

Foreclosure and Discordance: Is Schizophrenia Thinkable?¹

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This article argues that schizophrenia, as the illness of the psychical system in its generality, can only be approached by posing the preliminary question: “what is association?”. If one thinks in terms of a logic of the “excluded third”, schizophrenia seems to be excluded from the field of psychoanalysis. But the author maintains that thinking in terms of a logic of the “included third” is not only coherent with psychoanalysis, but results in what is said schizophrenically supporting the discourse of the analyst.

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In his major work *Dementia Praecox or the Group of Schizophrenias* (1911),¹ Eugen Bleuler replaces “dementia praecox” with the group of “schizophrenias”. The main characteristic of the illness in question would no longer be either dementia or precociousness, but a splitting of the mind or a disturbance of associations. The invention of the term “schizophrenia” does much more, however, than rename a specific mental illness, for Bleuler speaks about the “group” of “schizophrenias” in the plural. What is the principle of this regrouping? Firstly, most of the symptoms which attracted the attention of the psychiatrists before Bleuler, namely hallucinations and delusions etc., are only complications of the illness, or only accessory and secondary symptoms. Secondly, unless there is a complication, the principal classical functions of the psyche remain intact: no disturbance of sensibility, no disturbance of memory, no disturbance of consciousness, no disturbance of motor functions.² What remains then to characterize uncomplicated schizophrenia or simple schizophrenia? Could it be an illness without symptoms, an “un-triggered” illness?

The specific disturbance of schizophrenia essentially concerns associations, the assemblage of the human mind, namely, the way in which the human psyche or thought, in the most general sense of the term, is

¹ Translated by Cormac Gallagher.

² E. Bleuler, op. cit. Trans. J. Zinkin, New York: International Universities Press, 1950.

³ Bleuler’s “Schizophrenia simplex”.

constructed into a coherent whole. Can one first take a step back to think, from an outside point of view, this assemblage, these associations, these thoughts that constitute the human mind as a structured whole? If so, how can one, starting from this, think of the disturbance of this assemblage, the illness of this type of thought that is called schizophrenia?

First of all, how can one comprehend this term “association” which is constitutive of thought and of the human mind in general? Whatever their interest may be, recent neuro-physiological studies illustrating the disturbance of associations by a specific deficiency at the level of mirror-neurons do not correspond to the question of the assemblage of the general system of the psychical apparatus. We never observe this system in its generality. Metapsychology consists of not reconstructing the real psychical apparatus as it is, but opening up reflection, thinking, posing the question of the psychical system in its greatest generality. How can we reflect, how can we think about this psychical apparatus that we never observe? Shall we think in the framework of a logic of the excluded third, which answers questions by *yes or no*? Here it is one or the other, and so the inside excludes the outside and reciprocally; one term presupposes the foreclosure of the other. Here the negation is foreclosure. Or shall we think in the framework of a logic of the included third, *yes and no*? It is neither altogether one, nor altogether the other, but between-the-two. The inside is extended into the outside without any rupture of continuity; one term is never more than in discordance with another. Here the negation is discordance.

Let us begin to think of the psychical structure in general, starting with Freud and the rule of association which can be free or not. The Freudian Ego, which must make the structure, fulfills the double task on the one hand of responding and adapting to reality, and on the other hand of responding to the instinctual creativity of the Id. The associations also apparently have a double function; one is turned towards outside reality, the other is turned towards the Id inside.

If associations are presented with a view to communication, they seem to respond to a logic of the excluded third, and to oppose two possible, one of which excludes or forecloses the other: either “it’s my mother” *or* “it’s not my mother”; it’s black *or* white; it’s yes *or* no; it’s on one side of the surface *or* the other. From this point of view where the logic of the excluded

third reigns, the associations are engaged with things, they are thing presentations (mother, yes, white). The negation here is foreclosure: the thing corresponds to the word, yes *or* no.

In principle, “free associations” are free from the constraints of the logic of the excluded third; the analysand will be able to hold at the same time “it’s my mother” *and* “it’s not my mother”, it’s yes *and* no etc., not without some discordance. This freedom of associations comes to disturb the reality principle which assured the coherence of the psychical system with the outside world. From this point of view, where the between-the-two insinuates itself, the word is no longer in contact with the thing, and the free associations are just pure word presentations⁴ with which you can operate as you please. The negation here is discordance: the word has lost all attachment of concordance with the thing.

This discordance which disturbs the relationship of associations with things is supposed to constitute the fundamental and primary symptom of the group of schizophrenias. Simple schizophrenia would be described as a discordance founded on the signifier being definitively barred from any reference to a thing. Correlatively, the fundamental rule of psychoanalysis which proposes the freedom of associations would be the methodical induction of a schizophrenia on the side of the analysand, something which would allow us to glimpse the possibility of a psychoanalytic treatment for schizophrenia. Nevertheless psychoanalytic treatment is not reduced to the artificial schizophrenia induced by the fundamental rule. There would have to be added the interpretation of the psychoanalyst directing the discordance of free associations towards a concordant explanation with a more or less paranoiac aspect. The treatment would thus be the association between a schizophrenia directed by the fundamental rule and a paranoia directed by interpretation.

Would such a psychoanalytic treatment of psychotics be fundamentally possible? This would be to forget the loss of cathexis of things among psychotics. No cathexis of things, no transference. The psychoanalyst would not be able to intervene in the course of free associations for want of transference. The treatment would remain at the first stage of schizophrenia

⁴ See S. Freud, “*Das Unbewusste*”, GW X (1915), p. 298; “The Unconscious”, SE XIV, p. 161, where Freud makes an explicit reference to Bleuler’s 1911 *Dementia Praecox oder Gruppe der Schizophrenien*.

without ever being able to go on to transference, and so without going on to the interpretative treatment with its paranoiac aspect. Here Lacan takes up the question again: what can be said about the treatment of psychosis? Possible or impossible treatment? This question only has meaning after the preliminary question (1956),⁵ which is nothing other than the question: what is a free association? And this question is at the same time indissociably the question of the psychical apparatus and of the subject in general. It is valid for any subject, schizophrenic or not. The question, which goes along with the movement of free associations, starts from the locus of the big Other which escapes us and from what unfolds in it. From there, the question traverses what is played out between the Ego and its objects. Such is the inalienable and unpuncturable *schema L*, since it is the structure of the human being in general as well as of any questioning about the human being. I insist on the fact that this preliminary question is not a response, it remains a question which always gives us something to think about.

We talk about the preliminary question in rather vague terms which include, in a rather confused way, the human mind, the psychical apparatus, the big Other, the Ego, the associations, and not without a continuity between these terms which can generate discordances. But if we now wish to pose and to depose the question precisely, we will have to support it by points that are supposed to be stable. The question of the subject is traditionally supported by the stable points of the oedipal triangle, the Name-of-the-Father, the primordial object represented by the mother, and the Ideal Ego. These three points constitute the geometry of the schema of reality, of *schema R*.⁶

No human being escapes the preliminary question of the human and the topology of *schema L*. But many human beings can escape one or other way of posing the question, for example from one or other of the geometrical oedipal points, which allow the question to be posed.⁷ Thus the support which allows the Other to be pinned down, the Name-of-the-Father, may happen to be missing. Psychosis would then be characterized by the radical absence of this supporting-point, by the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father. The general question of the subject – its dependence on the Other in

⁵ J. Lacan, "On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis", *Ecrits*. Trans. B. Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), pp. 445-448.

⁶ The supports of *schema R* are clearly named "geometrical" and not "topological".

⁷ J. Lacan, *ibid.*, 445ff.

the *schema L* – nevertheless remains intact. In the event of the failure of this oedipal geometrical support, in the event of the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father, *schema L* with its elastic logic, with its topology, should still pose the question by means of the edge, with the two other supporting points⁸ which find themselves pulled about to palliate the lack of the first point: the topology of *schema L* recasts the available supports to form *schema I*.

We could thus define psychosis by a decisive criterion. At the moment when it's a matter of posing the preliminary question, thanks to stable supporting terms, one of these terms may happen to be lacking: where there is an absence of the Name-of-the-Father, there is psychosis; where there is no absence of the Name-of-the-Father, there is no psychosis. We are situating ourselves here clearly in the logical perspective of the excluded third. And psychosis is naturally characterized by foreclosure: it is the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father.

But the Other of the preliminary question is never either the Father or the Mother. The Other does not admit of any adequate support; “there is no Other of the Other”, there is no support for the Other. The Other is essentially hole, lack, absence. This hole itself can be understood in a logic of the excluded third. And one could then define psychosis no longer by a hole at the locus of the Other, but by the absence of a hole in the Other. But we still remain in a forclusive logic, in a theory of psychosis as foreclosure, in a geometrical conception of psychosis according to a logic of the excluded third. In such a logic, the points are fixed, measured, stabilized; we are in a geometrical perspective, which is appropriate to measure the terms by which a question can be posed. In a logic of the included third on the other hand or of discordance, there is no fixed point, no measure, but simply a continuity; there we have a topological perspective which is suitable for summoning up the uncertainty and the discordance inherent in any true question.

The preliminary question, in the 1956 text, opened out rapidly onto the way of posing the question, onto the oedipal terms of *schema R*, and above all put geometrical perspectives into operation which seemed to give the responses. This is the theory of psychosis in terms of foreclosure. The

⁸ Namely the primordial object represented by the mother and the Ideal Ego.

question of the topological *schema L* was too quickly read as a response in terms of geometrical supports.⁹ Lacan's *L'Etourdit* of 1972 restates the question in the up-to-date manner of a question without response in which discordance persists. Rather than fixing schizophrenia geometrically in the traditional supports, the loops and detours of *L'Etourdit* allow us to think out the preliminary question of the subject topologically, and not without seeing the diagnosis of schizophrenia as a specific illness disappear.

But it is nevertheless a matter of taking up the question again at the point where it has got to, where it is cornered in the logic of foreclosure. In the confusion between *schema L* as “discordant question without response” on the one hand, and *schema R* as “forclusive response without question” on the other, there is indeed a forcing. Such a forcing can be located in the very history of the individual who is supposed to be psychotic. It's the irruption of a father who, without reason or unknowingly, takes the place of supporting the field of the Other.¹⁰ Hence Schreber's father or again Professor Flechsig. It is indeed a forcing to think that the Other can be supported geometrically by a father, or even a Name-of-the-Father, that would allow the threshold of the symbolic to be crossed. No doubt the supposition of such a threshold would allow the symbolic to be thought of as a delimited territory. But the symbolic is not a territory, but a *dit-mension* dependent on the movement of the act of saying always there already even if it is always already forgotten.¹¹

In this forcing, the topological beach of the act of saying where the preliminary questioning of the subject is played out, which has neither a defined threshold or limit, has been replaced by geometrical loci, among which is the Name-of-the-Father congealed by tradition.¹² A logic of discordance where the indefinite continuous reigned had been replaced by a logic of foreclosure where the loci are clearly discerned.

Of course this geometrising of the question allows the discourses to be articulated by well established loci: the subject will occupy in a stable way

⁹ J. Lacan, “L'Etourdit”, *Autres Ecrits (AE)*, p. 458.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 466.

¹¹ “That one might be saying remains forgotten behind what is said in what is heard” (*ibid.*, p. 449).

¹² “The Name-of-the-Father by making a locus of its beach, proved itself to be responsible according to tradition” (*ibid.*, 460).

the locus of the semblance, the product or truth. With this geometry of the loci of the discourses, which depends on a masculine logic, everything can be ranked according to a unique reason called “phallic”, on the condition that there is presupposed the exception which directs this ranking. The Name-of-the-Father is demonstrated to be this exception, according to tradition.¹³ This exception is, of course, an inordinate pretension which is not fulfilled, a presupposed which is not verified: the Name-of-the-Father does not exist.

It is because it is confronted with the forcing of a father which monopolises the beach of the Other that psychosis very logically contests this exception; it is the battle of the psychosis against the Name-of-the-Father, Schreber’s battle against God, a foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father no doubt, but a quite justified foreclosure, since it rejects the exception as principle of geometrical ranking, of classification by “yes or no”. To the masculine geometrical logic, which claimed to be able to rank everything by yes or no (for all x phi of x), under the direction of the exception (there exists an x not phi of x), psychosis opposes the first feminine formula of sexuation: there is no such exception (there does not exist an x not phi of x). By this negation of the exception there is demonstrated “the effect of a push-towards-the-woman” of psychosis.¹⁴ The logic of extremes – yes or no – “the power of extreme logic” that functioned with these quite stable and quite distinct geometrical loci proves to be fallacious and is rejected because it throws us off the scent of the true question.¹⁵

The rejection or foreclosure of the logic of foreclosure opens up for the psychotic process the possibility of a topological beach not reducible to forclusive mechanisms. An individual can indeed be stabilized in language by these geometrical loci of a well-established discourse and in that way it is included in the geometrical perspective of a binary logic of foreclosure and classification. But the real at stake in the psychotic process does not allow itself to be cornered in such a stabilization: there is no individual who is

¹³ J. Lacan, “L’Etourdit”, *AE*, p. 460.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 466.

¹⁵ “But to carry the phallic function to its power of extreme logic would throw us off the scent” (*ibid.*).

stabilized as psychotic, no individual schizophrenic, only someone “described as schizophrenic”, a pure word-presentation.¹⁶

“What is said schizophrenically” is specified by being caught up – in the preliminary question – without the help of any established discourse.¹⁷ It would be quite erroneous to conclude from this that the psychotic individual is outside discourse; there is no schizophrenic individual, the schizophrenic individual does not exist, since the question of the subject remains a question without response at the level of simple schizophrenia. On the contrary the dimension of discourse is inherent in the question preliminary to any subject: “what is said schizophrenically” can only be understood by the complete development of the question of the subject. It would be tempting to specify it with respect to an established discourse. But that fails: “what is said schizophrenically” cannot be specified by means of geometrically defined loci in an established stabilized discourse as is the case in the discourses of the master, the hysteric and the academic. There remains the discourse of the analyst which, for its part, is never stabilized, which does not allow itself to be established or circumscribed in a geometrical perspective, which never responds in terms of yes or no, which is never concordant, but always discordant. Schizophrenia, which can only be comprehended as “what is said schizophrenically” and not as the illness of an individual schizophrenic, is only thinkable in the framework of psychoanalysis and its topological perspective.

This “what is said schizophrenically”, or the schizophrenic word which does not have the help of any established discourse which would give it coherence,¹⁸ clearly appears, just like the ancient oracle, as an interpretation without stable and assignable signification.¹⁹ It cannot be recuperated in a well stabilized geometrical perspective. It is only the movement of the act of saying²⁰ proper to the unstabilised discourse of the analyst that can rename it, and, in return, “what is said schizophrenically” will lead us to better

¹⁶ “An animal has the habitat (a *stabitat*) which language is” (J. Lacan, “L’Etourdit”, *AE*, p. 474).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ “The associations lose their coherence” (E. Bleuler, *Dementia Praecox or the Group of Schizophrenias*, p.55).

¹⁹ J. Lacan, *ibid.*, p. 490.

²⁰ “That one might be saying remains forgotten behind what is said in what is heard” (*ibid.*, p. 449).

understand psychoanalytic interpretation in its equivocation and its discordance.

Lacan's discourse "proves to be able to be supported even (starting) from psychosis",²¹ on the condition however that we do not remain at a static theory of foreclosure,²² but find in it the topological locus of the act of saying which is favourable to the practice of discordance and which, in its equivocation, dynamises interpretation. This will not, for all that, rule out making the path more precise and using afresh some fragment of the logic of the excluded third, of new diversified Names-of-the-Father, which it will be necessary to foreclose anew, in order that the question of the subject may be pursued without a conclusive response.

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²¹ J. Lacan, op. cit., p. 494.

²² At "the wreckage of the *Memoirs*" of the dead President Schreber (ibid.).