

Ordinary Psychosis and Addiction in the Postmodern Era : 1<sup>st</sup> March 2016 :  
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- 4 -

## Ordinary Psychosis and Addiction in the Postmodern Era

Thomas Svolos

United States

Starting from the premise that we are in a new social era, which we can call postmodernism, we can observe two major clinical phenomena. It was psychoanalysis that formulated the first major phenomenon with the name, from J.-A. Miller in 1998, of ordinary psychosis. I would observe that the other social and psychiatric fields don't know what to say about this – books on things like the manic world of today, and the NIMH

researchers and clinicians are arguing about psychiatric diagnosis. Psychoanalysis, in contrast, has worked for 20 years now with ordinary psychosis, putting it to use as a concrete response to what we find in the analytic experience.

The second major clinical phenomenon is addiction – whose importance is no doubt recognized in the social field, the psychiatric field and in psychoanalysis.

So, I pose a question: what, if any, relationship or connection exists between these two different clinical phenomena in our current social era? My wager here is that one answer to this question might be developed following Lacan's graph of sexuation. [See <sup>i</sup> below]

I would start with an observation from the upper half of the graphs. I argue that we can characterize the pre-postmodern era as falling within a masculine position. The paternal imago was strong and the world was phallicized. All of  $x$  was under the function of the phallus. Thus, this world was a realm of neurosis, in the classical sense. Then, of course, we have the exception. Now, much has been made in the exegesis of the graph of the position of the exception as the obscene father (from Freud). But, why not look at this position differently? The classical Lacanian notion of psychosis, of Schreberian psychosis, is yet another articulation of this position – an exceptional  $x$  that does not fall under the dominion of the phallus. Thus, we have a clinic with clear boundaries organized around the masculine position with regard to the sexual non-relation – a clinic of neurosis or exceptional psychosis, phallus or no phallus.

As for our postmodern era: this can be structured around the feminine position. We might start with the observation that there does not exist an  $x$  that is not subject to the phallic function, that is not signified. We might read this at a social level as the Marxist observation that there is no limit now to commodification and the extension of the value system that derives from capitalism to all domains of subjective experience (capital as limitless, all about flows, liquid, etc.). Or, at a subjective level, we might say that there is no longer the position or the fantasy of exception. But, the phallic function of all  $x$  is not complete, it is not all. And, here is where I suggest we might pinpoint both ordinary psychosis and addiction.

J.-A Miller identified three things for the clinician to look out for in ordinary psychosis: disturbance of the body (eg, the body event); disturbance in the social relation; or, a disturbance in the innermost sense of being. I suggest that these might be understood, in a sense, as an incomplete or not all functioning of the phallus with regard to the body (not fully mortified by discourse), social discourse (not fully organized by the phallus), or sense of being (the master signifier not fully in place). In contrast with the pre-postmodern masculine position, where it is all or nothing, here in the postmodern on the feminine side, it is a matter of not all, for all.

What is interesting to me is to think of what we might say about addiction in this context. One hypothesis, which I would propose, is that if ordinary psychosis is an articulation of the subjective position, addiction is the staging of a subject's relation with the object  $a$ . And here we can go back to Miller's

three themes, which are indeed three of the ways of addiction: for body effects, the experience of intoxication; for an effect in social relations – to act differently around others; or, to change one's innermost sense of being ("I only feel myself when I use" is a frequent refrain). For Lacan, addiction is defined as detachment from the phallus. [See <sup>ii</sup> below] But, for some, the detachment is not absolute or complete (though, I think we can in fact articulate a Schreberian addiction – da logic of addiction as exception), but not all for the ordinary psychotic. Thus, I suggest that, in the postmodern era, following the logic of the feminine position with regard to the sexual nonrelation, ordinary psychosis and addiction might in fact have this logical link.

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By Jacques Lacan [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=235](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=235)

By Sigmund Freud [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=234](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=234)

On Ordinary Psychosis [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=649](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=649)

**NOTES**

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<sup>i</sup> \* Seminar XX : 13<sup>th</sup> March 1973 : pVIII 1 of Cormac Gallagher’s translation : Information & availability [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=222](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=222)

<sup>ii</sup> \* ‘For Lacan, addiction is defined as detachment from the phallus.’ :

The following are suggestions only – I am in process of checking the correct reference!

See

p75 of Lacan and Addiction: An Anthology : edited by Yael Goldman Baldwin, Karen R. Malone, Thomas Svolos : Karnac Books : 2011

A read-only version available [here](#)

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=u2ge50hssBkC&pg=PA75&lpg=PA75&dq=Lacan,+addiction+is+defined+as+detachment+from+the+phallus&source=bl&ots=FXF7JIXQyx&sig=kzxH1G-HqBlrEqq6eOtt2AaeJQg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjuyMXT75bPAhVHGSAKH1TD6YQ6AEIJzAB#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Chapter Five

Introducing the “New Symptoms” by Thomas Svolos

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*To attach or detach from the Phallus*

There is a very curious relationship between what Freud and what Lacan had to say about addictions. Freud makes a few comments on addictions in his work, most of them a gloss in one form or another of his comments to Wilhelm Fleiss in a letter of 22 December 1897, in which he states that “masturbation is the one major habit, the ‘primary addiction’, and it is only as a substitute and replacement for it that the other addictions – to alcohol, morphine and tobacco, and the like – come into existence” (Freud 1985 p287). Lacan had fewer things to say about addictions, but perhaps his most well-known comment was delivered in 1975, [See <> below] as an aside, at a meeting of the École, when Lacan noted that there is no other definition of drugs than that which allows one to break the marriage, the relationship, with the Phallus (Lacan 1976 [See <> below]). With Freud, addictions are a means of maintaining a relationship with the Phallus – in this masturbatory sense, without the connection to the Other, a short circuit to *jouissance*; for Lacan, addictions are a way of obtaining *jouissance*, but, instead of obtaining this through the Phallus, he speaks of obtaining it by breaking a connection with the Phallus.

[p76]

My first thesis is that this divergence indicates a different place for the Phallus with regard to castration and its relationship to *jouissance*. For Freud, castration (of the mother or the child) for the male is linked to a perceived threat of the loss of one’s Phallus, further linked to a perceived paternal injunction. Integration into the social bond is further, for Freud, linked to a certain perceived renunciation of enjoyment achieved through the mechanism of paternal identification and the pursuit of a *jouissance* regulated, in a sense, through that identification. Addictions, in this model, short-circuit the path to satisfaction, taking the subject out of the social bond in a mode of direct satisfaction, akin to masturbation. Now, Lacan does – for example, in *Seminar V* [See <> below] – rework this Freudian proposition, rewrite it, importing linguistics and partially reformulating this structure of castration and Oedipus with his notion of “the-Name-of-the-Father”. And, in that sense, one can certainly easily read Lacan’s comments in 1975 about breaking the relation with the Phallus in addictions as breaking the relation with the social order, disconnecting from the Other – as regulated by the Symbolic Phallus (Lacan, 1976).

I would suggest, however, that we read this comment of Lacan’s in the light of his later comments on the Phallus, in particular those which Jacques-Alain Miller has recently drawn our attention to within *Seminar X* [See <> below]. Miller notes that in this Seminar we see the return of the Phallus, not only as Symbolic, but as organ.

References:

From [here](#)

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=u2ge50hssBkC&pg=PA75&lpg=PA75&dq=Lacan,+addiction+is+defined+as+detachment+from+the+phallus&source=bl&ots=FXF7JIXQyx&sig=kzxH1G-HqB1rEqq6eOtt2AaeJQg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjuyMXT75bPAhVHGSAKH1TD6YQ6AEIJzAB#v=onepage&q=Lacan%201976&f=false>

Warning : These references to 1975 & 1976 are being checked.

<> Lacan had fewer things to say about addictions, but perhaps his most well-known comment was delivered in 1975 :

Possibilities : Religions and the Real (Paris) : 13<sup>th</sup> April 1975

This is an extract from Journées des cartels de l’École freudienne de Paris. Le Séance de Clôture : 13<sup>th</sup> April 1975 : Jacques Lacan – see below

[Religions and the Real \(Paris\) : 13th April 1975 : Jacques Lacan](#) or [here](#)  
<http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12024>

Journées des cartels de l’École freudienne de Paris. Le Séance de Clôture : 13<sup>th</sup> April 1975 : Jacques Lacan

This is untranslated.

See [École Lacanienne de Psychanalyse/ Pas-Tout Lacan](#) <http://ecole-lacanianne.net/en/bibliolacan/pas-tout-lacan-2/> : Published Maison de la chimie, Paris, Lettre de l’École freudienne, 1976, n° 18, pp. 263-270 : Available [here](http://ecole-lacanianne.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/1975-04-13c.pdf) <http://ecole-lacanianne.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/1975-04-13c.pdf>  
[pas tout Lacan 1975-04-13 JOURNEES D’ETUDE DES CARTELS DE L’ÉCOLE FREUDIENNE. SEANCE DE CLOTURE]

Probably not but relevant!



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Seminar XXIII : 18<sup>th</sup> November 1975 : p4 of Cormac Gallagher's translation : Information & availability [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=971](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=971)

Hence the necessity – I think all the same, seeing you here in such large numbers, that there are some of you who have already heard my old refrains – hence the necessity that the flaw should never cease but always grow unless it submits to the cease of castration as possible. This possible, as I have previously said without you noticing it, because I myself did not note it by not putting in the comma, this possible, I formerly said, is what does not cease to be written, but you have to put in the comma: it is what ceases, comma, to be written. Or rather would cease to take that path if [p5] the discourse I have evoked, which might not be a semblance were at last to arrive.

◊ (Lacan, 1976):

Lacan, J. (1976). Intervention in the “Journées des cartels de l'École freudienne de Paris.” *Lettre de l'École freudienne*, 18: p263-270

Probably not Seminar XXIII : 11<sup>th</sup> May 1976

From Rik Loose 'A Lacanian approach to clinical diagnosis' : p288 of 'Lacan & Science : Edited by Jason Glynos & Yannis Stavrakakis : Karnac 2002

Copy available [here](http://source.dbs.ie/bitstream/handle/10788/1444/Loose_R_2002.pdf?sequence=1) : [A Lacanian approach to clinical diagnosis and addiction - DBS eSource](http://source.dbs.ie/bitstream/handle/10788/1444/Loose_R_2002.pdf?sequence=1)

A Lacanian approach to clinical diagnosis and addiction by Rik Loose.

P263 Towards the end of his Civilization and its Discontents Freud poses a question which he feels he cannot evade. After contemplating the similarities between the development of civilisation and the individual he wonders whether it is possible to make the diagnosis that “under the influence of cultural urges, some civilisations, or some epochs of civilisation – possibly the whole of mankind – have become neurotic?” (Freud, 1930:144 Published at [www.Freud2Lacan.com](http://www.Freud2Lacan.com) : See [here https://www.freud2lacan.com/docs/Civilization\\_and\\_Its\\_Discontents.pdf](https://www.freud2lacan.com/docs/Civilization_and_Its_Discontents.pdf)). He immediately points out the danger implicit in making this kind of diagnosis by saying that “we are only dealing with analogies and that it is dangerous, not only with men but also with concepts, to tear them from the sphere in which they have originated and been evolved” (Freud, 1930:144). This is a very important remark. P273 In the very last page of ‘Civilisation and its discontents’ Freud diagnoses the disorder in human civilization in a way that would not be acceptable to psychiatry. In his observation of civilisation he has come to the conclusion that it is an irrefutable fact that man wants happiness, but cannot have it. (Freud, 1930:145). In other words, man is destined to suffer. Earlier on in the article he wrote: [p274] But the most interesting methods of averting suffering are those which seek to influence our own organism. In the last analysis, all suffering is nothing else than sensation; it only exists in so far as we feel it, and we only feel it in consequence of certain ways in which our organism is regulated. The crudest, but also the most effective among these methods of influence is the chemical one – intoxication. [Freud, 1930:78]

The connection, established by Freud here, between suffering, the regulation of our bodies and intoxication is extremely interesting and demands further exploration. The immediate context from which this quote is taken is crucial for an understanding of the problem of addiction in the field of psychoanalysis. I will therefore explore this context in some details here. Freud indicates that suffering threatens us from three directions: our bodies, the external world and our relations to others (Freud, 1930:77). This last source causes us most suffering. Isolating ourselves from others is thus one solution to our problems. Drugs and alcohol can provide us with pleasure, but they can also render us incapable of “receiving unpleasurable impulses”. . . . .

P279 of Lacan & Science: Rik Loose states : In neurosis and perversion the mechanisms of repression and disavowal result in a fundamental dissatisfaction due to a failure of the pleasure principle. What lies beyond this pleasure principle is always “too much” and yet the absence of this beyond creates a “never enough”, a *plus-de-jouir* (more-to-be-enjoyed). Here we can situate one of the few (maybe the only) reference(s) Lacan makes to addiction: “everything which permits the escape from this marriage (*to the phallus*) is clearly very welcome, that is the reason for the success of drugs, for instance; there is no other definition for drugs than this one: it is what permits to break the marriage to the little Willie” (Lacan, 1976:263-270, Loose's translation) From Lacan J (1976[1975]) : Discours pendant la séance de cloture : Lettres de L'École Freudienne, Vol 18 : p263-270

◊ Seminar V : Seminar V : The Formations of the Unconscious : 1957-1958 : Jacques Lacan : available [here http://www.lacanineireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book-05-the- formations-of-the-unconscious.pdf](http://www.lacanineireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book-05-the- formations-of-the-unconscious.pdf)

◊ Jacques-Alain Miller on Seminar X, two possibilities:



"Introduction to Reading Jacques Lacan's Seminar on Anxiety I ", New York: Lacanian Ink 26, Fall 2005.

"Introduction to Reading Jacques Lacan's Seminar on Anxiety II", New York: Lacanian Ink 27, Spring 2006.

"The Seminar on Anxiety is developed outside of the paternal metaphor and also takes its departure from an initial term, opaque and mythical, which is not Desire of the Mother but jouissance. The point of departure Lacan proposes, when he speaks of an irreducible remainder, is that no metaphor is capable of symbolising it integrally. Petit a designates in this respect the failure of the metaphor."

Jacques-Alain Miller, Reading Lacan's Seminar on Anxiety, II, 2004.

[Seminar X: The Anxiety \(or Dread\): 1962-1963: begins 14th November 1962: Jacques Lacan: Text in English & References](#) or [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=212](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=212)