

Some further questions prior to any possible treatment of the psychoses

David Ferraro

In the 1970s, it was possible for Deleuze to claim that ‘everything new that’s come into psychoanalysis, from Melanie Klein to Lacan, has come from psychosis’.¹ I’m not so sure that this is true today. We could approach psychosis through a periodisation of Lacan, passing from imaginary, to symbolic, to real and ultimately to the Borromean know. Periodisation, however, is to Lacan’s teaching as scaffolding is to a building. It helps to reach some difficult places, but is not to be mistaken for the edifice itself. I note this as after 70 years of Lacanianism, the trend in some places is to emphasise a series of terms organised under the signifier of the ‘late’ Lacan, which sets up, as a foil, various other Lacans. For example, there is the Lacan for whom psychosis is an outcome of the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father, or the Lacan for whom psychosis is the outcome of a failure to adequately separate from the object *a*. Later, Lacan introduced the *sinthome*, which could be taken as an acknowledgement that ‘cure’ at the level of *jouissance* is not only not possible in psychoanalysis, it is also not necessary.

What has been added to these conceptions? In many parts of the Lacanian world, especially in the years of this century, it is the affirmation that the Oedipal drama, which Lacan eventually designated

as Freud’s dream, is a merely contingent familial and psychological arrangement, and one perhaps lapsing into extinction. The various teachings on ordinary psychosis are not especially rigorous or consistent when viewed *en masse*, but they do generally seek to refute the deficit model of psychosis, decentering neurosis. The psychotic is no longer a failed neurotic, rather, neurotic structuration is a particular knotting, with a contingent, if sometimes widespread *sinthome*. If the Name-of-the-Father was the organising principle determining a subject’s structural position, anchoring and stabilising the symbolic order, this was pluralised by Lacan himself and, according to some readings, displaced by the master signifier.² This latter can be isolated as part of the psychoanalytic procedure to be nominated as a signifier all alone, and moreover, this ‘all alone’ is not merely contingent upon the atomisation and fragmentation of neoliberal capitalism, but rather typifies the fundamental sociological and ontological dimensions of the contemporary subject.

Everyone is delusional, all structure is relative. There is a transferential unconscious as well as a real unconscious, but these do not stand in dialectical relation to each other, because the framework of the

1 Deleuze, 1995, p. 15.

2 Miller, 2011, *passim*.

'late' Lacan does not permit dialectical relations.³ Transferential questions are therefore diminished, even derided, as are questions of meaning, and of interpretation.⁴ These interpretations of Lacan's teaching most definitely have a textual basis, but they are no less interpretations for all that. Some arise from a scriptural reading of Lacan, as if he was not continually trying out different notions and then abandoning them, or using provocative phrases for effect. Some are extrapolations based on isolated remarks that appear in relatively minor texts, and almost all of these interpretations systematically excise that portion of Lacan's later teaching that deal with themes of poetics, the importance of kinship groups, and the fact that analysis is not merely monological. The distance between 'interpretation' and motivated mutilation in reading these late teachings is sometimes very slight.

The pivot in Lacan's teaching toward an alleged generalised foreclosure is usually paired, in contemporary psychoanalytic publications, with the same generalisation at the level of society and familial structure. Analysts who in case discussions conduct themselves with the utmost circumspection here permit themselves the wildest generalisations about entire societies and epochs. The age of the father is behind us.⁵ Society itself is mad, in some sense, or, rather as in Thatcherism, it doesn't exist, except as semblants and routines.⁶ The Other is reducible to the subject's puppet, and to think otherwise is tantamount to psychosis.⁷ The Name of the Father, far from being the logical outcome of a structural triangulation, is instead reduced to the person of the father qua patriarch.⁸ Since the patriarchy has been abolished, at least formally, his Name disappears also. The family is the site wherein the societal

meets the psychical, and the family has allegedly changed in ways that supposedly logically preclude a triadic or tetradic structure. Parents are 'all alone', as are their children.⁹ Family constellations have altered since the time of Freud. Even Catholic countries permit divorce, and besides, there are single parents, and same-sex couples and parents. Without blushing, our contemporary colleagues can ask questions of these families such as 'who is the father, who is the mother? Neither of them? Or both of them?'¹⁰ Allegedly, lineage itself no longer exists.¹¹ And not only does Lacan's teaching move away from the logic of the signifier, the symbolic order itself is now a suspect, even defunct notion. Lacan subordinates its significance and demonstrates its inconsistencies: on this basis, the interpreters of the 'late' Lacan have practically abolished the symbolic altogether, except as a pacifying illusion. The arguments behind these claims are usually brief and rather sketchy, along the lines of something-something science, something-something capitalism,¹² but the overall effect is that a certain reading of Lacan is paired with a certain interpretation of contemporary society, each pointing in the same direction: each is alone, and each is mad, that is, delusional.

If you had asked me a few years ago, I would have more or less agreed with many of the foregoing claims. I do wish to suggest not that they're entirely wrong, but there is a great deal that they ignore, despite having ossified into an institutional dogma and a university discourse. I'm not sure whether any contemporary Lacanians bother to read *Seminar III* these days, but if they did, they'd find some fun moments, such as when Lacan says of psychoanalytic publication that 'It seems that the ultimate point of the discourse is to give a sign to its readers

3 It is a minor theme of Miller's final seminar, from 2011 (above), that the late teaching of Lacan is non-dialectical. Lacan himself referred to dialectics as late as *Seminar XXIV*, so strictly speaking it is Miller rather than Lacan who is non-dialectical.

4 Miller, 2017. In this text, and elsewhere, Miller repeats the idea that the real unconscious precedes the establishment of a transferential unconscious (p. 35) and stands radically outside of it.

5 Miller, 2013, cited in Lacan Web Télévision, 2022.

6 Miller, (2012a), p. 18.

7 Miller, (2020), p. 173.

8 On this point, Miller is often to be found contradicting himself. In Miller (2006), the father is indeed emptied out and reduced to a merely logical function, distinct from any man; elsewhere (e.g. Miller, 2014), the father is not a pure signifier, as the mother must link the signifier with 'the body of a man' (p. 12).

9 Brousse, (2021), p. 26. Brousse goes so far as to claim that not only paternity, but also motherhood has been abolished by the present social order, by mechanisms that remain unspecified in the text.

10 Brousse, (2021), p. 28. In fact, such questions betray the questioner's commitment to the supposedly abolished familial form, in the same vein that asking of gay couples who plays the man/woman is an expression of the crudest heteronormativity.

11 Brousse, (2021), p. 27.

12 A case in point can be found in Miller, 2012b.

and to prove that the signatory is, if I can put it like this, a non-nobody, that he is capable of writing what everyone else writes.¹³ In other words, having relegated transference to an inferior status in the theory, it nevertheless returns as performativity in the discourse. Those who reject filiation nonetheless practice affiliation, and none of us need believe the notion that analysts, perhaps the most genealogical of all professions, forever inscribing the markings of their ancestry on every publication, don't believe in lineage. This is comedy.

Jacques-Alain Miller in particular ends up in a strange theoretical position. His discussions, so influential in the Lacanian world, hinge on two foundations: a reading of the late Lacan which takes primacy over every other possible Lacan, and a series of essentially sociological claims about the changing status of subjectivity in the contemporary world. Miller's knowledge of Lacan's teaching is expert and his reading complex, and whilst it merits critique, that is a task for another paper. Things are rather simpler, however, when it comes to dealing with the sweeping sociological generalisations of Miller and followers. Miller¹⁴, on the one hand, claims that the Name-of-the-Father was operative in the past (presumably in the 1950s, when Lacan formulated it), but is no longer. He never quite specifies what is responsible for this shift other than unevidenced and vague assertions about capitalism and science producing a 'disorder in the real'. At one point, he mentions 'bioengineering' as something that will lead to 'eugenics', but he goes no further¹⁵. Insofar as these vagaries constitute a position, it is an extremely curious one given that the Name-of-the-Father was formulated by Lacan in a France that was not short of either science or capitalism, just a few years after World War Two and the Holocaust, during a period of significant anti-French colonial struggle, and at a time when eugenics was rife throughout mainstream psychiatry. Nothing is easier than pointing to a phenomenon, and claiming that capitalism is the cause of it. Since capitalism is so massively pervasive, one will always be at least partially correct, despite having explained nothing. Freud had his wild anthropology; Miller provides the sociological equivalent. Even if it is possible, as a hypothesis, that the pivot that occurred within developed capi-

talism from a Keynesian welfarist framework to a neoliberal paradigm produced subjective effects, it remains to be demonstrated what exactly that would change in terms of the Name-of-the-Father. It isn't as if patriarchy is incompatible with advanced capitalism and science, as demonstrated in many parts of the world outside of Western Europe and the US. Psychoanalysis has its limitations, and to properly theorise social change, Miller and his followers are in the same boat as the rest of the analytic world, namely, needing recourse to a discourse outside of analysis alone. Ultimately, Miller's conclusions are not a rigorous theorisation of the contemporary real, but rather an imaginisation of this real, and one that can provide limited guidance as far as the psychoanalytic implications of contemporary social and familial structures are concerned. I suggest some different points of departure.

First, let's touch briefly on the topic of diagnosis. All diagnosis is essentially a generalisation, and even if Lacan's structural diagnostic model is the very best of these, it still works against discerning the singularity of each subject. Perhaps Lacanian diagnosis is even more problematic than the merely stupid taxonomies, like the DSM, because its very complexity permits more phenomena to be read into each structure. We should, in my opinion, exercise reservations about the clinical utility of diagnosis, but these does not mean that analysts are obliged to accept as the only alternative a series of bland generalities about delusion or madness that amount to a conceptual porridge, brooking no distinctions. Given that diagnosis is arguably most relevant as a trans-ferential guide for analysts, and since these aspects of praxis are suspect in a clinic of a supposedly real unconscious, one that bears little resemblance to the Freudian unconscious, one can be dismayed, but not surprised that rigorous nosology falls by the wayside. Hypothetically, it is even possible that wild and unrigorous theory and imprecise diagnosis is the basis for misreading clinical data such as to conclude that 'everyone is delusional'.

Next, let's talk about Lacan's structural theory of psychosis, and what it does and doesn't affirm. One point that Lacan repeatedly makes clear is that the presence of a symbolic father bears no necessary relation whatsoever to a biological father, and

13 Lacan, (1993), p. 207-208.

14 Miller, (2012b).

15 Miller, 2012b.

still less to a father qua patriarchal authority. He furnishes us with numerous clinical and anthropological examples to this effect, such that it is curious that anybody could conflate the structural triangulation of Lacan's teaching - the fact of a lack in the Other being positively signified - with a contingent set of social arrangements peculiar to parts of Europe in the past.¹⁶ More subtly, one could even argue that whilst Lacan's teaching in *Seminar III* can be easily overlaid onto Freud's Oedipus, it need not be, and even if it is, it permits such fluidity, such multiplicity of different structural positions, that even under pre-Freudian patriarchy, no outcome is assured. It is worth noting that the abolition of a centralised authority figure is not the same as the abolition of authority as such, and one might recall Foucault's observation that the more liberal a system, the more rules it paradoxically must entail, even if these now emanate diffusely.¹⁷

Second, if I am correct in asserting that Lacan's classical teaching on psychosis is less about a certain type of nuclear family, and more about a structural logic, it follows that we can make a distinction between the form aspects of the structure and its content. Consequently, a pair of same-sex parents might constitute a change in 'tradition' at the level of content, and whilst this may itself be of immense significance for a given subject, it does not of necessity imply any difference whatsoever at the level of formal structure. I believe that we have to keep this in mind as some of the works of Lacanian exegesis are psychotically literal in their reading of the Name-of-the-Father, with this latter requiring a flesh-and-blood man who splits his female partner into a divided woman and mother. These conditions are only haphazardly met under any circumstances, and if you equate them literally with Lacan's structural theory, it is little wonder that you're quickly obliged to abandon the structural theory. Miller's deployment of the 'late' Lacan in surveying the present epoch indeed follows Lacan in asserting that the symbolic order depends upon 'tradition', but, whilst we are on the topic of the psychotically literal,

he omits the greater portion of Lacan in which 'tradition' is not some precise temporal continuity, but rather, that which is capable of being registered in the field of the Other.¹⁸ Same-sex marriage and IVF pregnancies are not 'traditional' temporally speaking but are widely admissible if one approaches the symbolic order as a storehouse of laws and signifiers (i.e. if one approaches it symbolically).

With this in the background, I'd like to turn to *Seminar III* and what is published as chapter 14, 'The signifier, as such, signifies nothing'.¹⁹ Lacan claims that psychosis is a structure, and that a structure is comprised of a set, an ensemble of elements, but that a 'set' is not to be understood as a 'totality'. This is important for what follows. Lacan introduces the idea of the 'pure signifier', that is, the signifier that signifies nothing. At this point, for Lacan, these signifiers are the ones used by physics, but not only physics, and it is precisely by virtue of the meaninglessness of these signifier that they are 'indestructible'. Lacan does not reference Frege,²⁰ but he makes the very Fregean move of declaring that 'no empirical theory' can account for whole numbers. The origin of number is not a thing that we can easily grasp, Lacan says, but the addition of each 'one', of each whole number, far from being only an exercise in arithmetic, of adding-one, in fact constitutes a paradigmatic shift. He says that 'One can clearly distinguish on the banks of the Orinoco between a tribe that has learned to signify the number four and not beyond, and one for which the number five opens up surprising possibilities, consistent moreover with the entire signifying system into which the tribe is inserted'.²¹

If we were to bring in the concept of zero here, we would have all the rudimentary elements of Miller's famous paper 'Suture',²² but with the extra dimension that each additive operation is also a formal restructuring. Paranoid psychosis, for example, is grounded in a logic of the two, a fundamentally imaginary relation of ego to ego, with all of the polarising reactivity that this implies. The addition of a third, or even a fourth, if we wish to insert the *sinthome* here, does not

16 There are many examples of symbolic paternity to be found in Lacan (1993), and practically none of them concern the nuclear family, or the family such as it exists under 20th century capitalism.

17 Foucault, (2008), p. 150.

18 Miller (2012b) refers to 'tradition' only in the temporal, rather than structural sense of the term.

19 Lacan, (1993), p. 183.

20 Frege, (2007).

21 Lacan, (1993), p. 185.

22 Miller (1965), in Hallward and Eden (2012). This Millerian reference is obviously much earlier than the others cited here, from a period when Miller favoured a different political outlook to his self-professed liberal 'cynicism'.

abolish the ego, imaginary dimension, but, at the risk of Hegelianising Lacan, sublates it (i.e. both negates and preserves it) via restructuration. Note that even if we don't accept Lacan's specific anthropological examples, there are plenty of others which demonstrate that this restructuration requires neither a man nor a patriarchy to solve the problem of the subject being caught in the dyadic relation, or the crocodile's jaws as Lacan puts it in *Seminar XVII*.²³ The Oedipal drama may well be historically accidental but this does not mean the same for triangulation *per se*. Very simply, the paternal metaphor is the name of that which the subject uses as defence vis-a-vis that which is otherwise unbearable with respect to the Other. (A real father, by contrast, could be conceived of as that portion of the mother's jouissance which is oriented to an object other than the child-subject). None of this is to valorise neurosis, for that matter, since one could identify those cases of autistic or schizophrenic subjects whose 'solution' is found in the imaginary dyad, as Lacan himself observes in *Seminar III* in cases of the 'as-if' subjects imitating a specular double.²⁴ In paranoia, as elsewhere, one divides into two. The delusion constructs a particularised relation to the Other for the subject, registering the latter in the field of the former, but also at the same time delimits and defends against this Other. There are neurotic versions of this, such as phobias, and fetishes.

The slogan that 'everyone is mad' or delusional, if it is not merely a rhetorical provocation, stands as a repudiation of structure and paradigmatic shifts. If the delusion in question is identification with the ego, with all the narcissism implied by this, then this slogan merely recapitulates Lacan's Schema L from the 1950s²⁵ in which the ego is clearly distinct from the subject. It is equivalent to asserting that there is an imaginary register, which is to say that it stays at the level of the insights of 70 years ago. Even here, we're dealing with a very limited generalisation since the egos of different subjects differ structurally, one from another. The schizophrenic sometimes struggles to have an ego at all, and to the extent that it finds consistency, one solution is via that of the imaginary double mentioned previously. Neurotic subjects may require, in analytic treatment, to be distanced from

their egos, disidentified with them, but in any case, these egos have their own points of torsion, of dystonicity. It is the paranoiacs who occasionally are the models of a perfect consistency, and who, in their hyper-normality, brittle as it is, take their place as the exception. As for delusions, the fully-fledged ones always possess a kernel of truth, though this is a metaphorical truth that is taken by the subject as literal.

If this is Lacan's position on the paternal function, it remains unclear why there should be, among contemporary psychoanalysts, such insistence on all subjects being delusional in a world bereft of fathers and symbolic authority. Part of the confusion may arise from a conflation between the figure of father and master, the paternal metaphor and master signifier. In fact, there are at least two masters in Lacan, one from Aristotle and the other from Hegel.²⁶ The master qua father in Aristotle could be thought of as a patriarch, whereas the master qua father in Hegel is a failed patriarch, and this diminution of the patriarchy, far from producing general foreclosure, is precisely that which provides the minimal space necessary for a neurosis. In an Aristotelian patriarchy, Dora gets exchanged, the Ratman's father pays off his debts, and the young female homosexual gets thrown, rather than jumps from the Viennese bridge. The relative decline in paternal authority permits the space required for neurotic desire, but does not, of itself, eliminate the triadic or tetradic structure. The structure works with socioeconomic contingencies, and even produces its own contingencies, but psychoanalysts can do better than to conflate the logical form with particular empirical iterations of it. If, by asserting that everyone is delusional, we are referring to the mirages furnished by the imaginary and the ego, then we are speaking correctly, but trivially. If we insist upon the kernel of weirdness that exists in each of us that is not amenable to interpretation, that sits at the edge of meaning and non-meaning, then to be sure, this kernel exists, but to conflate this with madness proper, with delusion, is to repudiate logic and structure, and to reduce psychotic nosology to the level of mere rhetorical flourish.

We may need a replacement for the name of the Name-of-the-Father. A woman could very well

23 'The mother's desire is not something bearable just like that, that you are indifferent to. It will always wreak havoc. A huge crocodile in whose jaws you are - that's the mother.' In Lacan, (2007), p. 112.

24 Lacan, (1993), p. 192.

25 Lacan, (1993), p. 14.

26 This is clearest in Lacan (1992), in the sections discussing Aristotle and Hegel.

metaphorise the Other, and examples are common in which this happens. When Lacanian analysts conflate the patriarchy with the paternal metaphor, it is almost always at the level of the father of the Law, and indeed, a father who attempts today to lay down the law is setting himself up to produce psychotic children. But, the Law is only one aspect of the triadic relation, and others include the function of metaphorisation, separation from the Other, triangulation, identification, nomination of the mother's lack, desire and limits. None of this requires an authoritarian patriarch, and even when it is a matter of a father who is both biologically and symbolically paternal, his function may depend upon his being subject to the Law rather than the arbitrary author of it.²⁷ Also, the pluralisation of the Name of the Father does not only have to mean that the metaphorisation via a third can involve non-paternal names, but that this function itself is fragmented, or distributed across multiple sites and elements.

Some might object that all this neglects the 'late' Lacan, that there is no Other of the Other, and perhaps not even an Other. A bit depends on one's interpretation here. I believe that the maxim concerning the Other's non-existence concerns the Other as absolute guarantor, or total consistency. I don't hear it as a maxim supporting Thatcherite cynicism. As for the late teaching of Lacan, we should look again at the seminar on Joyce. If you want to see people dialoguing all alone, enraptured by their own autoerotic jouissance, you'll find it in responses to the signifiers 'Lacan' and 'Joyce'. Take a look at what Lacan says about the Irish author. He does not give us a diagnosis. The late Lacan, contrary to the tendentious claims of some commentators, does not abjure the Other, the Name of the Father, or dialectics. He indicates the importance of Joyce's father, albeit, in negative fashion, noting that he is a *soulographe*, a drunk, and a fanatic. His ability to mark a place of lack and desire in the Other is limited. 'He is a radically failing father'.²⁸ What is it that holds Joyce together? His *sinthome*, we might wish to say, is his writing, the inscription of his ego - not to say name - by way of mythologising Dublin. But what materially supports

this? Lacan is very clear here. Nora Barnacle is Joyce's support, his 'inside-out glove'.²⁹ You can drive out the Other with a pitchfork, but it has a habit of returning.

One could say that the logic of the signifier to be found in 1950s Lacan can be contrasted with that of *lalangue*, to be found from *Seminar XIX* onward. The difference here is non-trivial, but one could also observe that, just as the logic of sexualisation is supplementary - one sex does not extinguish or supplant the other - so too are these different Lacanian frameworks. One could go further and suggest that not only are they not antagonistic but that they are different aspects of the same thing, albeit, each irreducible to the other. The existence of poetry, or at least, the best of it, is a testament to the coexistence of a logic of signification coinciding with the affectively-laden productions of *lalangue*. Lacan himself draws attention to this in his later seminars where he dwells on his study of Classical Chinese poetry, for instance.³⁰

There are analysts, including, embarrassingly, some Lacanians, who see same-sex couples walking down the street and imagine that the symbolic order is collapsing. The same analysts claimed that homosexuality was a perversion, long after their IPA colleagues abandoned this position, even though perversion could arguably be one of many structural positions that leads precisely back to the paternal metaphor and the symbolic order.³¹ In any case, one should look at this symbolic order. One has to have been deformed by a particularly European training not to have noticed that, around 500 years ago, widespread colonisation of the New World occurred. Colonialism is never just about material plunder but also entails the destruction of symbols, languages, history. It is the destruction of an entire symbolic order (though not the abolition of the symbolic as such). The effects of this are profound, and reverberate centuries after the event, but nonetheless, but these effects do not include generalised delusion. Psychoanalysts in the imperial core of capitalism, seeing the foundations of their own symbolic orders slowly decay, would do well to study the solutions to be found in the colonial world. A theme of some post-colonial writers is that of the destruction of 'empty

27 This is a theme of Recalcati (2019).

28 Lacan, (2016), p. 77.

29 Lacan, (2016), p. 68.

30 Lacan, (1976-1977).

31 For instance, see Miller (1996), in which homosexuality is repeatedly, and uncritically equated with structural perversion.

space' under colonialism,³² which does not refer only to the theft of 'empty' lands and resources, but also the loss of 'empty space' within cultural and symbolic practices as these become subordinated to bio-political disciplinary regimes. Psychoanalysis could serve as a praxis capable of re-opening some space, but only on the strict pre-condition that analysts critically interrogate their own relations to non-analytic discourses, as well as the material and symbolic conditions of their societies beyond the level of wild generalisation. 'Docility' is not enough. In some sense, a psychoanalytic praxis that is blind and deaf to colonialism, that seeks to forge institutional ties without questioning the crucible in which these are formed, will inevitably replicate the very norms that analysts imagine themselves resistant to. Empirically, this is manifested as the reduction of psychoanalytic exegesis to university discourse, namely, discipline by

discipleship. Nobody is coerced - this is not a master discourse after all - but the relevant publications do not dare to transmit any opinion dissenting from teacher-masters whose formation was half a century ago, and whose theory says less about the state of the world than it does about their own bigotry and social position.

Finally, just to be clear, I am reminded of the anecdote of the Catholic priests who sent their acolytes to Lacan's seminars, hoping, mistakenly, that some teaching on the Name-of-the-Father would bolster their faith in the Law. My aim here is not to bolster faith in anything, still less in a social order based in patriarchy. Fathers are contingent rather than necessary, but the logic of triangulation is not, and it is this logic that makes fatherlessness resemble a paranoid fantasy. Fathers are indeed a symbolic fiction; fatherlessness an imaginary one.

32 For instance, see Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1987), p. 37.

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