

Chapter 1

Foreclosure

Lacan introduces the term *foreclosure* to explain the massive and global differences between psychosis and neurosis; neurosis operates by way of *repression*, while psychosis operates by way of *foreclosure*. This distinction is complemented by a third category, though arguably less secure and more problematic than the first two, of *disavowal*, as a mechanism specific to perversion. These three terms, which correspond, respectively, to Freud's *Verdrängung*, *Verwerfung*, and *Verleugnung*, along with the three-part division of neurosis, psychosis, and perversion, form the basis of what is effectively a differential diagnosis in Lacan's work, one that aspires to being truly psychoanalytic, deriving nothing from psychiatric categories. Thus underlying the elaboration of the notion of foreclosure is a clear and sharp distinction between three separate subjective structures.

Two features of this psychoanalytic nosology worthy of note are first that it assumes a structural unity behind often quite different symptoms that are expressions of the one clinical type, and second that there is no continuum between the various clinical types uncovered. A corollary is that in the case of psychosis this structure, a quite different structure from that of neurosis, is present even before the psychosis declares itself clinically.

ORIGIN OF THE TERM

While the term *foreclosure* is a common French legal term with a meaning very close to its English equivalent, for Lacan's purposes it clearly derives more directly from the work of French linguists Jacques Damourette and Édouard Pichon, *Des Mots à la Pensée*.¹ In their *Grammaire*, these authors speak of "foreclosure" in certain circumstances when an utterance repudiates facts that are treated as either true or merely possible. In their words, a proposition is "foreclosed" when "expelled from the field of possibility" as seen by the speaker who thereby "scotomizes" (a term they adopt from René Laforgue) the

possibility of something's being the case. They take the presence of certain linguistic elements as an indication of foreclosure, so that when it is said that

Mr. Brook is not the sort of person who would *ever* complain,

on Damourette and Pichon's analysis the word "ever" would flag the foreclosure of the very possibility of Mr. Brook's complaining; that is, that Mr. Brook should complain is expelled, foreclosed, from the field of possibility.

Whether this analysis is correct or not is largely irrelevant as far as Lacan is concerned since, although he derives the term from Damourette and Pichon, he puts it to quite a different use. For Lacan, what is foreclosed is not the possibility of an event's coming to pass but the very signifier, or signifiers, that makes the expression of impossibility possible in the first place. Thus "foreclosure" refers not to the fact that a speaker makes a statement that declares something impossible—a process closer to disavowal—but to the fact that the speaker lacks the very linguistic means for making the statement at all.

This is where the difference between repression and foreclosure lies. On Lacan's analysis of Freud's classic studies on the unconscious—*The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*—the mechanisms of repression and the return of the repressed are linguistic in nature. His thesis that the unconscious is structured like a language implies the claim that for something to be repressed it has first of all to be registered in the symbolic. Thus repression implies the prior recognition of the repressed in the symbolic system or register. In psychosis, on the other hand, the necessary signifiers are lacking altogether, and so the recognition required for repression is impossible. However, what is foreclosed does not simply disappear altogether but may return, albeit in a different form, from outside the subject.

Lacan chooses "foreclosure" to translate Freud's "*Verwerfung*," a term that though it is difficult to chart through the *Standard Edition* because it is not indexed is there usually given the more literal translation, "rejection" or "repudiation." For a number of years Lacan also employed more literal French translations, "*rejet*," or, on occasion, "*retranchement*." It was not until the very last session of his seminar on psychosis in 1955–1956 that he finally opted for the term that has since become so familiar: "I shan't go back over the notion of *Verwerfung* I began with, and for which, having thought it through, I propose to you definitively to adopt this translation which I believe is the best—*foreclosure*."²

It is reasonable to regard this choice as implying an acknowledgment that through his work Lacan raised to the level of a concept what in Freud had remained less clear in its meaning and more ambiguous in its employment. Freud does not use only the term "*Verwerfung*" in connection with psychosis, since at times, especially late in his work, he prefers to speak in terms of the *disavowal* of reality in psychosis. On a number of occasions Freud appeared to be grasping for a way of characterizing different mechanisms underlying neurosis and psychosis, without ever coming to any satisfactory conclusion. It is fair to say that with the work of Lacan the mechanism of foreclosure and the structure of psychosis are understood in a new way, one that has given the psychoanalytic treatment of psychosis a more secure basis.

Indeed, on more than one occasion Lacan declared that psychoanalysts must not back away from psychosis, and the treatment of psychotics is a significant feature of analytic work in the Lacanian orientation.³ It should be noted, though, that Lacan's remark is not to be taken as a recommendation to shoulder fearlessly the clinical burden imposed by the psychotic patient. It rather reflects Lacan's belief that the problems the psychotic raises are central to psychoanalysis and not a mere supplement to any supposed primary concern with neurosis.

Lacan observed that Freud's breakthrough in his examination of President Schreber's *Memoirs* was discovering that the discourse of the psychotic and other bizarre and apparently meaningless phenomena of psychosis could be deciphered and understood, just as dreams can. Lacan compares the scale of this breakthrough with that obtained in the interpretation of dreams; indeed, he is inclined to regard it as even more original than dream interpretation, arguing that while Freudian interpretation of dreams has nothing in common with previous interest in the meaning of dreams, the claim that dreams have meaning was itself not new.

However, Lacan also points out that the fact that the psychotic's discourse is just as interpretable as neurotic phenomena such as dreams leaves the two disorders at the same level and fails to account for the major, qualitative differences between them. Therefore, if psychoanalysis is to account for the distinction between the two, it cannot do so on the basis of meaning alone.

It is on this issue of what makes psychosis different from neurosis that Lacan focuses: How are we to explain the massive, qualitative differences between the two disorders? It is because Lacan is convinced that the delusional system and the hallucinations are so invasive for the subject, have such a devastating effect upon his relations with his world and with his fellow beings, that he regards as inadequate

prior psychoanalytic attempts to explain psychosis, ultimately including Freud's own.

Freud explains psychosis in terms of a repressed homosexual relationship to the father. In the Schreber case, Freud argues that it was the emergence of an erotic homosexual relationship towards his treating doctor, Professor Flechsig, and the conflict this desire produced in him that led in the first instance to the delusion of persecution and ultimately to the fully developed delusional system centered on Schreber's special relationship to God.

Freud also compares and contrasts the mechanisms of neurosis and psychosis in the following terms: in both there is a withdrawal of investment, or object-cathexis, from objects in the world. In the case of neurosis this object-cathexis is retained but invested in fantasized objects in the neurotic's internal world. In the case of psychosis, the withdrawn cathexis is invested in the ego. This takes place at the expense of all object-cathexes, even in fantasy, and it is this turning of libido upon the ego that accounts for symptoms such as hypochondria and megalomania. The delusional system, the most striking feature of psychosis, arises in a second stage. Freud characterizes the construction of a delusional system as an attempt at recovery, one in which the subject reestablishes a new, often very intense relation with the people and things in the world by his or her delusions.

One can see that despite the differences in detail on Freud's account between the mechanisms in neurosis and psychosis, both still operate essentially by repression: withdrawal of libido onto fantasized objects in neurosis, withdrawal of object libido onto the ego in psychosis. It is basically for this reason that Lacan finds it inadequate:

It is difficult to see how it could be purely and simply the suppression of a given [homosexual] tendency, the rejection or repression of some more or less transference drive he would have felt toward Flechsig, that led Schreber to construct his enormous delusion. There really must be something more proportionate to the result involved.⁴

THE FORECLOSURE OF CASTRATION IN THE WOLF MAN

However, it is apparent in his work prior to *Seminar III* that Lacan was already thinking about a mechanism in psychosis that is different from repression. In his "Response to Jean Hyppolite's Commentary on Freud's 'Verneinung,'" published in 1956 but dating back to a discussion in his seminar in early 1954, Lacan refers to Freud's use of the

term “*Verwerfung*” to characterize the Wolf Man’s attitude towards castration.⁵ The discussion focuses on a series of comments in this case study where Freud first contrasts repression and foreclosure in categorical terms, stating, “A repression is something very different from a foreclosure.”⁶ Freud then observes:

[The Wolf Man] rejected [*verwerft*] castration. . . . When I speak of his having rejected it, the first meaning of the phrase is that he would have nothing to do with it in the sense of having repressed it. This really involved no judgment upon the question of its existence, but it was the same as if it did not exist.⁷

Lacan considers that the Wolf Man’s attitude towards castration shows that, at least in his childhood, castration is foreclosed; it lies outside the limits of what can be judged to exist because it is withdrawn from the possibilities of speech. While no judgment can be made about the existence of castration, it may nevertheless appear in the real in an erratic and unpredictable manner that Lacan describes as being “in relations of resistance without transference” or, again, “as punctuation without a text.”⁸ While clearly indicating that a difference of register is at stake here, these formulations remain metaphorical. They will subsequently be developed into a more complex position concerning the vicissitudes of the foreclosed.

The implication in Freud is, then, that foreclosure is a mechanism that simply treats the foreclosed as if it did not exist, and as such it is distinct from repression where the repressed manifests itself in symptomatic formations. Pursuing this line of thought farther, Lacan turns to Freud’s paper “Negation,” a topic of his discussion with Jean Hyppolite at Lacan’s seminar at the Sainte Anne Hospital on February 10, 1954. In this paper Freud distinguishes between *Einbeziehung ins Ich* and *Ausstossung aus dem Ich*. Regarding these, respectively, as “introduction into the subject” and “expulsion from the subject,” Lacan argues that the latter constitutes the domain of what subsists outside of symbolization—that is, as what is “foreclosed.” This initial, primary expulsion constitutes a domain that is external to, in the sense of radically alien or foreign to, the subject and the subject’s world. Lacan calls this domain the “real.” He regards it as distinct from reality, since reality is to be discriminated within the field of representation (Freud’s *Vorstellung*), which Lacan, in taking Freud’s *Project* as his point of departure, considers to be constituted by the imaginary reproduction of initial perception. Reality is thus understood to be the domain within which not only the question of the possible existence of the object of

this initial perception can be raised, but also and moreover within which this object can actually be refound (*wiedergefunden*) and located. The distinction between “introduction into” and “expulsion from” the subject amounts, as Lacan construes it, to the distinction between reality and the field of representation—what Kant called the “world of appearances”—and a second realm, the real, which one could compare to Kant’s thing in itself, were it not for the fact that this real is capable of intruding into the subject’s experience in a way that finds him or her devoid of any means of protection. So although the real is excluded from the symbolic field within which the question of the existence of objects in reality can be raised, it may nevertheless appear in reality. It will do so, for instance, in the form of a hallucination, thus Lacan’s remark, “That which has not seen the light of day in the symbolic appears in the real.”⁹

Though there is no explicit statement to this effect, it is clearly implied in Lacan’s “Response to Jean Hyppolite’s Commentary on Freud’s ‘Verneinung’” that it is castration that is foreclosed. This is an issue that is taken up again in *Seminar III*.

What is at issue when I speak of [foreclosure]? At issue is the rejection of a primordial signifier into the outer shadows, a signifier that will henceforth be missing. . . . Here you have the fundamental mechanism that I posit as being at the basis of paranoia. It’s a matter of a primordial process of exclusion of an original within, which is not a bodily within but that of an initial body of signifiers.¹⁰

However, Lacan shifts ground in this seminar and comes to the conclusion that foreclosure of castration is secondary to the original foreclosure of the primordial signifier, the Name-of-the-Father.

SCHREBER’S WAY

Lacan devoted his seminar in 1955–1956 to a reexamination of Schreber’s *Memoirs* and Freud’s discussion of the case. Already armed with the distinction between *Verdrängung* and *Verwerfung*, Lacan’s intention was to explore the clinical, nosographical, and technical difficulties the psychoses raised.

In further examining the nature of foreclosure in *Seminar III*, the earlier views outlined previously undergo a number of modifications. While it seems to be a common assumption that foreclosure entails psychosis, there in fact appears to be nothing to rule out the possibil-

ity that foreclosure is a normal psychic process. Indeed, although he does not do this systematically, Lacan does not hesitate to speak of the foreclosure of femininity, or, later and in a different context, of the foreclosure of the subject of science. Foreclosure in psychosis is the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father, a key signifier that “anchors” or “quilts” signifier and signified. Thus it is only when what is foreclosed is specifically concerned with the question of the father, as in Schreber’s case, that psychosis is produced. The term “Name-of-the-Father” indicates that what is at issue is not a person but a signifier, one that is replete with cultural and religious significance.¹¹ It is a key signifier for the subject’s symbolic universe, regulating this order and giving it its structure. Its function in the Oedipus complex is to be the vehicle of the law that regulates desire—both the subject’s desire and the omnipotent desire of the maternal figure. It also should be noted that since foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father is one possible outcome of the Oedipus complex, neurosis and perversion being the others, these structures are laid down at the time of negotiating the Oedipus complex.

In contrast with Freud and also, in part, with his own earlier views, Lacan sees both the foreclosure of castration and the homosexual identification as effects and not causes of psychosis. In fact, he claims that Schreber’s symptoms are not really homosexual at all and that it would be more accurate to call them “transsexual.” These transsexual and other phenomena, for which Lacan will later coin the phrase “push towards woman,” *pousse à la femme*, are the result of the initial foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father and the corresponding lack in the imaginary of phallic meaning. The paternal metaphor is an operation in which the Name-of-the-Father is substituted for the mother’s desire, thereby producing a new species of meaning, phallic meaning, which heralds the introduction of the subject to the phallic economy of the neurotic and, therefore, to castration. This phallic meaning, as both the product of the paternal metaphor and the key to all questions of sexual identity, is absent in psychosis. The operation of the paternal metaphor is expressed in the following formula¹²:

$$\frac{\text{Name-of-the-Father}}{\text{Mother's Desire}} \cdot \frac{\text{Mother's Desire}}{\text{Signified to the Subject}} \rightarrow \text{Name-of-the-Father} \left(\frac{A}{\text{Phallus}} \right)$$

In psychosis, then, the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father is accompanied by the corresponding absence, foreclosure, of the phallic meaning that is necessary for libidinal relations. Without this phallic meaning the subject is left prey to—“left in the lurch,” as President Schreber

puts it—the mother's unregulated desire, confronted by an obscure enigma at the level of the Other's jouissance that the subject lacks the means to comprehend. It is not that the absence of this signifier, the Name-of-the-Father, prevents the symbolic from functioning altogether. Schreber is, after all, within the symbolic; indeed, he is a very prolix author, as his *Memoirs* so clearly demonstrates. Yet his entire literary output revolves around two connected, fundamental issues that he is unable to resolve: The question of the father and the question of his own sexual identity, two dimensions of his being that concern the symbolic and his embodiment.

The difference between Schreber and the neurotic here is striking: The neurotic finds a response, in the form of a neurotic compromise, a more or less satisfactory solution to the questions of the law and of sexual identity. Schreber, on the other hand, finds himself completely incapable of resolving them because the materials he needs to do so, the requisite signifiers, are missing.

Yet what is foreclosed from the symbolic is not purely and simply abolished. It returns, but, unlike the return of the repressed, it returns from outside the subject, as emanating from the real. As Lacan henceforth puts it: What has been foreclosed from the symbolic reappears in the real. It is important to recognize not only that what in the real returns is actual bits of language, signifiers, but also that the effects of this return are located at both the symbolic and imaginary levels.

With the emphasis upon the function of speech in *Seminar III*, where the Other is understood as the Other of speech and of subjective recognition, Lacan pays very close attention to the imaginary means by which the subject makes good the lack in the symbolic. For instance, Lacan considers that in psychosis there is a form of regression involved; there is regression, which is topographical rather than chronological regression, from the symbolic register to the imaginary. Thus when he declares that what has been foreclosed from the symbolic reappears in the real, it is marked by the properties of the imaginary.

Whereas the symbolic is linguistic in nature, the imaginary groups together a series of phenomena the cornerstone of which is the mirror stage. The mirror stage, which refers to the infant's early experience of fascination with its own image in a mirror, relates how the child responds with jubilation and pleasure to seeing a reflection of its own image. Lacan claims that the child is fascinated with its image because it is here that the child experiences itself as a whole, as a unity, for the first time. Furthermore, the experience of a self-unity lays the basis for the ego, which is formed through the subject's identification with this image. Of course, the reference to the mirror is not essential but is

intended to capture the fact that the ego and the other both come into existence together, and, moreover, that the ego and other (or, more strictly speaking, the image of the other, *i(a)* in Lacan's writing) are dependent upon one another and indeed are not clearly differentiated. The reference to the mirror captures this ambiguity by emphasizing that the ego is built upon an image of one's own body as it would be perceived from another's point of view.

The ego and its other are locked together in the sense that they come into existence together and depend upon one another for their sense of identity. For Lacan this dual relationship epitomizes the imaginary relationship, characterized as it is by imaginary identification and alienation and marked by an ambivalent relationship of aggressive rivalry with and erotic attachment to the other. In psychosis this means that relations with the other are marked by the erotic attachment and aggressive rivalry characteristic of the imaginary. Thus Professor Flechsig becomes an erotic object for Schreber but also the agent of Schreber's persecution.

In "On a Question Prior to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis" there is a shift away from the function of speech to the laws of language, which is accompanied by a simultaneous shift away from "intersubjectivity" to the relationship with the Other as the Other of language. As a consequence there is a somewhat more detailed analysis of language phenomena and language disorders in psychosis. This appears very clearly in Lacan's analysis of the psychiatric term "elementary phenomena," introduced by French psychiatrist de Clérambault, described by Lacan as his "only master" in psychiatry.

Throughout his work Lacan makes repeated references to these elementary phenomena, a term that embraces thought-echoes, verbal enunciations of actions, and various forms of hallucination. In *Seminar III* Lacan uses it as a general term for the phenomena produced in psychosis by the appearance of signifiers in the real. These are classically referred to as "primary phenomena," considered instrumental in the onset of the psychosis, while they themselves lack any apparent external cause. Lacan's use of the term dates back to his 1932 thesis in medicine, where he observes:

By this name, in effect, according to a schema frequently accepted in psychopathology, . . . authors designate symptoms in which the determining factors of psychosis are said to be primitively expressed and on the basis of which the delusion is said to be constructed according to secondary affective reactions and deductions that in themselves are rational.¹³

In *Seminar III* his task is to explain how these elementary phenomena result from the emergence of signifiers in the real. Lacan claims that if they are to be called elementary this has to be understood in the sense that they contain all of the elements of the fully developed psychosis.¹⁴ This approach is made possible by the recognition that all psychotic phenomena can in fact be analyzed as phenomena of speech, rather than as a reaction by the subject, in the imaginary, to a lack in the symbolic.

In "Question," elementary phenomena (though no longer called this) are analyzed as reflecting the structure of the signifier, resulting in an analysis of hallucinations that divides them into code phenomena and message phenomena.¹⁵

The code phenomena include the following:

- Schreber's *Grundsprache*, or basic language, and its neologisms and "autonyms." "Autonymous" is Jakobson's term for contexts in which expressions are mentioned rather than used—the first word in this sentence is an example. Jakobson describes this as a case of a message referring to a code. It is a common occurrence in ordinary language, but in Schreber's case there is a highly developed code-message interaction, moreover, one that also is reflected in the relationships between the "rays" or "nerves" that speak. These rays, Lacan says, are nothing but a reification of the very structure and phenomenon of language itself.¹⁶
- The frequently encountered phenomenon in psychosis of the enigma, along with psychotic certainty, which according to Lacan develops out of it.¹⁷ Lacan claims that there is a temporal sequence between these phenomena. First, there is an initial experience of an enigma, arising from an absence or lack of meaning that occurs in the place where meaning should be. The enigma arises because the expectation of meaning that the signifier generates is radically disappointed. An enigma is not just the absence of meaning but its absence there where meaning should be present. Thus in a second stage what was already implicit in the first comes to the fore, namely, the conviction, which by its very nature the signifier generates, that there is a meaning, or as Schreber's rays put it, that "all nonsense cancels itself out."¹⁸

One should note that in both sorts of case there is effectively a failure of language ("the code") to produce meaning ("the message").

In the first there is a communication of the structure of language, but no meaning is conveyed; in the second the absence of meaning gives rise to the conviction of the psychotic.

As examples of message phenomena Lacan gives the interrupted messages that Schreber receives from God, to which Schreber is called upon to give a reply that completes the message—for instance, “Now I will . . . myself . . .,” to which Schreber replies, “. . . face the fact that I am an idiot.” In calling these “message phenomena,” on the grounds that the sentence is interrupted at a point at which the indexical elements of the sentence have been uttered, Lacan appears to have in mind Jakobson’s observation that the “general meaning of a shifter cannot be defined without a reference to the message.”¹⁹

Both types of phenomena are examples of the return of the signifier in the real. Both indicate the appearance, in the real, of the signifier cut off from its connections with the signifying chain, that is, S_1 appears in the real without S_2 and, as a consequence, the “quilting” that would normally produce meaning cannot occur. This does not, however, result in the complete extinguishment of meaning but rather in the proliferation of a meaningfulness that manifests itself in the real in the form of verbal hallucinations, as well as in the enigma and the conviction the psychotic experiences.

Of special note as examples of the return of the signifier in the real are those verbal hallucinations, often persecutory, of the psychotic, such as the case of the hallucinated insult “Sow!” discussed in both *Seminar III* and “On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis,” where both imaginary and symbolic disturbances can be detected. On Lacan’s analysis the example displays disturbances of the code, but it also reveals the appearance in psychotic form of the same content that one finds expressed in different ways in neurotic formations of the unconscious—the utterance expresses the imaginary meaning of fragmentation of the body. What is perhaps different is that this emerges in the place from which phallic meaning has been foreclosed.²⁰

Given that the foreclosure of the signifier the Name-of-the-Father entails the corresponding absence of phallic meaning, it is to be expected that this will have particular consequences for the psychotic subject’s sexual identity. Lacan speaks of a push towards woman to describe the gradual transformation of sexuality in Schreber’s delusion as well as in other cases of psychosis. Prior to his psychosis Schreber lived as a heterosexual man with no apparent trace of feminization. The first intimation of this push towards woman is given in Schreber’s conscious fantasy just prior to the onset of his

psychosis, "How beautiful it would be to be a woman undergoing sexual intercourse." Subsequently Schreber's "manly honor" struggles against the increasingly desperate attempts by God to "unman" him and transform him into a woman. But he finally becomes reconciled to this transformation, recognizing as he does that his emasculation is necessary if one day he is to be fertilized by God and repopulate the world with new beings. In the meantime he will adorn his naked body with trinkets and cheap jewellery to enhance and promote this unavoidable feminization.

Lacan sees in this development two separate aspects to the restoration of the imaginary structure. Both were detected by Freud and both are, for Lacan, linked either directly or indirectly to the absence of phallic meaning in the imaginary. The first aspect has already been mentioned. It is Schreber's "transsexualism." The second aspect links "the subject's feminization to the coordinate of divine copulation."²¹ This psychotic drive to be transformed into a woman is an attempt to embody the woman in the figure of the wife of God. Lacan notes that transsexualism is common in psychosis where it is normally linked to the demand for endorsement and consent from the father.

What triggers a psychosis? Lacan argues that even though the onset of psychosis is largely unforeseeable, the psychotic structure will have been there all along, like an invisible flaw in the glass, prior to the appearance of the clinical psychosis, when it suddenly and dramatically manifests itself. And we can see this in Schreber, who had up until the age of fifty-one led a relatively normal life, enjoying a successful career and carrying out the demanding duties of a senior position in the judiciary.

Lacan holds that it is a certain type of encounter, in which the Name-of-the-Father is "summoned to that place [the Other] in symbolic opposition to the subject," that is the trigger, the precipitating cause, of a psychosis.²² What does this "symbolic opposition to the subject" mean? The issue is explored in the seminar on psychosis in a lengthy discussion that continues over a number of sessions of the function of what Lacan calls "*l'appel*," "the call," "the calling," "the appeal," or even "the interpellation." The discussion is not related specifically to psychosis but rather to a quite general function of language.

Lacan takes a number of examples from everyday French, drawing on the difference between "Tu es celui qui me suivras" and "Tu es celui qui me suivra," where the subordinate clause is in the second and third person, respectively. The basic idea can be hinted at by the English distinction between "shall" and "will." Consider these two statements:

You are the one who will follow me.

You are the one who shall follow me.

It is possible here to take the first as a description of or prediction about something that will come to pass: "I predict that you will follow me." The second, on the other hand, can serve as an appeal, where the interlocutor, the one who is being addressed, is called upon to make a decision, to pursue a course of action that he or she must either embrace or repudiate. This latter case is, for instance, exemplified by Jesus of Nazareth's invocation, his appeal, to his disciples-to-be. "I say to you, 'You are the ones who shall follow me.' Now, tell me, what is your reply, what do you say to this? Give me your answer, for now is the time to choose." In this example we could say that Jesus is "in symbolic opposition to" his disciples, or, we could equally well say he is asking them for "symbolic recognition," since his speech calls upon them to respond in a way that engages them in, commits them to, a decision, one loaded with practical consequences, as to whether they are to recognize him as the Messiah.

For Schreber, then, there is a moment when he is called, interpellated, by—or perhaps better "in"—the Name-of-the-Father. This is when the lack of the signifier declares itself, and it is sufficient to trigger the psychosis.

How is this symbolic opposition, this call for symbolic recognition, brought about in psychosis? Lacan gives this response: by an encounter with "a real father, not at all necessarily by the subject's own father, but by One-father [*Un-père*]." ²³ This is a situation that arises under two conditions: when the subject is in a particularly intense relationship involving a strong narcissistic component; and when, in this situation, the question of the father arises from a third position, one that is external to the erotic relation. For instance, and the examples are Lacan's, it presents itself "to a woman who has just given birth, in her husband's face, to a penitent confessing her sins in the person of her confessor, or to a girl in love in her encounter with 'the young man's father.'" ²⁴ And, as is well known, it also can occur in analysis, where the development of the transference can sometimes precipitate a psychosis. Lacan puts it thus:

It sometimes happens that we take prepsychotics into analysis, and we know what that produces—it produces psychotics. The question of the contraindications of analysis would not arise if we didn't all recall some particular case in our practice,

or in the practice of our colleagues, where a full-blown psychosis . . . is triggered during the first analytic sessions in which things heat up a bit.²⁵

Indeed, at issue in the treatment of a subject in analysis is the unpredictability of psychosis, the uncertainty of knowing in whom a psychosis may be triggered and the lack of diagnostic criteria for psychosis prior to its onset. And yet if Lacan's views on the structure of psychosis are right, then it makes sense to speak of "prepsychosis" in the case of subjects with a psychotic structure who are not clinically psychotic.

Once the psychosis is triggered, everything will have changed for good, but what about before the onset? It is in pursuing this question that the work of Maurits Katan on prepsychosis and that of Helene Deutsch on the "as if" phenomenon is discussed.²⁶ While Lacan finds Katan's characterization of the prepsychotic period unconvincing, facetiously remarking that nothing resembles a prepsychosis more than a neurosis does, he finds more of interest in Deutsch's work, and especially in what she refers to as the "as if" phenomenon, where, for example, an adolescent boy identifies with another youth in what looks like a homosexual attachment but turns out to be a precursor of psychosis. Here there is something that plays the role of a *suppléance*, a suppletion, that is, a substitute or a stand-in for what is missing at the level of the symbolic. Lacan uses the analogy of a three-legged stool:

Not every stool has four legs. There are some that stand upright on three. Here, though, there is no question of their lacking any, otherwise things go very badly indeed. . . . It is possible that at the outset the stool doesn't have enough legs, but that up to a certain point it will nevertheless stand up, when the subject, at a certain crossroads of his biographical history, is confronted by this lack that has always existed.²⁷

Suppletion can take various forms. The case of Deutsch's is a good example of imaginary suppletion, where the support derived from an identification with the other is sufficient to compensate for the absence of the signifier. The psychosis is thus triggered at the moment at which the imaginary suppletion with which the subject has until then been able to make do proves inadequate. It is not uncommon for this to occur at the beginnings of adult life when the subject loses the protective support of the family network—indeed, Lacan even goes so far as to evoke the imaginary identification with

the mother's desire as a means of maintaining the stability of the "imaginary tripod."

Lacan also considers that the delusion itself can provide the psychotic with a degree of stability, and this can be regarded as a second form of suppletion.²⁸ Considered by Freud as an attempt at cure, the stability of the delusional metaphor is seen by some in Lacan's school as the aim of the treatment of psychotics—an important consideration in light of the claim that psychosis is a discrete subjective structure that no treatment will cure.

A third form of suppletion is, despite the air of paradox, best called symbolic suppletion. It is an intriguing fact that some psychotics have been capable of making important scientific or artistic contributions. Cantor, the mathematician, is a famous example, but there are numerous such cases. We know about them because of the documented psychotic episodes these people underwent. But it is also interesting to speculate that there may be cases where the psychosis never declares itself and the clinical phenomena never eventuate. Perhaps in these cases the (pre)psychotic subject may find a form of substitute for the foreclosed signifier that enables the subject to maintain the fewest symbolic links necessary for normal, even for highly original and creative, functioning. In his 1975–1976 seminar, Lacan argues that James Joyce was such a case.²⁹ And, indeed, there are a number of indications that one can point to in support of the claim that Joyce was probably a psychotic who was able to use his writing as an effective substitute that prevented the onset of psychosis. This is an interesting thought, and I return to it later. There is something necessarily speculative about such cases, and Joyce himself is obviously such a special case that he can hardly serve as a model for others. Still, there are important issues here to do with the diagnosis of psychosis—could, for example, the so-called borderlines be situated here? Are they to be regarded as undeclared psychoses? Clearly the Lacanian model implies a search for indications of psychosis independent of and prior to the onset of a full-blown clinical psychosis.

What causes foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father? Assuming the psychotic structure is laid down at the moment of the Oedipus complex, under what conditions is this foreclosure produced? Lacan does not have much to say about this issue, though he does make a criticism of certain views and offers some positive observations of his own. The criticism is that it is not enough to focus on the child-mother or child-father relationship alone; one must look at the triadic, Oedipal structure. Thus in looking at child, mother, and father, it is not enough to think in terms of "frustrating" or "smothering" mothers, any more

than in terms of “dominating” or “easygoing” fathers, since these approaches neglect the triangular structure of the Oedipus complex. One needs to consider the place that the mother, as the first object of the child’s desire, gives to the authority of the father or, as Lacan puts it, one needs to consider “the place she reserves for the Name-of-the-Father in the promotion of the law.”³⁰ Lacan adds (and this is the second point) that one also needs to consider the father’s relation to the law in itself. The issue here is whether or not the father is himself an adequate vehicle of the law. There are circumstances, he says, that make it easier for the father to be found undeserving, inadequate, or fraudulent with respect to the law and therefore found to be an ineffective vehicle for the Name-of-the-Father. This leads him to remark that psychosis occurs with “particular frequency” when the father “functions as a legislator,” whether as one who actually makes the laws or as one who poses as the incarnation of high ideals.³¹

HEAVENLY JOYCE

The discussion of Joyce some twenty years after the seminar on Schreber was not as it happens merely an occasion to explore further the issue of suppletion in relation to foreclosure. It resulted in nothing less than a reformulation of the way in which the differences between neurosis and psychosis should be approached and also contributed to an understanding of the difference between paranoia and schizophrenia.

From the discussion so far it can be seen that initially neurosis is taken as the model for the formation of symptoms and the construction of the subject. When, in 1959, Lacan writes that “the condition of the subject . . . depends on what unfolds in the Other,” it is clear that the structure of psychosis is conceptualized as a variant of the structure of neurosis.³² If one examines the R schema and Lacan’s comments on it, it is apparent that the Name-of-the-Father underpins the phallic signification, ϕ , and all object relations as a consequence.

The psychotic structure is then a transformation produced by the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father and the corresponding *lack* of phallic meaning of the neurotic structure. This thesis is apparent in the transformation of the R schema into the I schema.

Lacan’s approach in his seminar on James Joyce offers a different perspective, one from which what Colette Soler, following Jacques-Alain Miller, has called a “general theory of the symptom” can be extracted.³³ This general theory is applicable to both neurosis and psychosis, whereas the theory of neurotic metaphor becomes a special case, one created by the addition of the function of the Name-of-the-

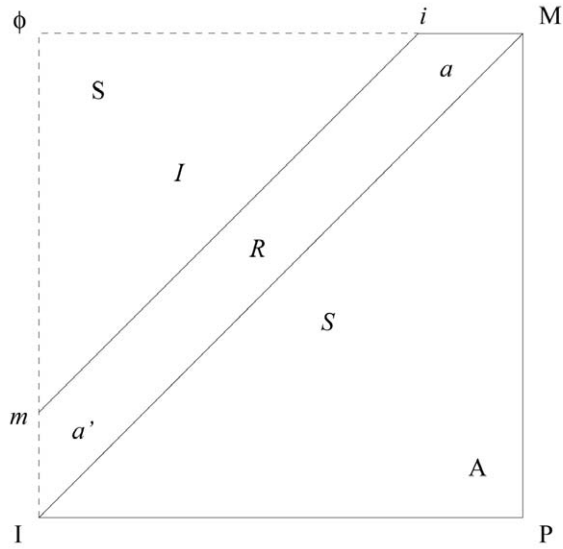


Figure 1.1 R schema

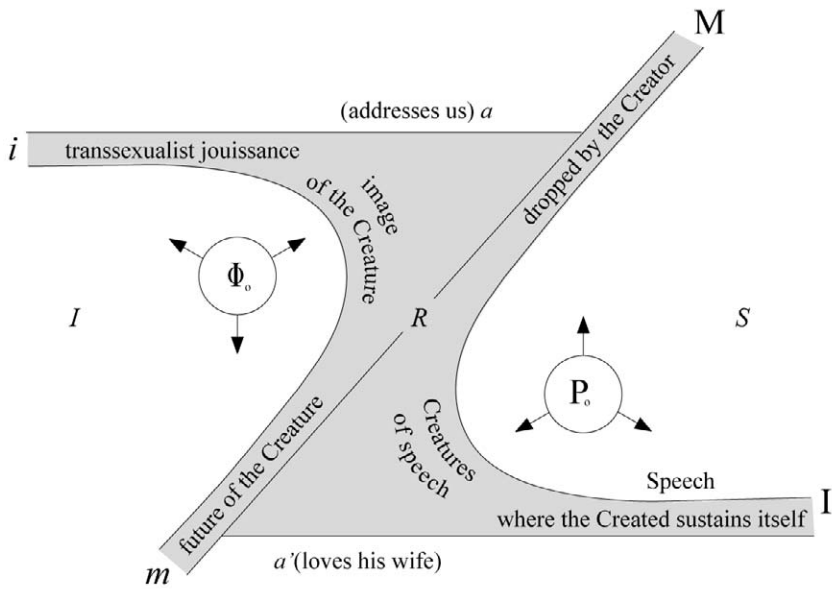


Figure 1.2 I Schema

Father. Thus rather than taking neurosis as the primary structure and considering psychosis to be produced by the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father, neurosis is henceforth considered as a special case created by the introduction of a specific signifier. This step effectively generalizes the concept of foreclosure. The delusional metaphor of psychosis is *one* response to this foreclosure; the symptom-metaphor of neurosis is another.

Developing these views by way of topology Lacan revises his earlier thesis that the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real are linked like the rings of a Borromean knot—in such a way, that is, that severing any one link will untie the other two. (See Figure 1.3.)

However, in this seminar, he declares that it is incorrect to think that the three-ring Borromean knot is the normal way in which the three categories are linked. It is therefore not the case that the separation of the three rings is the result of some defect, because the three are already separate. Where they are joined, they are connected by a fourth link, the *sinthome*, which Lacan writes as Σ . (See Figure 1.4.)

The Name-of-the-Father is henceforth but a certain form of the *sinthome*: “The Oedipus complex is, as such, a symptom. It is insofar as the Name-of-the-Father is also the Father of the Name that every-

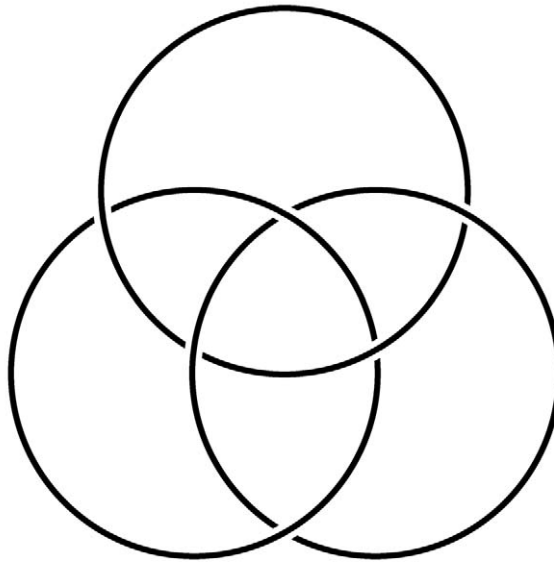


Figure 1.3 Borromean knot

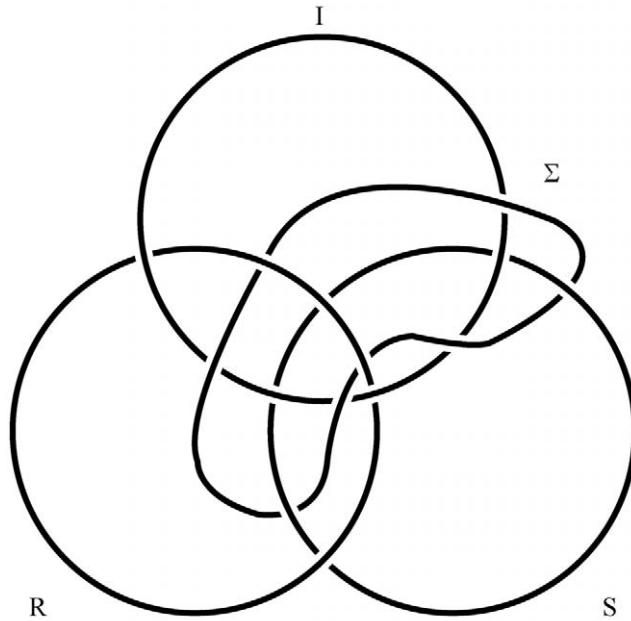


Figure 1.4 Four-ring Borromean knot

thing hangs together, which does not make the symptom any the less necessary." In *Ulysses* this father has to be "sustained by Joyce in order for the father to subsist."³⁴

Lacan's thesis, then, is that although Joyce was psychotic, he succeeded in avoiding the onset of psychosis through his writing, which thus plays the role for Joyce of his *sinthome*. Indeed, Lacan says, through his writing Joyce went as far as one can in analysis.³⁵ Joyce's achievement in preventing his own psychosis means that in him the psychotic phenomena appear in a different form both from neurosis and from a declared psychosis. Lacan locates the elementary phenomena and the experience of enigma, for instance, in Joyce's "epiphanies," fragments of actual conversations overheard, extracted from their context, and carefully recorded on separate sheets.³⁶ All of this was completed even before Joyce's first novel, and many of the fragments were subsequently reinserted unannounced into later texts. Torn from their context, the epiphanies remain nonsensical or enigmatic fragments and are striking for their qualities of incongruity and insignificance:

Joyce—I knew you meant him. But you're wrong about his age.

Maggie Sheehy—(*leans forward to speak seriously*). Why, how old is he?

Joyce—Seventy-two.

Maggie Sheehy—Is he?³⁷

What is so striking is not so much that the epiphanies do not make much sense, which is what one might expect of such fragments taken out of their context, but rather that Joyce, or Stephen, should describe these meaningless and enigmatic fragments, outside of discourse and cut off from communication, as a "sudden spiritual manifestation." Lacan claims that this process, in which the absence of meaning of the epiphany is transformed into its opposite, the certainty of an ineffable revelation, is comparable to the enigmatic experience and its conversion into psychotic conviction in Schreber. Joyce of course differs from Schreber, and differs in that he cultivates the phenomenon and transforms it into a creative work. In *Finnegan's Wake*, Joyce the craftsman transforms linguistic meaning into "non-sense" and vice versa, so that what corresponds to the enigmatic experience of a Schreber is thereby raised to the level of an artistic process.

It is therefore to be expected that the question of *jouissance* in psychosis should be treated somewhat differently in the seminar on Joyce. In the case of Schreber the foreclosure of phallic meaning leads to homosexual and transsexual impulses. For Freud, as we have seen, this is to be regarded as the consequence of a repressed passive homosexuality, whereas Lacan does not think that this will adequately account for the psychosis—it is more accurate to say that Schreber's virility itself is attacked by the return in the real of the castration that is foreclosed from the symbolic. In Schreber the barrier to *jouissance* is surmounted, and *jouissance* is no longer located outside of the body. Schreber's body is thus no longer the desert it is for the neurotic and is therefore besieged by an ineffable, inexplicable *jouissance*, which is ascribed to the divine Other who seeks his satisfaction in Schreber.³⁸

Joyce's writing transforms the "enjoy-meant" that literature normally conveys into *jouissance* of the letter, into an enjoyment that lies outside of meaning. But what is even more astonishing is that in a secondary way, through imposing or introducing this strange literature that is outside of discourse, he manages to restore the social link that his writing abolishes and to promote himself to the place of the

exception. Furthermore, he has the responsibility, which is usually assumed by the work of the delusion, for producing sense out of the opaque work, passed down to his commentators—thereby assuring the survival of his name.

One final important consideration is the particular prominence given in *Seminar XXIII* to the function of the letter in psychotic experience. In earlier work, in which Lacan spoke of the symptom as a formation of the unconscious on a par with dreams, jokes, and parapraxes, the symptom is taken to be a knot of signifiers excluded from discourse and therefore unable to be included in any circuit of communication. However, alongside this emphasis placed upon the signifier as such there are a number of important observations on the function of the letter. In fact, as early as 1957 Lacan had stated that the symptom is “already inscribed in a writing process.”³⁹ The materiality of the letter is discussed in “The Agency of the Letter,” while an important thesis of “The Seminar on *The Purloined Letter*,” in which Lacan makes his first reference to Joyce’s “a letter, a litter,” is that the letter is not just a signifier but also an object. As such, it may become a remainder, a remnant, a vestige left in the wake of the message it conveys. The letter may occupy a status not unlike a fetish object, as was the case with André Gide, whose letters were burned by his wife when confronted with evidence she could no longer ignore of his sexual exploits with young boys. Gide’s collapse belies the fact that the letters were the vehicle of a jouissance supplementary to the message they conveyed.⁴⁰ Similarly, the assumption in the seminar on Joyce is that the symptom is no longer to be regarded simply as a message excluded from the circuit of communication but also as a site of jouissance—while this does not make the theory of the signifier redundant, it stresses the localized effects of the materiality of the letter.

The thought that something fundamental may be excluded from the symbolic, and the role that this may play in understanding psychosis, was immediately grasped by Lacan, even prior to the discussion of Schreber in *Seminar III*, as a corollary of the thesis that the unconscious is structured like a language. Not only did this thought offer Lacan, with his psychiatric grounding, the means to develop a better theory of psychosis than psychoanalysis had previously managed to do, but the detailed work on the Schreber case also can be seen as a verification of the theoretical position Lacan had until then been developing in the context of neurosis alone. The Schreber case highlighted the nature of what it was that was foreclosed—the Name-of-the-Father. But it also brought the category of the real into much sharper focus than was apparent in earlier seminars, where the demarcation

between the imaginary and the symbolic was more pressing—no doubt as the result of a focus on neurotic structures. In this context the return to a discussion of psychosis and foreclosure in the seminar on Joyce is quite important, with the real taking on a new and more ramified role in the overall explanation of psychosis. What is of particular interest in the discussion of Joyce is that it presents a new theory according to which foreclosure is the universal condition of the symptom.