heirs of Plato* reference is made to Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Philosophers* (III, 41 – 2) where there is preserved the complete text of Plato's will. It describes in detail two properties one of which Dillon argues can be taken to be the ancestral home and the other the garden, or *kepos*, adjacent to the grove of Hekademos, a public area set out for exercising and promenading to the north west of the Acropolis in Athens.¹⁰

⁶ There is a further distinction between, on the one hand, the teaching of innovators such as Plato or Aristotle, Freud and Lacan and, on the other hand, the delivery of classes following a set curriculum by a person employed to do so.

⁷ Lynch, J. *Aristotle's School: A Study of a Greek Educational Institution*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972, p. 64. This point is not necessarily refuted by the fact that Plato advocated a state education with set curriculum in *Republic* and in *Laws*. See note 16 below.

⁸ 'Preamble' by Jacques Lacan, 1964, translated by Cormac Gallagher, version May 2010.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 106 ff

¹⁰ Dillon, J., *The Heirs of Plato*, Oxford, 2003, p. 8 ff. I am indebted to Professor John Dillon for very effectively grounding my approach to this paper in a conversation over lunch in June 2010.

than used to be assumed just what sort of organisation the Academy was ..¹⁴ The fabled inscription above the equally fabled entrance to the Academy, *let no-one unversed in geometry enter here*¹⁵, no longer enchants the historians of these ancient schools as a historically valid indication of entry requirements. The view is that this story was propagated by the Pythagorean faction of followers of Plato representing their mathematical tendencies. The criterion for entry seems to have been no more and no less than a decision to commit time free from the daily grind to the work of the School.¹⁶

Participation in the ancient school was work but not paid work. It required the scholar to have the time to devote to the work of the school. The words *école*, *scoil*, *school* and come from the Greek σχολή, which refers to *leisure*, *quiet*, and what is *not rushed*. It came to indicate *that in which leisure is employed*. Only later did this come to be closely associated with *learned discussion*.¹⁷ In a passage Lynch quotes from the Roman Cicero (106 – 43 BC) the place of discussion in the leisure time of the ancient Athenians is nicely captured:

... the Greeks themselves devised the palaestra, benches and the stoa first and foremost for exercise and enjoyment, not for philosophical discussion. In fact gymnasia were invented many centuries before philosophers began to chatter in them and what is more, to this very day, even though philosophers occupy all gymnasia, their audiences nevertheless prefer to listen to the discus than to philosophy; and at the first sound of a throw they

¹⁴ Dillon, 2003, p. 15

¹⁵ *αγεωμέτρητος μηδεὶς εἰσίτω*. There is no doubt, however, that mathematics was a preoccupation of the Academy.

¹⁶ In the society of ancient Athens the schools were predominantly made up of the wealthy and their offspring but there were exceptions. The Academy did not charge fees under Plato but they were introduced by Speusippos (cf. Lynch [1972], p. 83). One had to be able to afford the time but scholars from all levels of society made this effort: two, we hear, worked nights in a bakery to give themselves the time to participate during the day; the Corinthian Farmer Nerinthos; and, contrary to social convention, two women, Axiothea of Phlius and Lastheneia of Mantinea. (cf. Dillon [2003], p. 13) We hear that in Aristotle's school there were those born as slaves who had been freed, such as Bion of Borysthenes (cf. Lynch [1972], p. 79). In passing and to provide some context it is worth noting that John Dillon's extensive research in this field has him estimate that the membership of the Academy in the time of Plato was "not much more than a couple of dozen ... at the outside" (Dillon [2003], p. 13).

¹⁷ Liddell & Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* revised and augmented throughout by Henry Stuart Jones, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1940.

all go off to oil themselves and abandon the philosopher in the middle of his discussion concerning the most important and serious matters...

A choice between discuss or discuss, so.

Again, contrary to the fancies of many 19th century scholars, there is no evidence that the schools had any systems of assessment, certification or external validation – no set curriculum, no exam boards or quality assurance inspectorate here.¹⁸ So the schools conferred no qualification; nor did they provide any specific career direction. In this they differed from what was being offered by some of the sophists, namely the education required for a young man to progress and succeed in public life. Lacan can be understood to be in part picking up on this when he says: 'It is the School that puts into question again the principles of a patent qualification, and with the consent of those who manifestly have received it.'¹⁹

If the ancient philosophical school was not a training centre it should not be considered in terms of a certain ideal of the University. There is little evidence for a universalising tendency in the Greek approach to education – the closest we come to it is perhaps in Aristotle's very extensive research projects. Newman's idea of a University as 'a place of teaching universal knowledge' is as anachronistically applied to ancient Athens as is Raphael's depiction.²⁰ According to Lynch '[t]he term university – of Roman origin with no Greek equivalent – should therefore be avoided in discussions of Athenian Schools.'²¹

Were the schools places of rank and hierarchy? There seems to have been acknowledgement that some were around longer than others, but there is no evidence that this granted them any particular prestige. Again from Lynch '...the evidence suggests that both the *Peripatos* and the Academy were

¹⁸ This historical reality contrasts with the fact that Plato proposes a state curriculum in his ideal for education in the *Republic* and *Laws*.

¹⁹ *Preamble* p. 2

²⁰ Newman, J.H., *Preface to The Idea of a University*, Harlan Davidson, 1948, p.1

²¹ Lynch, (1972), p. 66. In conversation for the preparation of this paper Professor John Dillon quoted a colleague who depicts the ancient Athenian schools in terms of the way followers gathered around a teacher in the market places, in the corners of church grounds and mosques in the Medieval period – more in that vein than that of the institution of the medieval University.

complex communities, lacking rigidly defined hierarchies... In both schools neither the younger nor the elder men were under any contractual obligation. One of the most common ways in which the philosophers of the schools referred to one another was as 'friends' (*φίλοι*), implying that a completely informal relation among members was what gave cohesion to the community.'²²

The *scholarch* was the leader of the work of the school. Described emphatically in the Academy and in the Lyceum as a *primus inter pares* there is evidence enough that it was not a position of absolute mastery but rather that of the one who formulated the problems.²³ We hear of Plato encouraging individuals to pursue their own paths of study, for example, Theaetetus towards mathematics. The picture emerges of each member carrying out and producing his or her own particular work. Here again there is a strong echo in Lacan's clarifying that the work of the cartel is not communal. There was great diversity within the schools in terms of a member's position *vis-à-vis* the teaching of Plato or Aristotle. If John Lynch tells us 'Aristotle's motive in founding the school must ... remain obscure'²⁴, it is because it cannot be reduced to his having well-documented differences with Plato's theory of forms: so did Speusippos, the nephew, and designated heir as well as any number of the key figures we know about in the period of the Old Academy. Not every Academician was a Platonist or every Peripatetic an Aristotelian. In the Lyceum after Aristotle's heir Theophrastus, an opponent of Aristotle's position, named Straton, took over as *scholarch*. Again Lynch clarifies: '...Aristotle's school, like the Academy, was not established as an Aristotelian school of thought in the sectarian sense.'²⁵

The ancient schools were not homogenous groups, whatever Raphael might have us imagine. Being in the school of Plato, the Academy, did not require blind obedience and adherence to a strict Platonic orthodoxy. Platonism becomes a tradition of questioning Plato's work in a way that forgoes rejecting it. The heirs of Plato each to a considerable extent

²² Lynch (1972), p. 76

²³ Baltes (1993) holds that Plato 'rejected anything that would nip in the bud further enquiries.' (cf. Baltes, M., 'Plato's School, the Academy', *Hermathena*, 155, 1993, p. 19.) Lynch (1972) adds: '... the Lyceum was a community with a *scholarch* who was 'first amongst equals' not simply the master of a group of understudies.' (Lynch, 1972, p. 82)

²⁴ Lynch (1972), p. 73

²⁵ *ibid.*

developed their own response to Plato's teaching. They gathered in the Academy because, in the end of the day, whatever differences they had with the work of Plato, they did not reject it. It is, perhaps, an act of rejection that leads to setting up a different school, so that a New School is a rejection rather than an elaboration.²⁶

If σχολή is the word for the activity of leisure time what words described the notion of school? There are two words used for the entity we call school: διατριβή (diatribē) carries the sense of *wearing away* with particular reference to time. It was used to evoke both spending time in amusement and in serious occupation. It has the sense of *discourse*, suggesting a social bond arising from a particular way of passing time with others. From this sense it took on representing the entity that was a school of philosophy.

Another word used in the accounts of ancient school activity is συνουσία (*sunousia*). As its counterpart in English - *intercourse* - this Greek word has as a strong sexual resonance as well as referring to discursive interaction, particularly with a teacher. Lynch argues that in setting up the Academy Plato was maintaining the Socratic belief in συνουσία (*sunousia*) as the basis of higher education. The support for this view comes from Plato's Seventh epistle which speaks of 'long partnership [*pollē sunousia*] in a common life.'²⁷ Lynch concludes: '... in effect, Plato may be said to have institutionalised *sunousia* in his school.'²⁸ On the other hand, Lynch notes that Aristotle does not use the 'traditional terms (*sunousia, suneinai*) to describe the relation among members of the philosophical community.' Lynch goes on to base a striking distinction between the Academy and the Lyceum on this choice, or avoidance, of words: '...association in the Lyceum meant a cooperative more than a dialectical relation between the members of the school. The progress of philosophical knowledge, in Aristotle's view, was not the result of *pollē sunousia* in a dialectical process (Plato, *Epistle 7*, 341c) but of individual contributions and shared tasks, the

²⁶ Is this a matter of keeping the founding father speaking, rather than fixing him as having said such and such? Can we say the Academy worked to keep the spirit of Plato alive whereas Aristotle wanted to kill him? He certainly had it in for Plato's teacher, Socrates: All men are mortal, Socrates is a man, Socrates is mortal ... he wishes.

²⁷ Plato, *Seventh Letter*, 341c.

²⁸ Lynch (1972), p. 88.

results of which had a cumulative effect (cf. *Metaphysics II*, 993 a 30 – b 5).'²⁹

As well as referring to a methodological difference and therefore a difference in their very practice – dialectical versus communal / empirical – the terms also indicate a recognition by Plato of the erotic basis to educational activity, a recognition refused, or at best avoided by Aristotle. This recognition by Plato is most explicitly represented in the outrageous *Symposium*, that story of 'a drinking party of old queens', as Lacan describes it in his Seminar on transference.³⁰ In the *Adjunct* Lacan proposes that '[t]he teaching of psychoanalysis cannot be transmitted from one subject to another except along the paths of a work-transference. The seminars, including my lectures at *Hautes Etudes*, will found nothing, if they do not refer on to this transference....'

Is it not then one of the crucial questions for a Lacanian school: what is understood by the phrase work-transference? Transference described by Freud as 'the strongest weapon of the resistance' is emphatically presented in the *Papers on Technique* as transference-love.³¹ To appreciate the potency of this mix of work and transference and love do we need look any further than the history of the psychoanalytic movement? I am reminded of Freud's foreboding as the initially small circle around him expanded in the years following 1902: 'There were only two inauspicious circumstances which at last estranged me inwardly from the group. I could not succeed in establishing among its members the friendly relations that ought to obtain between men who are all engaged upon the same difficult work; nor was I able to stifle disputes about priority for which there were so many opportunities under these conditions of work in common.'³² In the face of this despair-inducing picture Freud soldiered on, refusing to shy away from 'handling explosive substances ... the most dangerous mental impulses...'³³

²⁹ Lynch (1972), p. 85. It cannot be prudery, surely, which has Lynch explain that this was due to the fact that the Lyceum received funding from the court of Macedon which allowed very extensive research projects to be carried out by teams working together towards a communal end. Even in the ancient world research funding could distract from the truth, perhaps? There is also a reference to a passage in the *Phaedrus* 275c on p. 88 in Lynch.

³⁰ Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII, Transference*, translated by Cormac Gallagher. *Symposia*, or regulated drinking parties, were part of the activities of the Academy.

³¹ Freud, S., 'The Dynamics of transference', 1912, SE XII, p. 104.

³² Freud, S., 'On the history of the psychoanalytic movement', 1914, SE XIV, p. 25.

³³ Freud, S., 'Observations on transference-love', 1915, SE XII, p. 171.

While he may not have succeeded in proposing an arrangement, or social bond, for the transmission of his teaching – as Cormac Gallagher clearly argues today³⁴ - Freud nonetheless provides the concepts and terms with which to articulate a project which allows us to experiment with the question of transmission. Now with Lacan, who was more than anyone most concerned with the directions being taken by the psychoanalytic movement, we have the proposal for a social bond for work based on the cartel +1. If Freud highlighted the ‘handling of the transference’³⁵ as the challenge in psychoanalytic practice should we then ask about the ‘handling’ of the work-transference? Our discussions to date have thankfully clarified that the +1 is not some sort of ‘analyst of the cartel’ so it is not for the cartel, or, indeed the +1, to imagine that the +1 handles the work-transference in a sense analogous to Freud’s phrase above. So, let us not be lured into finding an imaginary symmetry between the two. If anything the +1 functions to prevent the cartel necessarily becoming complete, an all. In that way there is something of the effect of a lack and, from there, the ‘selection, ... the discussion and the outcome to be reserved to the work of each one.’³⁶

If it is the cartel arrangement itself, which includes the function of the +1, that manages the work-transference, is it not to be recommended, required even, that each be in their own analysis in order to provide some chance of ‘the psychoanalytic discourse establish[ing] a social bond cleansed of any group-necessity?’³⁷

³⁴ ‘For this had been [Lacan’s] constant reproach to Freud – that he was ultimately responsible for the pitiful state of analysis by his failure to isolate a specific psychoanalytic discourse and for having left his momentous discovery in the hands of masters and academics.’ In Gallagher, C., ‘The Founding Act, the Cartel and the riddle of the PLUS ONE, The Letter, Issue 44, above.

³⁵ ‘... *der Handhabung* ...’ Freud, S., ‘Observations on transference-love’, 1915, SE XII, p. 171.

³⁶ Lacan, J., *Founding Act*, trans. Cormac Gallagher, May 2010. At a study day in June 2009 Helen Sheehan related the +1 to the notion of a *catalyst / catalyseur*, a term used by Mustafa Safouan to describe the role of Hans Sachs in the Berlin group when he moved to Berlin to act as a didactic analyst in the early 1920s.

³⁷ Lacan, J., *L’Etourdit*, translated by Cormac Gallagher as *L’Etourdit: Second turn: the discourse of the analyst and interpretation* in The Letter, Irish Journal of Lacanian Psychoanalysis, Issue 43, Spring 2010. Lacan comments: “...I measure the group-effect by the amount of imaginary obscenity it adds to the effect of discourse.”

There is work to be done in answering these questions and this is now being carried out in the project of the cartels in the Irish School for Lacanian Psychoanalysis.

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