

PARANOIA*

Charles Melman

Paranoia is above all linked to our representation of space, because spontaneously our representation of space is Euclidean, which has been the natural geometry for centuries. We continue to think according to the rules of this geometry, and there has been an effort made by rationalism to assimilate the rules of thinking to the rules of this geometry. But this Euclidean geometry is based on the existence of closed figures, that is, an isolation of what is inside from what is outside. Here is an absolute boundary between the inside and outside (the circle) which is the basis for paranoia.

People have questioned themselves for a long time about the materiality of the line, and that is why geometers say that it is a line without thickness. But in so far as it separates the inside from the outside, we can say that it is a cut or a cutting. What gives meaning to the Euclidean surface is this cutting. Lacan has this very surprising formula: he says that the surface *is* the cut.

This is very different to the representation of space that is to be found, for example, in the Book of Kells, because space is represented there as a weaving, a fabric. Why is it so different from the Euclidean way of thinking? If the surface is represented by a weaving then what, at a certain moment, disappears and goes outside, returns again. In a weaving or texture there is no cutting, and what has been repressed returns. But in the case of the circle, what has been put outside must remain outside, and we will have to be very vigilant so that what has been put out does not come back in.

* This translation follows the conversational tone of the original presentation.

In the Book of Kells, there is a representation of St. Mark with the lion. He himself is a weaving, and not only is there a weaving going through his body, but he himself is entirely woven. You have to go through Lacan, to rediscover the problem posed by this sort of representation of space.

Why does our spontaneous thinking represent space according to the Euclidean model? It is very likely linked to what Lacan calls 'the mirror phase'. The child sees himself in the mirror as a closed form, and he sees everything outside that form as devalued, and also as threatening that form. Freud says more or less the same thing. The child takes everything that is good into himself and rejects the bad. But to think that you are good and everything outside you is bad is to have a paranoid conception of the world. This is the very source of paranoid thinking. So it seems simple: I push everything that is bad outside, and then afterwards I feel threatened by that. But Lacan shows us that clinically there are complications, because that image with which I identify myself, that image which is going to become my own and constitute me, is essentially the image of an other. This is to say that my self is constituted by an other. It is an other who is in me. This is why as a subject, I am always a little bit of a stranger to my own ego. So the very principle of paranoia, which is the feeling of being intruded upon by another, is realised by the very physiology of the constitution of the ego. So I, who appear to be normal, have an ego that is constituted on a paranoid principle. It is an other who is in me, and there are circumstances in which I can find myself completely detached from this other who is in me. When, for instance, I want to strike or destroy that other, when I might strike someone in my group who appears to be very like me, and in that act I will arrange things so that I will also strike at myself, as happened in the case of Lacan's Aimée. This was a patient who tried to stab a famous actress and who was in fact trying to hit out at her own ideal ego, and so she arranged things so that she herself would be struck at the same time.

These remarks of Lacan address a fundamental problem in western metaphysics, namely, the quest for being and the quest for identity. Lacan shows that the very support for identity is otherness, the image of an other. In other words, the ego is above all a social agency. We saw firstly that what is bad is pushed outside, but now we see that what is bad is at the very interior of the ego. I can continually try to put it outside, but it is within the ego because it is the ego itself. Why is it bad? Because with this introjection of an image of an other, all the woes of existence capture me at the same time. I am condemned to never being able to find my own identity, because as soon as I get close to it, I find the image of an other.

There is also something else which can make of this ego a persecutory agency. Our relationship to the signifier is of such a kind, that everything that brings us to a halt, becomes a source of persecution. Take for example a great loving passion: you know how the chosen object in such a case can come to be the persecutory object, and how things very often turn out badly. If that object of passion is my ego, I am going to experience that ego as a persecutory object, - this is the problem of narcissism. And you know the myth of *Narcissus*, and how that does not end up well either.

This way of thinking about the world, according to the Euclidean principle, is always our spontaneous way of thinking. When we were in Chile, one of the members of the International Psychoanalytic Association explained that 'a' is not equal to 'not-a'. So we see that Aristotle's way of thinking continued to dominate *our* way of thinking. To say that 'a' is not equal to 'not-a' is to apply that particular representation of space. And 'a' can never be identical to 'not-a'. It is enough to evoke the logic of repression to know that what has been put outside (not-a) will necessarily come back inside. Therefore, consciousness necessarily represents 'not-a', so I can say that 'a' is in fact identical with 'not-a'. Freud's article on negation shows that 'not-a' is equal to the truth of 'a'. If I say I am not thinking about my mother, that means I am thinking about my mother. So you see that if I have this representation of space, with the cut that it

implies, in its attempt to keep everything that is rejected outside, it becomes a paranoid method of thinking.

What clinical conclusion can you draw from this? The conclusion is that what is outside me is considered to be threatening. What is different from me is considered to be menacing. This is xenophobia. Anyone who is not like me is, for whatever reason, (their colour, their religion, and so on) outside of me, a threat of my ego. But what is more interesting is that the person who is like me, the one most like me, is even more intolerable than the one who is different to me. This is the problem with brothers and sisters. So within groups, you get the phenomena of splitting and schism, the division of people who are alike. So people who are alike, are going to look for some little feature, or some little trait of difference, in order to put outside what is inside. This is why movements in which a certain unity is realised, always end up being broken, divided and split.

Heretofore, we have explored the Imaginary dimension of paranoia. Now we will talk about the Symbolic determination of paranoia. The symbolic determinants of paranoia are linked to the very precise fact that whenever you have a symbolic system from which, for whatever reason, someone finds himself excluded, then this someone will find himself in a paranoid position - as for example, when you are in a railway carriage and all the people are speaking a different language to yours, and after a while, you begin to feel that the others, if they are laughing, are laughing at you. Because you are dealing with a symbolic system, a tongue, which you do not know, you find yourself in a position of exclusion. This happens all the time in a multiracial society. Intolerable situations can be created. Why is this so? If I have to deal with a symbolic system from which I am excluded, I find myself put in the place of the big Other. Here something curious happens, namely, the significance of the symbolic chain happens at the place of the Other. And so I find myself at the locus at which signification is exercised, and takes place. I have the impression - in that foreign language, and in the measure that I am put into the place of the

Other, which is also the locus of signification and meaning - that people are talking about *me*, because this is the locus that is inhabited by signification, the potential for meaning, the language elements that are capable of generating meaning.

In paranoia, there are three types of delusion - grandiosity, jealousy, and protest. If, in a given symbolic system, I am put into the place of the Other, without being able to identify myself with any of the others who are there, I am going to find myself in that place which escapes castration at that locus of the Other, and since I have this sensation that everyone is speaking about me, I am inevitably going to have this grandiose notion of myself, because I am not like the others, I am not castrated. I haven't got the limitations of the others. Since, on the other hand, the whole language is speaking about me, I feel exceptional, I am the exception that escapes the rule. I am the minus one. And if I am exceptional, I am the only one who is loveable, the only one deserving of love, and if anyone else is loved in my group, I am offended. And you know that when you are in love, you believe you are unique and exceptional, and you must be the only one. Why then the protest, the claim on one's rights, querulous paranoia? Because I am at a place where I am not given all the honours I deserve. So here again we can explain paranoia in terms of structure.

You know how the paranoid loves logic, because he is perhaps the product of a very strict logic. He loves clarity, everything must be transparent, no shadows, no ambiguities, which are always felt as threatening. Rousseau, because of his paranoia no doubt, wrote in a marvellously clear language. So if the paranoid has this need for absolute clarity, which goes against the equivocations that are proper to language, it is precisely because he wants to deal with language, and with that which supports ambiguity, namely the locus of Other, which is the locus of all questions, all enigmas, which is where he sustains himself or resides, but also where he suffers. He would want this locus to be completely mastered by the symbolic, and therefore it must lose its quality as Other. The Other dimension should be cancelled out, so that gives to the

paranoiac the idea that humanity is reconciled within itself, so that at that point nobody would be Other with respect to his fellows. So in paranoia there is always a dimension of sacrifice and generosity.

As you see, paranoia is quite constitutive of our psychic functioning. Against the paranoia that rejects outwardly what it cannot put up with, we as psychoanalysts have to try to grasp just how close paranoia is to the constitution of our subjectivity.

Of course all these manifestations that I have been describing here are completely integrated into our social life. We must now turn our attention to the Real dimension of paranoia. Consider the laws made by parliament, thousands of laws, even those that regulate the most trivial elements of our daily lives, like those on the functioning of coffee machines. These laws show us the following: the person who operates these coffee machines, for instance, does not want what is good for me, he is prepared to make me sick. This is the real dimension of paranoia. Because of this, I am obliged to distrust my neighbour, or else to have a law between the two of us. Otherwise he may well harm me for his own advantage. Take the question of air pollution for instance, and the reality of air pollution in our big cities, and you can see how the persecutory dimension is present in our social functioning.

For the paranoiac, the signifier is transformed into a sign. From what position does he interpret what he hears so that we can describe him as delusional or deluded? We know that the signifier is founded on a fundamental equivocation, so we can never know the ultimate meaning. But the paranoiac has found something! He has found the cause, the cause of what is happening. At that point the signifier loses its equivocation because everything speaks about the cause, so from then on the signifier represents the cause. It no longer represents a subject for another signifier. The signifier here becomes a sign, representing the cause or the thing or someone. The signifier represents the subject for another signifier, while the sign represents a thing for someone (Lacan's formula). And why is it that the paranoiac has found the cause? Because

when *he* comes to the place of the Other, as excluded or rejected, he becomes the cause. That is why he has these grandiose ideals, and also a feeling of shame or unworthiness. There is this bizarre thing, that everytime one thinks one has found the cause, one enters into a paranoid-type system. If I give the cause of bad social functioning, for instance, it is going to have consequences of a paranoid type.

You must always be careful or suspicious when you think you have found the cause, and you know what has to be gotten rid of, struck out, in order for things to work properly. Because as analysts we know that what we call the cause, namely this *object-a*, namely that object,, thanks to which we protect ourselves against that which is in the big Other, is the means by which we protect ourselves from a radical lack. The cause, the *object-a*, the thing, is essentially the cork or the stopper with which we protect ourselves from this radical lack in the Other. And am I not here in the process of giving you the cause of paranoia!? This is the danger and risk of every explanation, and in particular when it is successful.

There is a relationship between hysteria and paranoia. Normally a woman comes to the place of the Other. It is her elective place, the place where she takes on her full value. That is also why the paranoiac tends to persecute women, because it is a place he wants to abolish. So if she normally comes to this Other place, what is hysteria's relationship with paranoia? Is she not spontaneously paranoid? Not quite, and for a very precise reason, which has to do with what Freud wrote in his article on femininity. This concerns the little girl who has not been castrated like the little boy, so that while she is the little girl, she finds herself in the virile position just like the little boy. But as Freud explained, there is a difficult piece of psychical work demanded of her which consists in renouncing this virility and her love object, her mother. She must renounce this virility, in order to come to this Other place. This is why we find Freud's remarks strange, because he says she must lose her virility, but not too much of it! When the little girl gets to this place of the Other, she attains it only after having passed by way of castration. It is not at all

the same way of getting to this Other place, as the way in which the one who is paranoid reaches it, who finds himself rejected into the position of the Other without having been castrated. This point is so exact that paranoia is often a defense against castration. The subject has refused castration, this limited and miserable world that is ours, and he has put himself into this exceptional position. Now the hysterical position can play with paranoia, but it is a pseudoparanoia, because of castration. To come to this Other place provides temptations to become paranoid. There is a fascination in coming to a position where every gaze or look is turned towards you. This is the difficulty that stars have. It is a need that stars have, yet it is also hard to put up with.

Freud wrote an interesting paper on a case of paranoia that appears to contradict analytic theory. Freud says that the persecutor is always of the same sex, which explains the imaginary dimension of paranoia. But the case he reports concerns a young woman, a very beautiful, unmarried woman, who accuses her lover of putting a camera in the room in which they used to meet, to take photographs when they are in bed and she also accuses him of having shown these photos to the head of the office in which she and her lover worked. When she was in bed, she heard the click of the camera. It appears to be a case that goes against analytic theory. But the true agent of the persecution is not her lover, but her boss, an older woman (a mother figure), the real object of love and persecution.

This is about jealousy, which Lacan tells us is part of our normal functioning. If I am loved, I can always ask myself: who is loved in me? Is it not this other upon whose image I have made myself, because it was that other that I myself loved, and it is this other that my ego privileges and is in relationship with. So I can always say to the person who loves me: No! it is somebody else that you love, because it is as an other that I have constructed myself. So jealousy is inevitable. I am jealous of the other that is in me and loved by me, and because this other with whom I have identified myself functions as an ideal, it is enough for me to meet in my social environment somebody of the same sex, who seems to me to be

ideal, in order to think right away that it isn't me that he loves, it's him! - this ideal ego. This is the basis of jealousy. So what does this say about mental health!

What is the role of the camera here? The patient has the impression that photos have been taken and have become public. This has to do with the gaze, and we can imagine that this woman has been favourably looked at by men, and in a jealous way by women, and so when she begins this liaison with the young man, this look, this gaze erupts. We know how frequently you have this presence of a persecutory look in paranoia. We all know this notion of being exposed to a gaze. In Lacan's optical schema, you see that the ego is fixed not just in a relationship with the other, but also with respect to the look that is attributed to the big Other, a literal element, almost of moral consciousness, moral consciousness represented by a look. Lacan points out that this look to which we are exposed is never a benevolent look: it is always a vigilant superego.

U But what is the difference between the ordinary situation and this person who is convinced a camera has taken pictures of her? When we are normal/neurotic, we don't know from where we are being looked at. But in this case, she knows from where she is being look at, and who is looking at her. The *object-a* is also a look, and it allows us to better understand how the *paranoiac*, having isolated what the cause is, at the same time isolates an *object-a*, and this can be a *regard*, a gaze, a look. It can also be a sound, the *object-a* of the voice. The patient heard the click. At that moment the *object-a* takes up a place in the field of the Other for her.

Responses to questions from the audience:

Regarding an analysand with a fragile sense of identity. The patient mentioned (in the discussion), who feels he disappears when his girlfriend or his analyst is not there with him, happens to be a twin. We imagine that there is an equality between twins, but this is never the case. There is always one who functions as the ideal. In this case it is the brother. Therefore, he is in a position of exteriority with regard to his own ideal ego. You (the analyst) might ask him why he should think that he disappears from your mind? Would his brother have been a better patient? The thing is to try to bring his jealousy into a dialectical form so that it no longer has this stasis and so it can come out clearly in the dialectical relationship with you. Intervene in a questioning and interrogative way, so that he can respond as he wishes. Do not interpret by explaining.

Is it possible to drive somebody into paranoia by our own interventions - when for example we introduce the reality of the situation, with knowledge verifiable in the external world? If someone who is not quite paranoid meets someone who operates on the level of knowledge, this verifies his paranoia because the paranoiac *believes* that *the other knows* that the Other has all the knowledge. He will be confirmed in his paranoia. What is purely imaginary then tips over into the Real, and confirms the paranoid uneasiness. So that is why a certain part of our work is to help the patient to understand that we know a certain number of things, but in no case do we know everything, that in no case are we this all-seeing, all-knowing gaze that the patient has met with in his illness. So that even if we see a certain number of things, we also have certain blind spots. That is why it is useful to present questions rather than interpretations in terms of a completed knowledge. Lacan always insisted that the patient understood that he, the patient, had a certain knowledge and that Lacan wanted to know this knowledge.

Freud's patients were sometimes persecuted by his imposition of theory upon them, by his perfect knowledge. Some analysts might suggest that, for instance, 'if you feel angry with me it is because you are rebelling against your passive feelings towards me, and if you are passive, you are rebelling against your aggressive feelings towards me!' You never lose! What can you say to someone who talks to you like that? Because there is always some truth in this sort of thing. But the problem here is that the analyst's perfect knowledge becomes a paranoid ideal.

What about the infant/mother relationship before the mirror phase, and why is the gaze associated with a harsh superego? Before the mirror phase, the child does not know what object captivates the mother's look. He hasn't identified it yet in the world of his perceptions. In the mirror phase, he discovers the object that causes his mother's desire, his own ego. So he will cathect this image which is the cause of desire, which then will function as an ideal and impose a certain rigidity on the turbulence of the subject.

We see clinically, children who move around and who cannot keep still, and one of the reasons for this hyperactivity is either they haven't got past the mirror phase, which imposes a certain immobility and pregnancy of form, or that this image is so strong, so captivating and constraining because of their mother's desire, that they cannot liberate themselves from it. They do all sorts of play-acting to get out of this image. It is also ideal because the subject always has the feeling that he has to satisfy a certain look, so the image is imposed on him as a sort of moral obligation to be fulfilled. He doesn't know what he sees. He also has to try and find out what he represents or what his mother loves in him. It is sometimes the case that the child is a replacement for a sibling who has died. In the eyes of the mother, he sees all too well that it is the *dead* child that captures the eyes of the mother and this will have a major impact on the way he develops, because his ideal will become the dead child.

Mother/son incest and psychosis? There are mothers who love their children so much, and they are, as women, in the locus of the Other, and they want their children to be in the same place as them, but they are not separated from them by any place. We see this in immigrants, where the mother doesn't want the child to mix, and so she keeps this child in the Other position.

For a baby that is hospitalised, brought up by nurses, there is a delay in development. He doesn't fix his gaze, he continues to have a strabismus, he doesn't smile, his motor development is delayed, he doesn't hold his head properly. Why? The nurses are excellent, so why doesn't he develop? He lacks this look of a woman, who is going to cathect him as an object which supports her own desire in herself. The nurse cannot give him that, even if she loves him a lot, because the nurse knows she will be separated from him, and so she cannot love him in that way. So the child cannot ask himself the question of who he is for this gaze, because the look is missing. What am I for this look?

When the child does find this look, it is a moment of triumph, of jubilation. It happens that mothers, sometimes because they are in conflict with their husbands, or with their own mothers, are unable to cathect this child as the object of their desire, since there is a prohibition coming from their own mother which forbids them from fully living their maternity, or because they have no desire for their husbands, and so they cannot love the child that is produced from that desire. There will therefore be pathological consequences for the child. In adult analyses you can discover these consequences for the child. In adult analyses you can discover these consequences, when for example the father had the child with this woman, and then promptly disappeared. So the mother may have very ambivalent feelings with regard to the child. The child perceives himself as being one too many. It would be better if he didn't exist at all. People suddenly realise in their analysis that they were never wanted. This relieves them of a chronic permanent depression, because it now becomes an element in a dialectic. It is no longer a blind factor.

Why is it a superego look? If I want to be this object, I must be able to satisfy the look of the Other. The ego always has this ideal dimension, because in order to realise this desire of the Other, I have to produce a certain perfection. I escape from castration, although fundamentally I am castrated. I experience this image as asking me to deny my castration and give a perfect form of myself, which means it is a very heavy weight to carry. That is why it is also *ideal*, which means that it always overlooks or denies castration, which is why I always end up feeling guilty, because I can never succeed in fulfilling the ideal.

When a younger brother dies, the elder, who was hostile to him, thinks that it was his death wishes that brought about this death. So his ideal will always be very persecutory, because he is convinced that he has murdered somebody. Hence the cruel superego.

And causes? You have to look for causes. There is never a final cause, so we go on looking. Analysis does not stop with the discovery of a cause. Lacan tries to give a theoretical account of the stopper-function of the cause, as serving as a defense against the fact that there is no ultimate, final cause. All our causes, which are effective causes, are nevertheless defenses. Someone who finds out that he has never been loved, for example: is that the final explanation for his existence? He had previously understood nothing. But he can begin to understand something as soon as he begins to discover how it was that this defense acted as a support for his existence. Then he can begin to be more tranquil about the event.

Address for correspondence:

*Association freudienne
internationale
15 rue Bouchardor
75010
Paris
France*