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How to Transform or Infinitely Postpone Meeting of the Psychotic Subject and His Other

Those who know the town of Leers-Nord won't have overlooked the fact that it doesn't in the least way resemble a spa, even less a seaside resort. And those who know Courtil know that it isn't a hydro-therapy center, not even a thermal one.

However the young man I'd like to speak of inflicts on himself a severe hydrotherapy there, expensive and more obligatory, in his opinion, than Annapolis is to a military career. For a long time now, the schedule of his showers has been incompatible with those of the national education system. So, logically, he brushes...off his classes and leaves his exam to hang dry. The duration of his showers -- that cannot be less than two or three hours -- seem as incompressible as the liquid that flows everywhere, given the particular technique used. It flows everywhere in the building and in particular in his room, which is currently just next to the bathroom. In addition, this radical hygiene has caused his skin to blossom, a disease with a flowery name to which dermatology holds the secret. No one fails to notice -- not even the concerned party -- that he contributes very actively to these unbearable floods of which he complains in a scandalized tone of voice, or that he waters copiously his rosy skin disease, making it flourish.¹

But no dialectical reversal can be expected from a subjective rectification as decided as it might be. To indicate to him the role he plays in the scandal he denounces is like an irresistible force meeting an immovable object: for him it is «impossible to do otherwise.» Here it's a question of a paranoid subject, not a belle ame.

What hypotheses can one formulate on the function of this strange behavior? Can one interpret it? What is its status? Before proposing hypotheses on what is at stake and the relation between all this and the

current relative stabilization, we need to examine in detail the case history. I will limit the narration of the case history to the elements pertaining to the questions posed. It isn't the sort of narration that is best suited to a clinical elaboration, to the cure either. (But can't you hear in the rule of free association a «one isn't here to narrate oneself?»)

1st Period: The Crime

Everything began, he says, with a motorscooter accident. For him its about a crime in which he almost lost his virility. From then on, everything would piss-off [foutre le camp],² and it isn't just an image: he became enueretic and encopretic. These strange sequels cannot be explained medically by the accident which involved mostly a head wound. This phenomenon flows from a body whose image has been damaged by a crime more than the organism was damaged by the accident. And there's no way to know if he has any idea about the motive and the suspect.

He testifies his baffled innocence in outraged tones. His mother, who «saw him dead,» took charge of his care and closely examined his underpants. I would later learn that she tolerated ever greater intimacy with her son, giving way, she said, in fear of his temper tantrums.

2nd Period: Diffusion of the Threat

This is what he was confronting at the moment of his first contact with Courtil. From the first meeting, D. showed himself to be loquacious in the denouncement of the malevolent scandals of which he was the object. In the form of allusions and insults, this scandal began with what serves him as family, although it would be more appropriate to say what doesn't serve him as family. He has a formula for saying this: «My family is a **puff**.» One of his eleven brothers and sisters, that we'll call C., treats him (the youngest) like the last of the last, the little reject, and sometimes in the evenings, to get the upper hand, tries to strangle him. The fear of death keeps him awake into the wee hours of the morning. The violence is very real, but what literally makes him suffocate is the indignation he feels when C. taunts him with allusions about his underpants.

The father is crazy, hospitalized since the end of the 40's, at first intermittently, then full-time. But D. announces, «I'm crazier than my father. He poisons his children. I can kill them. Nobody believes me, but I've already committed crimes.» He specifies later that this consisted in having twisted the parts of his neighbor [sic]. He doesn't say much about his mother, silencing the fact that, shortly before, he attempted to abuse her sexually.

The others are, according to him, almost all drunkards. He says that at his house, «It's a boxing ring» [ca se bat], and he evokes their dispersal in the neighboring villages as if it were the progression of an epidemic. The same centrifugal logic applies to the malevolent scandals: they are spread through the streets, from his neighborhood where, he says, his last name has become an insult, to the school. Now the scandals proliferate in such a way that he is no longer at peace anywhere. It's like he himself says, «worse and worse» since everyone has dropped him. He sees very clearly where this will lead him, and when I asked him if he hears it also, he confirmed that the voices told him so -- sometimes they only urge him to go wash himself. The only remaining exit so that he doesn't end up in the asylum like his father is suicide. He speaks of hanging, drowning, throwing himself out the window, and he says it with such very crude detail and strongly enough that one believes him when he says, «don't laugh.»

So there's the «puff» that serve as his family. He can't give a definition to this word and is astonished that one might ask him to. It's probably more a neological formation than a borrowing from slang where we can find the formula for the institution of the family exactly reversed. Here its not a question of law over desire, but rather an irremediable verdict; no request, but simply statements; no project, but a condemnation.

We responded that if he wanted to, he could come to Courtil.

In passing, it must be noted -- which is never anodyne for the French youth we receive -- that Courtil is two institutions; it is certainly an health facility, but even more anciently, it is an institution on the border. The concept of «border» must be included in that of «Courtil,» the highly turbulent, symbolic zone par excellence. A priest/exorcist at the end of his career highlighted the astonishing fact that it was in border regions that his services were most often called for.

Relation to the border is also important to the young man in question, but I will not develop the case from this angle today; except to note that his admission to Courtil installed a border between himself and his mother.

I will focus on the trajectory going from his admission in a critical state, to the current situation of both a very noticeable soothing and his «hydro-therapeutic rituals,» which aren't without a certain inconvenience for the institution. His stay has been punctuated by numerous critical episodes sometimes necessitating hospitalization. Without going into detail, we can discern the following traits: D. has proves himself capable of a very well-mannered politeness that can quickly turn into obscene language and erotic tyranny over the other children present. He keeps his eyes peeled for

the least default in the institution or those around him. Ceaselessly, D. looks for the possibility to drag us into perilous negotiations with his incessant and exorbitant claims and demands. This always concerns a way to dodge, to break a too frontal assault, to take down a position of mastery, to turn away encounters that would be too catastrophic for him -- for example, when a member of the other sex proves too enterprising.

We always try to arrange his encounters with the institution in such a way that it doesn't give imaginary consistency to the ideal that surges up there where the paternal function is foreclosed. To intervene in the name of the father serves no purpose with him, and to speak with him alone doesn't appease him at all, but rather upsets him.

3rd Period: Stabilization?

Currently, D. has undertaken a series of internships for which he frequents the CAT³ in order to prepare his future with sustained aid and multiple and various ups and downs that I won't go into in detail. The duration of his showers and the ever-defective -- in his opinion -- bathrooms play a large part. These defects have almost become his sole torment, the principle object of his cogitations, the permanent theme of his «complaints» which he addresses to whoever will listen.

A closer look reveals that it is always a flaw that makes it so the water never flows where it's supposed to. Once repaired, this flaw surges up somewhere else. It flows where it's not supposed to. As I already indicated, the word complaint is only superficially suitable. It's rather that he comes to us confirming that the scandalous flaw is still there, no matter what we do, lodged in the heart of the institution. This doesn't mean that other worries, other recriminations are absent, but this one is a fixed point, like a residue, when a lot of other things are changing for him. It's a little bit as if his whole being centered around this flow, such as Schreber centered himself in the act of shitting on the world. From the «it flows» of his encopresy to the «it flows» of his showers, there has been a displacement; from the crime menacing his whole universe he has gone to a bearable proximity with a fundamental flaw which above all must not be gotten rid of. The spreading of crime has made place for a very circumscribed localization of a named flaw; the proliferation of threats has given way to a fear of germs. He is sure that this has the advantage of germs being susceptible to the effect of Lysol.

The skin disease, as an accessory, permits the perpetuation of treatment with creams and ointments that his mother administered, without the eroticized aggressivity that they released; it's a nurse who takes care of this. But, more important than this benefit, one can hypothesize that these

marks on the skin have a more precise function; they inscribe the tracks where the jouissance, which had one day invaded his entire body, brought him very close to the worst.⁴

It is important not to see this flowing as a symbol, as a metaphor. It belongs rather to the central mechanism of the paranoia, that is, both the localization of jouissance in the place of the Other and the naming of this jouissance. Thus, his discourse is not centered on a complaint but, as Colette Soler has said, on «the denouncing of the unjustified jouissance of the Other.»⁵ This localization in the place of the Other does not repress the jouissance; it does not annihilate it as would its symbolization. It encircles the jouissance without truly separating it. This separation taking place is also a plugging in that partakes of the flow. The mark on his skin could then be the stigmata of this «failure» of the paranoia, the fixing in the body of the jouissance flowing back into the place of the Other.

Before concluding, there is one other point I would like to bring up. I spoke of the interminable negotiations in which he hoped to involve us, and the difficulty they put us in. It appeared to us little by little, and also to him, that this had to do with the manipulation of that figure of speech that Barthes saw as the emblem of middle-class rhetoric: tautology. His style bears the mark, evoking those busybodies who acquit themselves provisionally with a «That's life!» and a nod. «A penny's a penny,» «An hour's an hour,» «It's so because I said so.» This sort of thing sufficiently punctuates the metonymic unfurling of his discourse so that he can cut with his interlocutor and pass on to something else. It's astonishing to see how, at his initiative or ours, it's become possible to shorten the negotiation by going directly to this sort of conclusion, as emptied of meaning as a ritual. From the certitude of the worst to «That's life,» (the abridged form of the tautology «Life is life»), he has gained a little margin to manoeuvre in relation to the extravagant pretensions of the Other. Even if he sometimes says, «Life is dying, puff, at forty,» it doesn't have the same degrading and debasing connotation that it had at the beginning of his stay.

So that an institution isn't one

A flow, a skin disease, a rhetorical figure: doesn't seem like much, does it? It's very eclectic, made of bric-a-brac, has that little «bubblegum and baling twine» touch that the montage by which the subject tries to treat the unnameable always has, if we go into it as singular. This treatment is evidently extremely precarious, but seems exportable insofar as it later finds an institution where it can lodge a disorder without setting off a flurry of repairs. That is what he is looking for and will probably find, now that he's been warned by our care that there is another way to make it so an insti-

tution isn't One. It's to not forget that his destiny is to be one among others.

- ¹ In the French this disease is called pythiasis ros{ de Gibert. [trans. note].
- ² Fouter le camp often has the same sense as the British expression «Piss-off!» while for an American this expression is limited to «Fuck off!» (to piss-off being reserved for the indication that one has provoked the other's anger) [trans note].
- ³ The CAT (Centre d'Aide au Travail) is a French agency that aids handicapped individuals toward the goal of gainful employment. [trans. note].
- ⁴ The word pire, in French, means worst, but Lacan played on its homophony with the French word for father, p}re, the worst being the foreclosure of the paternal function.
- ⁵ Colette Soler. «Innocence paranoïaque et indignite melancolique.» Quarto #33-34; p. 26.