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LACANIAN REVIEW ONLINE

Lacan's legacy in the United States

An interview with Tom Svolos, author of *Twenty-First Century Psychoanalysis, Karnac, 2017.*

1/ *What is Lacan's legacy in the United States?*

We can trace Lacan's impact in the United States to visits he took here over fifty years ago. The impact on psychoanalysts and clinicians was minimal. However, American academics were very interested in Lacan. One of the points I develop in the book is to credit academics with seeing the legacy of Lacan as a reader: a reader of symptoms or the unconscious in the clinical realm, Lacan was valued by academia for providing a way to read social or cultural phenomena.

We have only had overtly Lacanian psychoanalysts in the US in the past twenty years or so. These include a few people living in the US who went to Paris and returned, and more who moved here to the US from elsewhere. These individuals scattered across the US tended to bring the institutional affiliations of Lacanian psychoanalysis globally with them—most notably what in the US is called the pro-Millerian or anti-Millerian positions.

2/ *What is the most contemporary symptom, in the Lacanian Orientation meaning of the term, today in the United States?*

I have to give two answers here—ordinary psychosis and addiction. As early as the late 1990's, I was seeing patients who did not exhibit evidence of neurosis; who did not develop the kind of transference I had experienced in neurosis; but, who did not have any overt or historical symptoms of psychosis. The first case or two of this was striking to me, but I began to recognize this clinical presentation more frequently. The second phenomenon so prevalent today in the US is certainly addiction. We have had several waves of socially identified epidemics of addiction over just the past quarter century, including crack cocaine in urban settings, methamphetamines in rural American, and now the opioid epidemic.

Both ordinary psychosis and addiction can be correlated with a change in the functioning of the symbolic order today—a decline, perhaps, or a change in its structure—and developing an approach to both of these was a major focus of my work and four papers on this are the core chapters of my book.

3/ *Yourself, how did you encounter Lacanian psychoanalysis?*

I first encountered Lacan in college, in a course taught by Fred Jameson. This led me to take a course on Lacan at Duke and then form a study group. I was hooked and, after college, decided I wanted to “become” a psychoanalyst.

I want to also add a few words on my encounter with World Association of Psychoanalysis. In the first few years of my practice, I was working with analysands that left me a bit disoriented—the cases I noted above of ordinary psychosis. Before I had that concept, I recall constructing these cases with a notion of a psychotic

structure prior to the encounter with the A-Father (which I subsequently encountered as untriggered psychosis) and a concept of a pre-delusional metaphor (evoking what Miller, years later, described as compensatory make-believe). Later, I became aware of the work then being done in the École, through encounters in the US with analysts of the WAP and with access to the work being published in France. The book *La psychose ordinaire* and discussions with colleagues about this work was decisive. I found other analysts grappling with similar questions and coming up with approaches that resonated with my work at the time. Similarly, regarding addiction, I recall finding a few articles about addiction and then participating at a meeting in the US on the analytic treatment of addiction, with Fabián Naparstek, that was critical. These encounters were decisive for me: I wanted to work with these people because their work was compelling in the way it was addressing phenomena analysts were confronting across the world. This was the appeal of a School for me.

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