

A Psychosis More Ordinary: A Lacanian Treatment of Paranoia

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Many patients who are diagnosed as borderline within psychiatric discourse are, within the Lacanian orientation, more likely to be considered to have a psychotic structure even though there has been no psychotic break. The concept of 'ordinary psychosis' was developed by Jacques-Alain Miller to describe a psychosis that has not been triggered, or has been triggered and has since stabilized. This is not a diagnostic category but rather an epistemic one; it provides a way of thinking about and treating patients who are not clearly neurotic but do not present with any obvious psychotic phenomena.

It is a commonplace to state that Freud developed the theory and practice of psychoanalysis from listening to hysterics, those intractable, unrewarding and disturbing patients whom doctors had little idea what to do with, and who confronted their doctors with what they did not know. Where neurosis provided a fertile theoretical ground for Freud, the theorization and treatment of psychosis was the route taken by Lacan in his development of Freud's theory. Where Freud regarded psychotics as unsuitable for psychoanalytic treatment, Lacan's foregrounding of the unconscious as being 'structured like a language' (Lacan (1993[1955-56], p. 167) - a formulation derived from Freud's early work, 'A project for a scientific psychology' (Freud 1895) and *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud 1900a) in particular - offered a new way to think about psychosis. Lacan's interest in psychosis began with his doctoral thesis on a case of paranoid psychosis, a 'pre-Lacanian' analysis of the case, in the sense that Lacan had not yet developed his theoretical vocabulary (Lacan 1975[1932]). He had made major theoretical inroads by the mid-1950s with his third seminar on the psychoses in

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1955-56, and 'On a question prior to any possible treatment of psychosis' written two years later (Lacan 2006[1957-58]). Lacan returned to the question of the theory and treatment of psychosis in his later seminars, *RSI* (Lacan 1974-75) and *Le Sinthome* (Lacan 1975-76). Although he radically rethinks his earlier position in the later seminars, he does not dismiss the validity of those ideas. Instead of focusing on the failure at the symbolic level of discourse, a failure that is clearly evident in a florid psychosis, he places his emphasis on untriggered psychosis and what can be done through linguistic intervention in the analytic session to prevent the triggering of a psychosis, or to work to maintain the stabilization of a psychosis that has been triggered. Jacques-Alain Miller has employed the term 'ordinary psychosis' to refer to untriggered psychosis, or a psychosis that has stabilized, in order to distinguish it from 'extraordinary' psychosis, that is, one with a well-developed delusional system exemplified by the case of Judge Schreber and described minutely in *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (Schreber 2000[1903]) and Freud's account of the case (Freud 1911c).

What follows is a brief overview of the theoretical concepts that inform the treatment of a paranoid psychosis within the Lacanian orientation and a case study which will illustrate the most relevant points of theory and practice. Lacan's elaboration of psychosis develops around the mechanism of 'foreclosure' [*forclusion*], his translation of Freud's concept of *Verwerfung*, the radical rejection of an idea from the ego (Freud 1894a, pp. 58-9; Lacan 1993[1955-56], p. 321). In Lacan's usage, foreclosure is an absolute repudiation of a fundamental signifier from the subject's symbolic system; this foreclosed element will return in the real of the subject's psychic experience in the form of a delusion (Lacan 1993[1955-56], pp. 12-13, 145-50). If something is foreclosed it leaves a hole in the Symbolic, the effect of which will manifest in the subject's speech (Lacan 1993[1955-56], p. 203). There will be a point, for the subject, where the rule that determines the connection between language and meaning fails: the psychotic may speak English but there will be certain words to which he attributes a meaning that is not shared by other people. He may even invent a word, a neologism that carries a meaning unique to his delusional framework. For this reason, Lacan will describe the psychotic as one who is within language but outside discourse because discourse depends on there being an accepted connection, decreed by convention, between a word and a meaning. Perhaps Lacan's most radical direction to the psychoanalyst in relation to the treatment of the psychotic patient is to occupy the position of the 'secretary' (Lacan (1993[1955-56]), p. 206). That, is the psychoanalyst occupies a place of active listening, of asking for clarification, of an acceptance of the psychotic's view of things. Rather than offering interpretations - contra-indicated in the treatment of paranoia in particular, as the interpretation can produce persecutory effects - the analyst supports the delusional structure because it is the means through which the psychotic has found some stability.

Within the session the analyst will listen attentively to the psychotic's speech for points where delusional elements appear and offer a symbolic support in a structural sense - that is, the analyst will offer words that function as does a third leg on a stool. For example, Thomas, whose case I will be discussing below, finds it very difficult to interpret tone when someone makes a bantering comment to him about something he has said or done. He always hears the comment as mocking and aggressive and it produces great stress to the point where he has to get away from his persecutor. He realizes such rapid exits make him look foolish and strange but for him the situation is, as he puts it, 'a matter of life or death'. Together we develop some phrases that I refer to as 'limit statements', that is, aphorisms that he can have ready to put in place when the abyss of extreme anxiety suddenly opens before him. In the instance above I asked him what the person who had spoken to him was like. He said: 'Peter can be a bit sarcastic'. Such a statement, in that it names the attribute of that person which has the capacity to terrify Thomas, works to circumscribe the attribute in the other and thus has the effect of limiting his anxiety. Peter speaks, and instead of a life or death situation there is one where Peter has said something 'a bit sarcastic' and so it can be ignored - or, at least, Thomas can hold his ground. Thomas is becoming far more adept at utilizing such limit statements in his working life. Sometimes they are more effective than at others but they provide him with a structure and hence asymbolic support. To change the metaphor, one could say that they help to knot the loose threads that could lead to the unravelling of Thomas.

Ordinary Psychosis

While Schreber's psychosis with its elaborate delusion produced a new world and a new breed of men, the category of ordinary psychosis is characterized by the banal.¹ Indeed in contemporary nosological categories, many patients termed borderline would be diagnosed by Lacanian analysts as psychotics in a structural sense. Even though their psychosis has not been triggered, there is evidence of a foreclosure in their speech. When Lacan renewed his focus on the structure of psychosis in his later seminars, it was with a different conceptual emphasis in the treatment. The role of the analyst was to provide a way that the Symbolic, Imaginary and Real registers of the subject's psychic experience could be knotted together. For the subject with a triggered psychosis, there is a hole in the symbolic and an imaginary support appears in the Real of the subject's psychic experience in the form of the delusion. For the untriggered psychotic, or the subject whose psychosis has been triggered but which has since stabilized, working with that subject to knot the registers of his experience together can be very effective. Lacan's seminar *Joyce and the Sinthome* (Lacan 1975-76) considers James Joyce as an untriggered psychotic. Lacan argues that Joyce's linguistic inventions, particularly in *Finnegan's Wake*, demonstrate how

writing is both a symptom and a supplement [*suppléance*] that repairs the fault in Joyce's Symbolic register and prevents the triggering of a psychosis.

Ordinary Psychosis and Lacan's Theory of Discourse

At the Paris Seminar in English in 2008 on the subject of ordinary psychosis, Marie-Hélène Brousse maintained that ordinary psychosis is an epistemic rather than an objective category. Jacques-Alain Miller developed the concept of ordinary psychosis in response to what he perceived to be a change in the dominant discourse of late capitalism within our consumer culture. There has been a diversification of norms which has resulted in a change in the nature of the social link between individuals. There is no longer a clearly right and a wrong way to enjoy sexually as there was in Freud's day, and this has had an effect on the nature of the Law as regulator of desire and the conceptualization of the Father as representative of that Law. There has been a shift from an absolute prohibition as the organizational principle of psychic sexuality to a situation where multiple ways of enjoying sexuality are permissible.

Where there is a change in discourse, there is a change in the presentation of the symptom and what we now see in the clinic is an increase in the field of addictions indicative of an autistic mode of enjoyment - that is, one that does not need an other to produce satisfaction - and hence there is the breaking of a social link. In traditional readings of the Lacan of the 1950s, he is seen to privilege the register of the Symbolic (that is, language and the inscription and enchainment of signifiers in the unconscious). The concept of ordinary psychosis is a development of what is known to followers of Lacan as the 'Borromean' clinic. It is named thus because of the form of the insignia of the Borromeo family: three interlocked circles in a triangular configuration, each of which is dependent for its place on the other two circles. If one circle breaks, all circles are disconnected. The interdependence of the circles offers an image to illustrate the interdependence of the three Lacanian registers (Real, Symbolic and Imaginary). The breaking of the interconnection would indicate a psychotic break. Lacan took this image and the notion of knotting (three circles of interlocked string could form a Borromean knot) to indicate that the registers of the Symbolic, Imaginary and Real are of equal significance. Indeed, where there is no unifying cultural discourse, all we are left with are these three registers and they can be enough for us to function. In today's clinic of psychosis, Brousse argued, the forming of a supplementary support comes through a particular manner of knotting the registers together. This knotting stabilizes the psychotic patient. We have moved away from the notion of the subject of the signifier to a focus on what is singular to each subject. That is, what is his mode of unconscious enjoyment? We could say that in ordinary psychosis the subject has found a way of communication with the symbolic Other which is different from the way

other subjects function, but he has enough 'know-how' to pass as one of them.

In Brousse's elaboration, the mother's desire for her child is valorized: she desires that her child be something in particular. This is the power of 'appointment' [*nommer à*] attributed to the mother. Brousse maintained that throughout Lacan's work he explored the concept of naming, from the passive (something is named), to the active (naming as the function of the symbolic Father who represents the Law). In his later work his thinking shifted to the idea of nomination *without* an authority that names. Brousse placed this development in relation to the understanding that the clinical structures (neurosis, perversion and psychosis) rely on three grammatical and logical principles of negation: repression, disavowal and foreclosure, respectively. Lacan filled the gap between negation as a logical principal and the 'No' of the prohibition of incest that organizes the unconscious, by naming it: 'Name-of-the-Father'. The later notion 'to appoint to' which follows from the cultural foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father (that is, anything is permitted as long as it doesn't break the law of the land) means that, instead of a 'master discourse', there is a notion of 'ratio' that represents a given social order. This 'ratio' accommodates a diversification of 'norms'. In this process, sexual meaning is transformed into social meaning. According to Brousse, the social norm is now stronger than the Name-of-the-Father and its unequivocal 'No'. Drawing from contemporary culture, Brousse emphasized Lacan's point that the super-ego's demand to enjoy is a 'Do that' rather than a 'Don't do that'. This super-ego is stronger than the ego-ideal; it is concerned above all with conformity to social conventions. Ordinary psychosis, in its pure banality, is, in this sense, super-social; ordinary psychosis can be detected in the subject's lack of conformity to recognized standards, a point that concurs with Miller's precept.

What Characterizes Ordinary Psychosis?

Jacques-Alain Miller developed the concept of ordinary psychosis in 1998. In contrast to the triggering characteristic of the classical notion of psychosis, ordinary psychosis has no absolute definition. In fact it is a category developed to avoid the rigid binarism of the clinic and the differential diagnosis of neurosis or psychosis. The category of ordinary psychosis is a way of introducing a point of inclusion for those who do not fit the determinants of neurosis or psychosis. It is not a new diagnostic category; rather, ordinary psychosis is a way of thinking about clinical phenomena. Miller found a reference point for this categorization in Lacan's paper 'On a question prior to any possible treatment of psychosis' (**Lacan 2006[1957-58]**) where he considers psychosis as a variation on the structure of neurosis. The delusion is symbolic precisely because it is a way of ordering the world. Miller cited Lacan's comment in his later teaching that the symbolic order is itself a

delusion in the sense that 'making sense' is delusional. The analyst's 'understanding' of a patient is in fact a participation in the way the patient makes sense of the repetitions in his life.

For Miller, ordinary psychosis is a form of clinical practice that looks for small clues. Sometimes a psychosis is not clearly manifest but at the same time the subject does not present with the stability or consistency of a neurosis. In ordinary psychosis there are indicators of some disturbance in the innermost juncture of the subject's sense of his life. This unease can occur in relation to the social, to the body and to subjectivity itself. For example, the analyst would consider the nature of the subject's identification with his social function: what is his profession or position within his family? Can the subject make a place for himself in the world? Does he experience powerlessness in relation to his function? Is there a mysterious gap or an invisible barrier that stops him performing his function? Does he have a good enough identification with his body? The body is always strange; it has its own way. While the neurotic has imaginary ways of coming to terms with his body, the psychotic subject needs a ruse in order to appropriate his own body. He has to find a way to tie his body to himself; piercing or tattoos can have this function in that they offer a form of support or stabilization for the body image. Miller described the subjective order of ordinary psychosis as being characterized by a 'vagueness' that has a non-dialectical quality: it is not organized by an inter- or intra-subjective relation. At the same time there are elements of fixation. There could be a fixity of the subject's identification to the waste object, an identification that is experienced as traumatic. The ordinary psychotic rejects himself; he realizes the waste in his own person. His identity may be cobbled together from bits and pieces of detritus.

According to Miller, ordinary psychosis will be triggered by a sudden cut in the subject's relation to the body, to the social or to his own subjectivity. For example, he might have an accident that affects his body in a significant way, or he could lose his job. If, in the latter case, the patient has lost his professional 'name', his title, he becomes nothing but an object to be persecuted by the Other. For example, a middle-aged man had a psychotic break after he lost his 'name' - 'good husband' - when he was sacked and could no longer provide for his family. Being a provider was the determinant, for him, of being a 'good husband'.² In the clinic of ordinary psychosis the function of the analyst is to locate the register of the disconnection and find a mode of reconnection or knotting that will work for the particular subject: as signifier, as image or in the real of the body. Where there is a foreclosure of an element in the Symbolic, the aim of the treatment of psychosis is to create a supplementary way of managing.

In the case which follows I am attempting to demonstrate the way of working with a psychotic patient to produce this supplementary way of dealing with his experience. Although Thomas has a paranoid psychosis, his psychosis has not been triggered for a number of years. He holds a

responsible job and maintains friendships. This patient falls into the category of 'ordinary psychosis' in that his psychosis has been stabilized through what, I will argue, is a knotting of the Symbolic, Imaginary and Real registers of his psychic experience within the treatment.

A Paranoia More Ordinary

This is the case of a man in his early 40s whom I have been seeing weekly, and sometimes fortnightly, for six years. He had been referred to me by a colleague who had seen him for ten years, and it was she who witnessed his psychotic breaks. He takes anti-psychotic medication and is now on a very low dose. Despite the medication he still has occasional incidents of paranoia for only a few seconds or minutes but he can be quite objective about these incidents and they do not produce much anxiety. He generally changes his employment quite frequently, always hoping that the next job will be better, that is, less stressful. He is very anxious if in the new job he meets someone with whom he has worked elsewhere and who might know about his paranoia or his occasionally odd behaviour, and tell others. He is highly educated in a technological field with postgraduate qualifications in his discipline and in business; he finds work readily, often through being 'head-hunted'. Despite enormous anxiety, he manages to impress at interview. In other words he 'passes'.

Thomas was very anxious when we first met; he was sweating and agitated and could not look at me. He told me that he was feeling quite paranoid. Nevertheless he spoke about his first paranoid experience when he was a university student giving a class presentation and suddenly felt that everyone was looking at him strangely. Major psychotic breaks have occurred twice and both of these breaks have happened at work. Thomas was a supervisor at a big company and associates the first break with having to work out how to sack someone. He was standing with some colleagues and suddenly everything felt out of control; it was as if the 'world was watching'. One of his colleagues was saying things that sounded as if he were making fun of him. He said: 'I had the idea that I would be killed if I moved.' Thomas had become very agitated and the police and an ambulance were called. He was terrified that he was going to be sent to prison where he would be raped. He was diagnosed as bi-polar and hospitalized for ten days. The second major break was also triggered when a potential conflict situation arose at work (a different job) and the same delusion about the police, jail and rape appeared.

Thomas makes a distinction between 'real' paranoia which refers to an auditory hallucination - 'everyone is really talking about me' - and the sense that he might have when watching TV or driving or at the supermarket. The latter is a particularly fertile field for paranoia; it gives rise to the feeling that everything is directed at him. The trigger for paranoia is always the perception of a demand that cannot be met, a demand in the face of

which he is defenceless: he will disappoint the other, the other will be angry and he will be punished, even annihilated. Any perception of potential conflict with an authority figure could produce paranoid sensations. This might occur with his boss, his landlord, or a colleague whom he has distinguished as smart and whom he perceives to be playing 'mind games' with him. The paranoia appears in the transference from time to time. Thomas may think I am critical of him; or occasionally he has the thought I may be angry with him if, say, he has to change an appointment time. He says: 'For my whole life I have always thought I am in the wrong and will be punished.'

The Relationship with the Father

Thomas's father continues to dominate his life even though he died when Thomas was a young man. He often appears in Thomas's speech, and he always refers to his father in relation to paranoia. He describes his father's death as the worst thing that ever happened to him. It was the experience of 'losing my entire world'; he felt as if he were invisible. His father was very critical and often angry with his son. Thomas has internalized a severely critical paternal voice. Nothing he ever did was good enough for his father; even being the top student of his year did not please his father because he hadn't been the top student the year before. Thomas's father always had to win and would crush anyone whom he considered to be a competitor - especially his son. He had no idea what he could do or how hard he should work to make his father proud of him. His father had told him that in order to be a winner at study or work you have to live like a hermit, not have a woman and give 200% to the job. Indeed, you had to be 'married to the job'. Thomas was often terrified of his father and his father would see the fear and taunt him. He says he is very afraid of conflict because 'it is always a fight to the death'. One of the ways Thomas developed to deal with his father was humour: if he made his father laugh he could not be angry at the same time. In the sessions he would often use humour which I would take as a signal that my words might be producing anxiety in him.

Thomas's father's statements return in his encounters with others; he experiences directions as absolute demands and comments as mockery. These everyday exchanges are traumatic for him; they take on a paranoid colouring and determine his relations with the people with whom he works. It is clear that there is no distinction between Thomas's identification with the signifiers his father gave him and his representation by them. Thomas is his father's words.

Relationship with the Mother

Thomas's mother also has a determining effect on his paranoia: where the father continues to exist in the form of an annihilating demand, his mother's

effect is to destabilize Thomas. Her demand is impossible in a different way. Where his inability to answer a question posed by his father produced the fear that something terrible would happen, he described his mother as taking away the pleasure of each day. He felt that whatever he was doing he should be doing something else. Rather than giving Thomas an orientation in his life, she always cast doubt over any job choice he made, suggesting to him that he could find something better. As a consequence, as soon as Thomas starts a job he thinks he should go elsewhere and rarely stays in a job for more than a year.

Thomas's mother has always been over-involved in his life and would behave seductively with him in his adolescence and young adulthood. She has a key to his apartment and will let herself in at anytime. Thomas says he is trying to separate from his mother but, at the same time, he recognizes that 'her life is my life'. Thomas's mother has a partner who is a great source of calm and support. Apart from his analysis, this man provides the only reliable point of reference and orientation in Thomas's life.

A Business of His Own

On what grounds am I calling this paranoia 'more ordinary'? It is because Thomas has developed his own means of knotting the registers of his psychic experience. In the third session, the form of this knot was introduced: 'I get very excited by the idea of having my own business.' There would barely have been a session when this idea has not been introduced. Being in paid employment is a frustrating necessity; Thomas rationalizes earning money in terms of providing the means to fund his own business, a business that is always in the making. I am arguing that the signifier 'my own business' functions as a supplement in the place of a foreclosed signifier. He calls the idea of his own business: 'My safety net. My life.'

When Thomas is at work he often thinks about how he will go about establishing his own business, sometimes compulsively. This can lead to some paranoia when he can't get the idea of the business out of his head. The business is his back-up plan: he uses the acronym BUP. The very idea of the business helps Thomas to draw a line between himself and the persecutory Other.

When Thomas starts building the website for his business he also 'makes' his name, quite literally. During a period of about six months when brief incidents of paranoia were disturbing him to the point that they were getting in the way of his work and he decided to leave his job, he devoted himself to his own business night and day, cold-calling potential clients and sending out hundreds of letters. He received very little response but was not daunted. Thomas found another job and redefined the field of his own business; he would work on it every evening. The business is a dream that he is always trying to make into a reality.

Employment

Thomas has been employed in very high pressure industries, often working 12 hours days. His experience at each job is always the same. He is terrified that he has made a mistake in his calculations, terrified that the boss might be angry with him, terrified that he will be sacked. There will always be colleagues who seem to be mocking him, or setting him up to fail. Often Thomas has returned to work in the weekend to check if he has really made an error or whether it is just his anxiety that he has. There are certain compulsive checking practices that have a stabilizing effect, despite their inconvenience. However, just as he could not please his father, no matter how hard he works he knows he will never be able to please his boss, whoever that boss might be. While everyday is very stressful, he manages to stay in a job because it enables him to work on developing his own business. His 'BUP' thus gives him the support to occupy a place in the world.

Treatment

For the first five years of the treatment the work has focused on creating structures where there were none and developing 'limit statements' that could be called upon to create some distance between Thomas and the Other. These are simple statements such as: allow time to check; step back; it's OK to ask a question. We have worked to limit compulsive acts and thoughts that stop being reassuring and become instead persecutory demands. Thomas is very articulate and self-aware and he has picked up some psychoanalytic concepts which help him organize his thinking. He thinks of ways in which language can be used to circumscribe anxiety. In the work context, Thomas has developed phrases that introduce a pause in the process which allow him to 'locate' himself. He uses phrases such as: 'I think we should revisit this project ...', or 'I have paid my dues' (this will justify finishing work at a reasonable hour). He calls these 'anchoring points'. I remind him that there are rules that govern the behaviour of people in organizations, which reassures him, although he is not entirely convinced of their existence.

On many occasions I have linked the idea of the demand of the boss against which Thomas is powerless with the impossible demand that he please his father. He is much relieved by this connection for its explanatory value but it has to be reinstated many times. We also speak about the lack in the Other: the Other isn't whole, the Other can be anxious too. When, at work, his boss told him that *he* was stressed, Thomas was amazed: the all-powerful Other can be stressed just as he can. During the treatment he has become less afraid of his paranoia, a development commensurate with having more signifiers with which to talk about it. There has been a marked change in the content Thomas brings to the sessions.

There have been some very significant moments in the treatment. Returning to his job after a holiday period Thomas said that when he is at work he feels as if he is in prison. Among the reasons why the idea of having his own business is so important for Thomas is that it provides a potential avenue of escape. He always needs to know how he will make his exit, including from his sessions with me. We worked on separating the anxiety about failure and getting fired that derive from his fear of his father, from the anxiety at the thought of his mother's inevitable disappointment if he left his job. This led to a new signifier - 'I don't care' - referring to both getting fired and his mother's disappointment. For Thomas to say he doesn't care is quite something. When I say that 'I don't care' separated him from the Other's demand, he is delighted. He is reassured and feels more confident about managing his working life.

Two weeks later he reports a 'fragmenting - my confidence has drained away; I am being engulfed by the Other'. He is afraid of being fired. His father's words about living in a cave if you want to be successful come back to him. When Thomas said that he should be giving the job 200%, I replied that 100% was quite enough. Thomas is working on his own business in the evening but thinking about it during the day and feels guilty. 'My Dad said his dream was to have his own business but he never had the right idea.' Thomas is always looking for the right idea.

Again things improve; Thomas introduces the signifier 'credit bank' for having done well and being praised. He says he will store the praise and use the good will for the next time he makes a mistake. When he is feeling pleased with his progress he might raise the question of marriage and children. Usually this is in the form of wondering if it will ever happen. This time he speaks of not wanting to be a father and how disturbing his father's attitude to fatherhood was for everyone: 'He really struggled'. This sense that his father struggled, that his father was not the omnipotent figure who terrified him, is both shocking and revelatory.

A major turning point occurred when Thomas had a dream, followed by the emergence in his speech of a benign paternal image. The dream was very uncharacteristic in that it had a metaphorical structure. In the dream he has a red sports car; it is stolen and he is devastated. Then someone suggests that he lease one. Thomas offers his own interpretation of this dream in two ways. First: 'Something precious is taken from me' (he loves red sports cars and if he were a successful business man he would have one). Second: 'I over-invest in things when there are other ways of getting what I want.' He says the first interpretation relates to his mother who always criticizes his plans for his own business (something precious is taken away). The second interpretation he associates with his father: give 200% to the job. He realises that 200% is an overinvestment of his time and energy and he does not need to work so hard.

The dream leads him to speak once more about his passion for business but some new information is introduced. He tells me that, when he was doing his postgraduate degree, he was in the university library and came across a book lying on a shelf by a very wealthy philanthropist, and that book changed his direction in life. He decided that he would create a business and, in order to do that, he would do a degree in business. He has always been inspired by the philanthropist. Thomas considers him to be a 'genius' at making money but at the same time he is a very modest man. This leads Thomas to say: 'A man is someone who makes money.' I hear this as a 'nomination'; he defines his own manhood in a way that is possible for him. The benign paternal figure of the philanthropist loosens the deadly hold of the tyrannical father. He tells me once again how much he wants to quit his job. I say: 'It's not a prison; you can leave.'

These words stay with Thomas and he brings them to the following session. The idea that his job is not a prison means that it is not 'a matter of life or death. It is really a game.' However, he decides that he needs to earn money for his business so it is a matter of how to work on setting up his business in his own time and still maintain some belief in his day job. We speak about how it might be possible to give each activity some significance. Thomas offers the word 'hobby' for his own business. He remembers, as a boy, going to work with his father and being fascinated by a switch that could do two different things. I pick up the signifier 'hobby'. He could think of his job and his hobby in two different ways. He could give the job 80% of his time and the hobby 20% but, when he was engaged in either of those activities, he would give it 100% of his effort. Thomas is very pleased with this formulation and says: 'I can have a job and a Back-Up Plan'. Indeed this is his way of transforming the impossible demands of both his parents into something manageable. He always has another job - even if it is still in a developmental stage - and this satisfies his mother; he is working effectively 200% in both jobs combined, thus addressing his father's imperative.

In the following session he reports paranoid feelings because he is leaving his job; he has found a new one which he believes will be less pressured. He is very worried that his boss will be angry with him because he has not completed the project he had begun. This leads to the recounting of another dream: 'I am on a bus and a man turns to me with a really mean look. I realize that he is a criminal - above the law. He could do anything.' He associates to a smart young colleague who had looked at him in the same mean way when they first met and of whom he was frightened because he thought there might be conflict which would lead to death. He wonders whether this has anything to do with his father who would behave at times as if he were above the law. The fear of punishment is mitigated by his belief that, because the new job is less pressured, he will have more time to work on his business.

Naming and Knotting

The work that Thomas and I are engaged in is a process of nomination, of introducing signifiers that limit the effects of his paranoia. 'Back-Up Plan' (BUP), code for his business that is constantly being developed, has the effect of support and functions as a supplement to take the place of something missing. 'BUP' is a signifier that appears to effect a repair in the symbolic register where there has been a break. Another crucial support has come through Thomas's identification with the successful business man, the man who makes money. This notion of what it is to be a man gives him a way of taking up a position the world. He cannot do this through becoming a husband and father. His real love is his business; it is a sublimated enjoyment under the aegis of the philanthropist, a benign version of the father. This symbolization creates an edge: he nominates himself as a man who makes money not children; a man married to his job rather than a woman; a man whose proper name is a business name. His identification with the philanthropist is both symbolic and imaginary; it gives him an ideal, and a way of being a man, a know-how which his father could not transmit. When these threads remain knotted he describes himself as 'confident' and able to deal with the problems that arise in the workplace; when unknotted, paranoia assails him. It is clear that there are oscillations in the treatment that will continue: connection, disconnection, reconnection in the ongoing attempt to limit persecutory anxiety through translating it into signifiers upon which Thomas can rely.

Either the psychotic subject will work to produce a delusion or, working with the analyst in the treatment, a knotting of the Symbolic, Imaginary and Real registers of his psychic experience can be effected. It is a question of making a structure that is possible for the psychotic subject to live within, one that is not delusional. The knotting does far more than add the extra leg to the stool; it transforms the stool into something else: a safety net (to use Thomas's words) made of many discrete but inter-related threads, one that is produced from the real matter of Thomas's experience.

Notes

¹ Points made in this paper are derived from presentations at the Paris English Seminar organized by the Institute of the Freudian Field and the Department of Psychoanalysis of the University of Paris VIII, in collaboration with the University of Paris VIII, 7-12 July 2008. The attribution to the 'banality' of ordinary psychosis was reiterated by a number of speakers and is based on a description of the category by Jacques-Alain Miller. It was included in the opening address by Marie-Hélène Brousse, 'Ordinary psychosis in the light of Lacan's theory of discourse'. Points made by other presenters at this seminar follow. I have taken the liberty of 'translating' from the Lacanian discourse to one that is more readily accessible by those unfamiliar with this conceptual vocabulary. Inevitably in such a translation, precision suffers.

² This example was given in a paper by Tom Svolos entitled 'A-Topos Rex'.

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