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Amerigo

That anyone would believe that there ever was such a thing as an American Psychoanalysis, monolithic and consistent, is laughable to those of us who have worked in this chaotic field. It has been fragmented and contentious for decades. Darian Leader is certainly correct in arguing for this more nuanced view of the American scene and for wondering what the Lacanian caricature of American psychoanalysis is all about.

The status of a so-called classical period of American psychoanalysis from the 1930s until sometime in the late 1960s, a period during which a certain New York based but Viennese inflected school held dominance in both the IPA and APsA, a school that was deferential to H. Hartmann and A. Freud, but also to Charles Brenner and Jacob Arlow, can obscure the many continuing challenges to that hegemony that were taking place. Where there are gates, there are barbarians, and the American psychoanalytic scene has always been defined by both. Of course, there were efforts to both define and dictate a certain orthological point of view as schools do everywhere but as usual it was in direct proportion to dissent.

The American Psychoanalytic Association did have unique autonomy within the IPA stemming from a 1938 agreement between the two associations that preserved and protected the distinctly *medical* cast of official (APsA) psychoanalysis in the United States and with that a certain intellectual conservatism for the next 50 years until it was forced to reform by court order in 1988. However, while this official uniformity had a somewhat stifling effect within ApsA, it did not prevent other psychoanalytic work to go on outside of the ApsA institutes.

To take just one instance mentioned by Darian Leader, when Eric Fromm published his popular books in the 1960s softening the middle European pessimism of the old school with the hope of humanistic social progress he did not represent the academy. His approach and indeed the institute with which he was affiliated in NY (W.A. White) were both outside the gates at that time. The debate with Herbert Marcuse on the importance of a drive model for the theory of the subject had little to do with the central clinical institutions but rather with an intellectual psychoanalysis that ran alongside them on another track which had links to Marxist social theory and the question of radical political agency in late capitalism. How this 'critical theory' of subjectivity might have an impact *within* the gates of clinical authority was hardly an articulated question at that time. This is perhaps where the question of 'culturalism' was being debated but there is no reason to consider that a distinctly American debate, since it began years before in Vienna, nor was it one that was particularly active within the medically focused institutes.

However, that there were many working psychoanalysts who were already oriented in their practice to such other debates was already generating fault lines that would soon be felt in the dominant societies.

Ten years later there were barbarians inside the gates. Janet Malcolm's *The Impossible Profession* (1977) was a report on the desperate efforts to restore and maintain the ramparts after they had been breached by Self Psychology. That the terminology of *Self* vs *Ego* indicated a problem in the theory of the subject is now 50 years later being articulated in the American scene. The current work of Morris Eagle (2021), *Toward a Unified Psychoanalytic Theory: Foundation in a Revised and Expanded Ego Psychology*, approaches the

question of the divided subject in its later chapters in ways that are immediately relevant to the longstanding Lacanian perspectives on this question.

Russel Jacoby's *Social Amnesia* (1973) had decades ago raised the question of the theory of the Subject for psychoanalysis, although more from a Hegelian-Marxist tradition. The current American interest in the work of Lacan and that of Laplanche is due in large part to the belated recognition that they had all along been addressing the psychoanalytic idea of the subject in ways that might prove valuable for these longstanding debates within the American scene.

But perhaps something else is at stake since both parties in the exchange between Darian Leader and the Editors of *Essaim* seem to know that there never was an American Psychoanalysis as such. They claim to recognize the actual diversity that held sway and yet the American scene somehow still captivates them. What is this 'American' myth? We're not inclined to speak of British psychoanalysis as such, but rather of British Object Relations Theory or the British Kleinians, etc. Is there a French Psychoanalysis? Any effort to define it would immediately confront the divisive effects of Lacan. Yet, somehow in spite of knowing otherwise, the idea of an American psychoanalysis resurfaces yet again. What is this America in American Psychoanalysis?

When the IPA granted autonomy to the American Psychoanalytic Association it was in part because the professional practice of psychoanalysis was widely successful in the US but still rather marginal in most other countries. In the 1950s and 60s when Lacan launched his barbs, the NY school of psychoanalysis was indeed a dominant force within the International Psychoanalytic Association and that dominance had its imaginary effects. I met French (Lacanian) analysts in New York in the early 1980s who still thought that Manhattan was the capital of mainstream psychoanalysis and who were hoping that they might finally get a closer look at this mythic beast, both horrible and attractive. It was then the Woody Allen effect, something that hasn't worn all that well. Is that myth still affecting this debate?

There is also the narrative of the United States as the driving force of late capitalism and thus the place where new science and technology is most influential in social formations. There is something of this notion in Leader's historical observations about Lévi-Strauss in New York, the UNESCO conference and the research projects of H. Hartman and D. Rapaport. We can decry the ideological rigidity but should not underestimate the power: America as an inescapable technological force. The research projects in psychoanalytic child development went on in both Britain and the US. Anna Freud and Hartmann jointly founded the *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* even if it was published in New York. Is this the America that still mystifies us in seeking to situate psychoanalysis as a science?

Yet researchers like the Hungarian born Margaret Schonberger Mahler who started the Masters Children's Center in NY in 1950 to both treat and to study psychosis in children were in fact outside both the hegemony of psychoanalytic establishment and academic child psychology. That her studies addressed questions regarding the formation of the subject is another instance where the ideological divide could be fruitfully broached.

Unfortunately, the editorial exchange regarding Leader's essay gets bogged down by the reaction to his polemical style. If we leave aside the turf battle, what matters are the underlying questions that have in the past and continue in the present to fuel the debates taking place in psychoanalytic circles both in the United States and elsewhere, debates about the concept of the I, about the divided subject, the unconscious Ego, relational discursive structures, debates that Lacan of course was addressing throughout his teaching, but that were taking in place in the U.S. in other ways, some noted by Leader. That these debates in the U.S. are finally taking some notice of Lacan's contributions is what matters, at least regarding the transmission of psychoanalysis. Those of us who in the 1970s and 80s first saw in Lacan an acute perspective on what was then the confusion that was psychoanalysis in America are finally seeing the field catch up with us. Young analysts here are now interested in Lacan's work not because he was founding a school with some exclusive claim on the true way but rather because they can see how he was trying to address the problems of the

divided subject, the traumatic dimension of the real, the non-rapport of the sexual, that they now struggle with in their respective schools.

The points that Leader raises that could and should be productively debated are relevant today and especially for the transmission of psychoanalysis to those who are now coming into the field. It is a missed opportunity when the argument gets sidetracked as it did here by a defensive reaction to a polemical style.

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