

Thomas Svolos : Neurasthenic Psychoanalysis and the Name-of-the-Father :  
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Neurasthenic Psychoanalysis and the Name-of-the-Father  
Thomas Svolos

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In the eleventh number of the *Papers of the School One Action Committee*, Rivka Warshawsky raises the spectre of a neurasthenic practice of psychoanalysis. She asks, "How can we estimate the possibility that the practice of psychoanalysis itself may become infected with this great weariness, with this 'life as a result of the race toward progress'? The question should not be confined to non-Lacanian practitioners, but to the danger of a neurasthenic practice of analysis infecting the Lacanian practice, too. It is a serious question."<sup>11</sup>

I want to say something about this question, because this use of the term neurasthenia I see as evoking a certain kind of style or affect.

Lacan himself raised such an issue, in the "Function and Field of Speech and Language," where he uses the word gloomy, and speaks of reticence, to evoke something akin to Warshawsky's question. I will quote Lacan here:

“Freud rose, however, to a position of total mastery regarding the dialectic of the work and the tradition of its meaning.

“Does that mean that if the place of the master remains empty, it is not so much due to his disappearance as to an increasing obliteration of the meaning of his work? To convince ourselves of this, isn’t it enough for us to note what is happening in that place?

“A technique is being transmitted there, one that is gloomy in style [d’un style maussade]—indeed, it is reticent in its opacity—and that any attempt to let in critical fresh air seems to upset it. It has, in truth, assumed the appearance of a formalism that is taken to such ceremonial lengths that one might well suspect that it bears the same similarity to obsessive neurosis as Freud found so convincingly in the practice, if not the genesis, of religious rites.”<sup>[2]</sup>

My first observation here is that this issue of weariness, of gloominess, is a description of a type of style, a stance, in the way in which both Warshawsky and Lacan are describing the approaches of psychoanalysts to their analysands and also presumably to their Schools and other institutions and even to psychoanalysis itself.

This stance, then, is one of reticence in Lacan’s formulation of 1953. Lacan links this to a problem in clinical approach and training as well, which he attributes to an excessive rigidity, a formalization of training and practice which obliterates the true meaning of Freud’s work—a reliance on imaginary conceptualizations and technique, in contrast to the true, Symbolic, meaning of Freud’s work. We might say that for Lacan, in 1953, he uses this notion of a neurasthenic practice as failure for the practice to be secured by a Symbolic Father. Thus, here I would say we have a contrast between a type of fidelity to the Father—in a return to Freud—and a type of neurasthenic style, linked to what we might call imaginary fixations.

We can read this quite differently, though, if we go back to the idea of this weariness, or gloominess, as a style or affect. I think it’s even quite plausible to go further and designate it as a kind of personality—using this work in a very precise Lacanian sense: of personality as the manner in which someone subsists, survives, keeps moving, in the face of the object *petit a* [la façon dont quelqu’un subsiste face à cet objet petit a].<sup>[3]</sup> This changes things quite a bit—for now this neurasthenia represents nothing less than a type of reticence in facing desire, or *jouissance* itself—a type of response to the Real. Now, to reformulate neurasthenia in this way as a type of response to or defense against the Real makes some sense, evoking Miller’s comments about neurasthenia in Comandatura.<sup>[4]</sup> Rereading Freud’s 1908 paper on “Civilized Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness,” Miller observes Freud’s response to neurasthenia—described at the time as a kind of response itself to the exigencies of modern life, its frenetic pace. It was the first New Symptom, akin to forms of depression ubiquitous today. Miller notes that, of course, Freud turns away from this explanation and identifies its logic as a neurotic response to a loss of *jouissance* demanded in conformity to a certain organization of sexual relations in monogamy.

This is a different point from before—before, in psychoanalysis, a certain type of return to a Symbolic Father allowed one to avoid neurasthenia. Here, adherence to the Name-of-the-Father is the very agent—in a sense—of neurasthenia itself. But, there are two different ways of using the notion of Father in play here. In the first

case, Lacan's quote, the symbolic meaning, or value, the truth, of Freud's work is obliterated in an imaginization of Freud as the Father of psychoanalysis, a process of imaginization of his work in a set of rigid rules regarding practice and training. In the second approach to neurasthenia, a type of highly prescribed relation to the Real—a certain knotting of the Real and the Symbolic, we might say—is linked to neurasthenia. But, perhaps they are not as different as they seem and speak to a similar "use" of the Father.

Let me add that I think there are institutional ramifications to this—which was the original intent of Rivka's question.

With regard to our colleagues in the IPA, certainly Lacan's comments on the formalization of psychoanalytic formation and training from the "Function and Field" are no less true today than in the 50's. In fact, we could certainly argue that under the pressure of Evaluation and State intervention into psychoanalytic practice, the IPA's path of collaboration is very much along the lines of the formalization that Lacan evokes, and that—furthermore—it is not very hard to detect gloominess about the future of psychoanalysis in the meetings of the IPA groups in the United States, at least, where many IPA analysts no longer have analytic cases.

When I think about the AMP, however, I do not find such gloominess—the very vibrancy and vitality of the response of our French colleagues to some serious challenges and attacks is, in fact, if anything, the very opposite of gloom or weariness.

Regarding the clinical exigencies of today, the work of the AMP is equally vibrant. In its evolution and invention of the concept of Ordinary Psychosis over the last ten years, we see a group of psychoanalysts engaging a challenge to psychoanalysis in a vital way. Similarly, in the work under development on the theme of the New Symptoms, we see a group of psychoanalysts committed to responding to the demands of today.

In fact, it is these two dimensions—the international engagement of the psychoanalysts of the AMP in response to the political challenges to psychoanalysis and the recent developments of Ordinary Psychosis and the work on the New Symptoms in the arena of applied psychoanalysis—that were decisive in my desire to join the School and the AMP.

And here, I think, this second issue of neurasthenia as a type of response to the Real can be brought to bear in a decisive way. We might even formulate Ordinary Psychosis and the New Symptoms as new forms of returns of the Real or defenses against the Real in psychic structure and in the formation of the clinical demands today. And, faced with this Real, the psychoanalysts of the AMP engaged it, responded to it. They did not "turn their backs to it," evoking Lacan's comment on psychosis.

The important thing about this engagement is the very invention required of psychoanalysts in the response to it, an invention born of the very social and psychic forms of the time, and which we see in the varied, yet related, responses of analysts throughout the world to these challenges, which brings to mind Lacan's comments in Baltimore on the role of invention in varied domains.<sup>[5]</sup> The thing about this invention is that in it, psychoanalysts use Lacan and his work, use Freud and his

work, but without being bound—as it were—to it. Would they adhere, to the letter, to Lacan’s work on psychosis from the 1950’s, they would not have arrived at the formulation of Ordinary Psychosis. If they were to imaginize it as the consistent (in reference to *R.S.I.*) form of psychosis, they would not have derived the formulation of Ordinary Psychosis.

My sense is that many psychoanalysts of other orientations, in the face of today’s Real, a Real that is not the Real of Freud, realize—rightly—that psychoanalysis as formalized by certain readings of Freud will not work and are gloomy in their assessment of psychoanalysis today. This neurasthenia that they feel is in fact linked to this adherence to a certain formalization of their practice itself derived from a formal, imaginary adherence to the Name-of-the-Father as semblant, to a certain Freudianism.

For the Lacanians, however, we note that the formulations from the 50’s are not discarded, however, or even surpassed (as Rivka warns us not to believe), but used in a different way. It is this “use of the Name-of-the-Father” that supports our work and is the hallmark of the Lacanian practice. With the invention we accomplish in its use, we will not see the neurasthenia that Rivka is rightly concerned about.

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NLS Web Site : [www.amp-nls.org](http://www.amp-nls.org)  
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[1] Rivka Warshawsky, “‘Meaning is use’ but nonetheless, one may question the use.” *Papers of the School One Action Committee*. Number 11, New Series, November 2005. <http://www.wapol.org/en/escuelauna/escuelauna.asp?/es/escuelauna/papers/papersdelca/n011.html>

[2] Jacques Lacan, “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis.” *Écrits: A Selection*. New York: Norton, 37-38 (p. 244 in the French).

[3] Jacques Lacan. “Du discours psychanalytique.” Discours de Jacques Lacan à l’Université de Milan le 12 mai 1972, paru dans l’ouvrage bilingue : *Lacan in Italia 1953-1978. En Italie Lacan*. Milan : La Salamandra, 1978, pp. 32-55.

[4] Jacques-Alain Miller. “Une fantaisie.” *Mental* 15 (février 2005): 9-27.

[5] Jacques Lacan. “Intervention sur l’exposé de C. Morazé : ‘Literary Invention’ ” au Symposium International du John Hopkins Humanities Center à Baltimore (USA). Paru dans *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man : The structuralist Controversy*, dirigé par R. Macksey et E. Donato, Baltimore et Londres, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970, pp. 41-44.