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Feminization in Psychosis : Clinical Fragments

Before deploying the clinical examples, I will deliver the theoretical reference that echoes them:

For the psychosis to be triggered off, the Name-of-the-father, *verworfen*, foreclosed, that is to say, never having attained the place of the Other, must be called into symbolic opposition to the subject.

It is the lack of the Name-of-the-father in that place which, by the hole that it opens up in the signified, sets off the cascade of reshapings of the signifier from which the increasing disaster of the imaginary proceeds, to the point at which the level is reached at which signifier and signified are stabilized in the delusional metaphor.

But how can the Name-of-the-father be called by the subject to the only place in which it could have reached him and in which it has never been? Simply by a real father, not necessarily by the subject's own father, but by A-father.¹

This reference is thus a theoretic detour which sets out from the clinic in order to come back to it. The detour is imposed by the necessity to articulate the clinic and found its daily practice with rigor and a certain ethic.

In psychosis, a signifier is missing: the Name-of-the-father is foreclosed, the paternal metaphor fails and the phallic signification doesn't manage to regulate the relations of the subject to himself and to the symbolic world.

On the one hand, if the subject is an effect of the signifier, this one that is missing will thus be in default in the minimal signifying armature of the subject. If, by hazard, there is an encounter, there is a call to the Name-of-the-father, the whole edifice collapses since the response to the call only reveals a hole; the signifier which would be able to account for the order of the world is missing. What then can take the place of this armature for the psychotic subject, if we suppose that the signifying armature is partitioned into the four discourses which create the social bond and the so-called psychotic is said to be in language but outside-discourse?² What then can create a social bond for this subject?

On the other hand, even if the subject is an effect of the signifier, he sustains himself from the living being. This is not without effect on the localization of jouissance. Right away there is an obstacle between the living being and the subject. For the living being, the difference between the sexes as well as a determined sexual function exist. For the subject, jouissance is necessarily asexual and the subject is confronted with the object a. Through the metaphoric operation, the jouissance can be coordinated to the pretend phallus. Thus it is an effect of phallic signification that separates jouissance from the body and in this way founds the dialectic of desire. Jouissance is thus outside-body. In the absence of the phallic function, the jouissance returns.

For the schizophrenic, jouissance remains unstowed. What can this scattered organism then plug-in to, if not another symbolic body? The terms «mechanical body» and «plugged-in» often used to describe psychosis are justified, as well as the importance of the function served by all that which has to do with «circuits» in the logical agencies which come to make up a symbolic body.

On the contrary, for the paranoiac, the delusion permits at least to attribute the jouissance to the field of the Other. This particular localization of jouissance in the Other poses two questions in relation to the management of the transference with a psychotic subject. What position does he put us in when he addresses himself to us? From what position should we respond in order to avoid becoming or, in any case, remaining in the position of this Other who takes its pleasure in him?

For every subject, the status of the body and its unification depend on the signifying articulation, on the symbolic; language makes the organization of the body. For the psychotic, this symbolic articulation is in default. What takes the place of substitute for a body unified by the symbolic? Anne Lysy, in an article that appeared in *Les feuillets du Courtil*, stated that «...it is to the absence of phallic signification that Lacan attributes the phenomena of imaginary cataclysms which he qualifies as a topical

regression to the mirror stage, phenomena touching on the identity and the body image.»³

This deadly gap is an effect in the imaginary of the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-father in the symbolic. There is a repercussion of foreclosure -- more especially for the schizophrenic than for the paranoiac -- on the «feeling of the organism.» It lets the subject «schize» into unstowed, unattached jouissance and the fragmentation of the body. Each psychotic subject then has to come to terms with his organs outside of any reference to an established discourse, outside of any phallic signification.

In her text, Anne Lysy advances a point that will permit us to better discern the knot of the differential clinic: paranoia and schizophrenia. She writes, «The accent Lacan put on the signifying determination of the imaginary restitution bears on the conclusion that the paranoiac succeeds where the schizophrenic fails.»⁴ In effect, schizophrenia remains on the side of the shattered, fragmented, disordered, pluralized delusional ideas, always unbound. The paranoiac tries to elaborate a system capable of explaining and organizing the world. This delusion, organized around one or several themes, produces a sort of cloud where otherwise there would only be a hole. This permits the jouissance to be attributed to the Other: «...schizophrenia and paranoia are two different modes of resolving the elision of the phallus.»⁵ They are two different fields that might also meet up, cross paths.

Three Particular Encounters

The above theoretical sketch will frame the clinical fragments deployed hereafter. At a given moment in their lives, Maurice, Bertrand and Renaud have had to sort out for themselves the question of the sex organ, without a phallic signification at their disposition. What happens for a psychotic subject there where, for all subjects, the question of the desire of the Other opens if it has been metaphorized? The three fragments which follow aim at the precise clinical construction of what is in question here. Three subjects, three moments of encounter: for each of them, an encounter was sufficient to bring about a very particular problem and impose certain rearrangements. So what did they encounter? What answer did each one manage to find?

A risk of real castration

Maurice is a young man of 18 and 1/2. His body hardly exists for him, and he doesn't recognize himself in the mirror. He speaks of himself in the feminine.⁶ He is not the least bit interested in girls. He alternates between long periods of stupor and explosions of violence. The gaze or the voice of another -- particularly if it contains a request -- leaves him frozen in place, completely fascinated by this gaze or petrified by this voice.

One day, a girl addressed him, asking him to show her his genitals. Immediately, Maurice executed the order and unzipped his pants. A few days later, at the swimming pool, Maurice had an enormous anxiety attack and became very agitated: he had just discovered his genital organs. Here's what he said in a very insistent fashion: «Bothers me! Look! Balls! Sick! Doctor cut scissors! Don't want, cut scissors!» Starting the next morning, he alternated between a very big voice and a very effeminate voice. Yet later, while showing his bloated belly, he asked the question, «Why baby in my belly?»

During this encounter with the question of his sex and the relation to the other sex, the default of phallic signification ended up, for Maurice, in a risk of real castration: these balls, he doesn't want any!

Why am I never a girl?

Bertrand is a young man of 18. He alternates between moments of extreme agitation when he doesn't stop talking, pokes fun at everything and can be a real dictator and moments when, as he puts it, «The only thing left for me is to die,» and he puts all his things in the trash can or mutilates himself, for example, taking stitches in the skin of his finger and then yanking up the thread brutally. He was very appeased by writing, school work, his identity as «handyman-repairman» or «sauce-king.» Incessantly, he taxed the others for money, an object, or clothing, then, was surprised, «Who got into my room? Who left that there?» Then he put up «wrong way» signs everywhere to prevent this intrusion by the other. Bertrand also had very personal theories as to his birth and the attribution of his name.

For more than two years now, he has asked from time to time, «Why am I never a girl?» However, he holds on to the insignia of masculinity: wear a tie, grow a moustache, measure the length of his penis and keep record of it on the wall.

Before that, he had wanted to get fat «there where a woman gets fat», be «round and smooth.» According to Bertrand, a man is «old and wrinkled,» something that is unbearable for him.

Finally, one can speak of a particular conjunction, the end result of an encounter with a girl admitted into his group as in-patient. Bertrand got along very well with her, he organized his time like she did, he sat facing her, he accompanied her to buy panties and wanted to make his purchases in the same aisle as she. One day, he heard someone insult him with «dirty homo» while he watched television, and nobody had said a thing. He no longer wanted anyone to wash his ears. He wanted to drop out of school and requested to be the «cleaning woman» of the group. At the beginning of June, this girl asked Bertrand, «If you have one, show me your penis.» Shortly afterward, Bertrand reappeared in the room in a dress and high heels; he was the pretty woman.

The following weekend, he became very depressed, saying, as if it were a sentence, «I agree with my Dad.» He couldn't say anything more about it, but one must know, all the same, that his father often insulted him as a «good-for-nothing» or «LD» (learning disabled).⁷ Bertrand quit going to school and wandered without managing to get a fix on anything. He then envisioned changing his last name. «I'm called Marcel. It's my new name. I chose it. Moreover, its written on my passport.» In fact, Marcel is his middle name (Note the potential to hear the feminine Marcelle). Bertrand managed to say, «Hey! My breasts are growing.» He wanted to shave his legs. He however foresaw returning to school, saying, «I have to put things in order.»

In Bertrand's case, the encounter with the sexual is truly a push to transform himself into a woman.

I'm not a battle

Renaud is 16. Each signifier has all its weight for him and he grants an enormous importance to precision in the pronunciation and spelling of his last name. He asks a lot of questions about this name, which is also the name of a famous battle, and a great deal of work on the letter had been necessary to appease him. He calls it «my work on the initials.» By cutting

his name in two and playing on the translation of one part, he had been able to find an appeasing signification for his family name.

Renaud is also very preoccupied with the function of the organs and the products of the body: «What will your stomach say? What am I losing here? Am I losing a little skin? What's this? I'm drooling now? What's happening to me?» He had just vomited. He spends a great deal of time in the toilet, verifies what is in his hankie when he blows his nose, and cutting his hair or shaving are very problematical for him.

A while ago, he went with his group to the sea for the afternoon. On the beach, the soldiers marched and Renaud manifestly saw in this a sign: he stood on a bench, accompanied the soldiers vocally in their manoeuvres, he was the general of this famous battle which echoes his name. He played an imaginary drum, made a lot of noise, couldn't stop talking.

Since that day, Renaud is intensely agitated. The signifying chain has begun to stream at high speed. He is incessantly involved in fights at school. He interprets every gesture, every gaze, every sentence pronounced by other boys -- exactly the ones who present themselves as a man are the most seductive for Renaud -- as being a provocation regarding himself: «He's pissed off at me. He won't leave me alone. It's him that started it.» And Renaud jumps on him and smashes his head into the ground. He doesn't foresee this stopping except if it kills the other. An adult, having remarked his astonishment and reminded Renaud that its forbidden, he could all the same conclude, «I'm not a battle.»

Since then he tries to enumerate what happens to him, tries to fix something in the numbers that he draws on his pants or on a corner of the table. He is especially worried about his size, the height of each person, but above all the fact that he is growing: «I'm going to outstrip my Dad. What will happen? Who's going to command?» Moreover, to be sure of what the word 'father' designates, he must each time add, «...the one called...» This is also the way he deducts that another man is not his father because «It's not the right name.»

During the same period, Renaud went to the girls bathroom and then, perplexed and very anguished, asked, «I got that wrong, didn't I?» But he held all the same to sitting at the girls' table, justifying himself by saying, «I have a girl's voice.» This encounter with the soldiers -- «I saw some soldiers at the sea» -- has thus brought Renaud to realize what his family name indicates, but also has made something vacillate about the authority of his father and the order of the world: Who, then, is going to hold things together? Who's going to stop it?

In addition, caught up in sexual drives that aren't regulated by phallic signification, Renaud is, on the one hand, certain of his being the progenitor of the child of every pregnant woman he encounters, and, on the other hand, he has the idea that all his classmates (boys and girls) are after him, have designated him the object of their jouissance. Then a few traits of a possible feminine identity surge up.

The Push-to-the-woman

Beyond the particularities of these three 'responses,' do they not attest to the very same structural effect that Lacan had notably conceptualized under the term push-to-the-woman?

In Maurice's case, the absence of phallic signification is directly correlated to the «one organ too many,» together with the necessity to «cut it off.» Insofar as it is not legitimated by the phallic law and the dialectic of desire, the organ is to be extracted: «to not have» presents itself to Maurice with the risk of real castration, of emasculation, Entmannung.

In Bertrand's case, the absence of phallic signification took effect in the register of Being: as soon as the insignia of masculinity, coming as identificatory prostheses, gave way to a question as to sexual identity, Bertrand had at first responded in reappearing on the scene as a woman, then witnessed in his body a transformation into a woman -- Verweiblichung.

In Renaud's case, the absence of phallic signification was marked above all by a fragmentation of the body, where the signifying work about his proper name and the enumeration of what happened to him tried to tie up the question of his being. But the shattering of the body and death of the subject always remain in the game, testimony of the topical regression to the mirror stage. For this subject, the question of sex is immediately correlated to an overflowing of jouissance attributed to the little others and to an entirely minimal indication of his sexual identity. In the division of the sexes, Renaud goes from one side to the other, but in a way circumscribed by daily life (toilet, table, voice), that neither a transformation into woman, nor a delusional construction can be postulated. There are no more than hints that, most of the time, leave him dangling, delivered up to the jouissance of the Other, a subject not attached to anything.

¹ Jacques Lacan. «On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis.» *Écrits: A Selection*. trans. A. Sheridan, NY: Norton, 1977; p. 217.

² «Outside-discourse» because the emergence of a discourse is notably conditioned by a lack with which the subject operates through a separation from his/her jouissance, a separation made possible by the paternal metaphor which localizes the jouissance as phallic, even if it is «not-all,» which is to say feminine jouissance.

³ Anne Lysy-Stevens. «Articulations cliniques de ϕ_0 » *Les Feuilletts du Courtil #1*: May, 1989; p. 27.

⁴ *Ibid.*; p. 32.

⁵ *Ibid.*; p. 31.

⁶ It is possible to speak in the feminine in the french language because most words have a gender and must be either masculine or feminine. We do not have this possibility in the english language in which all words except personal pronouns are of neuter gender.

The author gives the example, «Je suis contente» which translates into I am contented. But the translation doesn't serve to show the distinction of gender. The final e of the feminine «contente» makes the french speaker pronounce the t with an emphasis which gives an audible difference for the native speaker from the masculine «content» where the t is restrained, almost swallowed. [trans. note].

⁷ In France, the term is «papillon blanc». The *Papillons blancs* is a circuit of specialized institutions for children having learning disabilities.

