

# The Degree Zero of Madness

## On Everyone Is Mad

Gil Caroz

The aphorism, *Everyone Is Mad* [*Tout le monde est fou*] does not apply to all beings on Earth, but only to those speaking beings who obey the code of language and are immersed in a discourse which forms a social bond. Indeed, when we speak, we render things unreal, we make them inexistent, which is the very meaning of the formula, “the word is the murder of the thing.” But what makes the speaker a madman is precisely that, by speaking and therefore making the thing inexistent, he gives it a being. We all know the example of Madame Bovary,[\[1\]](#) who does not exist and has never existed and yet her being is nevertheless assured by a work that gives her a being. Let us take another example from Russell: to say that the King of France is bald is madness because the King of France does not exist.[\[2\]](#) Moreover, “it should be noted that if a man who thinks he is a king is mad, a king who thinks he is a king is no less so.”[\[3\]](#)

## A defense against the real

This power of language and discourses to render things inexistent is part of a vast device [*dispositif*] that we call the *Other*. This Other, known as symbolic, does not really exist. This is why it is likely to protect the subject from what is unbearable in the real. When we speak, the actual thing that we talk about is negated, the signifiers referring only to other signifiers, leaving their referents as empty placeholders. Ultimately, this means that, we only speak of the absence of the sexual relation. When the object *a* comes to fill the void of this absence, it is then jouissance as positivized that emerges, although it remains unsayable. Whether the place of the referent remains empty or is obstructed by the object *a*, in both cases, the real remains excluded from language. Thus, madness becomes a universal and structural defense of the speaking being against the real. It takes its support from the Other, although it unfolds differently according to the structures.

In his “Irony Clinic”, Jacques-Alain Miller describes the different modalities of defense that consist in talking about what does not exist. The neurotic is mad because he makes the Other exist by situating in it the object *a* as the logical consistency in his fantasy, but also as the lost object that causes his desire. The paranoiac is mad because he locates jouissance in the Other, thus giving the Other a real consistency. The inexistent Other becomes “greedy for the object *a*.”[\[4\]](#) It is transformed into an Other that exists, one that condenses jouissance and enjoys the subject.

Schizophrenia is the only clinical structure that does not meet the definition of madness as a defense against the real through the mediation of the Other,[\[5\]](#) since the gap between the symbolic and the real is absent. For the schizophrenic, the word *is* the thing; that is, the symbolic is real. Not only does he not use the Other as a defense against the real, but through irony, he also attacks Other as symbolic and as a social bond supported by a discourse. Consequently, the schizophrenic is immersed in the real, he does not defend himself against it.

Just as schizophrenia is an exception among clinical structures, psychoanalysis is an exception among discourses regarding madness in that its practice is not a defense against the real. On the contrary, psychoanalysis is an ethics oriented *by* the real. Lacan points out that analytic discourse has “nothing universal about it,” “which is precisely,” he adds, “why it cannot be taught”.[\[6\]](#) As a universal, teaching

belongs to the university discourse, which delivers an *expounded* knowledge that avoids the real. In turn, psychoanalysis is not taught but rather transmitted in an one-by-one encounter and produces some *supposed* knowledge, valid only for the One all alone.[7] When this knowledge is pushed to its limit, it creates a fracture in the articulation  $S_1 \square S_2$  which is the very condition of universal knowledge. Those  $S_1$ s that are isolated during this operation are not of the order of a negation of the real. On the contrary, they designate the real of the subject. In this sense, analytic discourse is not mad at all.

The aphorism, *Everyone Is Mad* contains a strong articulation between two terms: it concerns teaching and knowledge on the one hand, and the clinic of delusion on the other. Delusion is a response to the structure of knowledge. J.-A. Miller presents delusion as an  $S_2$  that is produced in response to the perplexity caused by the emergence of an elementary phenomenon that can be assimilated to an  $S_1$ . [8] According to this perspective, the elementary phenomenon would have the value of an axiom, of a logical postulate, as enigmatic as it is inexplicable. Delusion is an  $S_2$  that imparts meaning to this irreducible, out-of-meaning element when it emerges in the subject's life.

## Generalizations

The aphorism that serves as the title of our Congress is in keeping with the current trend of depathologization, that replaces the clinical principle with a legal one and substitutes lifestyles for pathology. [9] For if we consider that – starting from this aphorism the counterpart of which is that everyone is *normal* – mental illness and psychosis no longer exist, then we are denying the real. The democratization of the clinic thus becomes a form of madness in itself. J.-A. Miller has indicated on several occasions that Lacan's concepts of psychosis can be generalized to the speaking being as such, without necessarily annihilating their clinical value in the context of establishing a differential diagnosis.

### *Mental automatism is the Other*

Let us begin by first noticing a generalization based on this one psychiatric concept as coined by de Clérambault: mental automatism. As the “initial form of every psychosis,” [10] mental automatism refers to an “independent enunciation,” [11] a parallel, autonomous and foreign discourse that parasitizes the subject and traverses him. This parasitizing is not in itself a pathology, J.-A. Miller states. It is rather a manifestation of the Other of language, which is the lot of human beings as such. This thesis is consistent with a statement by Lacan that sounds like a rhyme: “Mental automatism is normal!” [« *C'est normal, l'automatisme mental!* [12] »] The psychotic, however, distinguishes himself in that he recognizes the foreign presence of this Other who speaks through him, who occasionally speaks to him and intrudes. In contrast, the neurotic ignores the fact that the Other speaks within him, he maintains the illusion that it is he who speaks, that is, unless he recognizes the unconscious. Thus, making the phenomenon of mental automatism a generality does not prevent us from distinguishing psychosis from neurosis.

### *Ordinary paranoia*

In another register, this time imaginary, J.-A. Miller looks at paranoia in terms of the “primary relation with the other” [13] which is truly of the order of a generalized paranoia. This conception finds its basis in the connection, defended by Lacan in his thesis, between personality and paranoia. For example, we know how difficult it is, in clinical practice, to differentiate the paranoid ego from the Vauban-like fortification [14] of the obsessional ego, for no matter what the structure of the subject is, the ego is paranoid. One can already read this in Freud as he describes, in his “Negation,” [15] the construction of the ego which consists, he says, in locating the good object inside the ego, and the bad object outside – this localization of the bad jouissance outside is a paranoid mode of relating to the other. It is worth noting that this

conception of the paranoid ego runs through Lacan's teaching, starting with the mirror stage, where the aggressive logic of "it's either you or me" reigns. In addition, if we consider that the ego is not only hostile to the other, but also narcissistic, we can thus speak of paranoia as normal and correlated to a generalized or ordinary megalomania.

Let us recall that, according to the mirror stage, the constitution of the ego occurs in two stages. In the first stage, that of the organism, the body is fragmented. In the second stage, the unified image of the body is constructed, bringing together and articulating the organs. One finds in these two stages of the mirror the two stages of the construction of a delusion, with, as part of the second stage, the ego as a flawless sphere that proves to be equivalent to a delusional construction. Following on from the mirror stage, it is from the unified image of his body that the subject forges a phantasmatic image of the world as an ideal, spherical form, similar to the globe adorning the poster of our XIV<sup>th</sup> WAP Congress. J.-A. Miller points out that this generalized paranoia as a primary relation to the other contradicts the conceptions of the fundamental understanding of the other that we find in theories of intersubjectivity.[\[16\]](#) Contrary to being comprehensible, the other is fundamentally foreign and threatening.

#### *Foreclosure: A transfer of dimension*

Generalized delusion, as described thus far, is an imaginary or symbolic construction. On the other hand, foreclosure, unlike delusion, is not a construction but a rejection of an element from the symbolic register that reappears in the real. J.-A. Miller names this passage from one register to the other a transfer of dimension.[\[17\]](#) This phenomenon runs through all the structures.

A signifier is rejected in the real when it condenses an excessive and unspeakable *jouissance*. Ernst Kris' case of the Fresh Brains Man, commented by Lacan,[\[18\]](#) clearly shows how the impossibility of the signifier to support the drive leads to a rejection in the real in the form of an acting out. It is indeed a foreclosure – not in the context of psychosis, but in the relation between analyst and analysand. We can suppose that the analyst's intervention, which fails to consider the patient's words as a truth concerning the oral drive, rejects this drive from the symbolic. As a result, the drive reappears in the patient's behavior, which acts it out. The unsayable that is not heard by the analyst returns in the real on the side of the patient.

In hysteria too, a similar passage into the real can manifest itself in the subject's pantomime, i.e. via her conduct in the world. Let us recall the patient in Lacan's patient presentation, who hears the insult "sow"[\[19\]](#) returning in the real, testifying to an unsayable *jouissance* that had invaded her at the moment when she met her neighbor's friend in the corridor of the apartment block. In similar circumstances, writes J.-A. Miller, a hysteric subject would not have heard a voice, but "it's not unthinkable that [the symptom] might return in the real, for example in the form of acting as if all men were pigs".[\[20\]](#) In obsessional neurosis, it is the father's gaze which can acquire consistency and lead to some major inhibition. This real consistency of the gaze is a manifestation of the obscenity of the superego that the signifier cannot contain, and which is rejected from the symbolic and displaced toward the real.

This series of concepts regarding psychosis, generalized and applied to the speaking being [*parlêtre*] as such, demonstrates that the aphorism, *Everyone Is Mad* can co-exist with a recognition of the real of the clinic. The fact that these phenomena traverse the psychic structures does not necessarily lead to the suppression of these structures.

#### *Foreclosure inherent in the cure*

Let us return to the question of teaching. One must be mad, says Lacan, to want to teach psychoanalysis in the university mode, that is to say as an exposed and universal form of knowledge. And yet, the training

of the psychoanalyst is at the heart of the action of the Schools of the WAP. In other words, while there is no meaningful teaching psychoanalysis, there is, as we have seen, the possibility of a one-by-one transmission. But the knowledge at stake in this transmission differs from a knowledge that dominates, that of which the master is the agent. This knowledge, on the contrary, is horrifying. In fact, Lacan notes, it is doubtful that candidates would commit themselves to the experience if they knew beforehand that subjective destitution was written on the entrance ticket. “Merely making a prohibition of what in our being is indispensable is to offer ourselves to a return of destiny that is a malediction. What is refused in the symbolic, recall the Lacanian finding, reappears in the real.”<sup>[21]</sup>

In other words, there is a possible foreclosure inherent to the analytical treatment itself when we deny ourselves the knowledge that arises from subjective destitution. This destitution, which imposes itself on the subject in analysis, implies that what he supports himself with – his suffering, his fantasy, his identifications, his complaint, his division and his supposition of knowledge – is no longer of any use to him. The subject must then rely on his own existence as the sole point of certainty that can guide his ethics. This recognition of the non-existence of the Other is correlated to a form of recognition of the real. It may provoke “horror, indignation, panic,”<sup>[22]</sup> but this is the degree zero of madness.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Miller, J.-A., « L’orientation lacanienne. L’Un tout seul », enseignement prononcé dans le cadre du département de psychanalyse de l’université Paris 8, cours du 23 mars 2011, inédit.

<sup>[2]</sup> Miller, J.-A., « La psychose dans le texte de Lacan », *Analytica*, n° 58, 1989, p. 137.

<sup>[3]</sup> Lacan, J., “Presentation on Psychological Causality, *Écrits*, trans. B. Fink (London: Norton, 2006), p.136.

<sup>[4]</sup> Miller, J.-A., “Ironic Clinic”, *Psychoanalytical Notebooks*, no. 7, London, London Society of the New Lacanian School, 2002, p. 18.

<sup>[5]</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>[6]</sup> Lacan, J., “There are Four Discourses”, *Culture/ Clinic*, no.1 (2013), p. 3.

<sup>[7]</sup> Miller, J.-A. “Everyone Is Mad, WAP 2024”, Available online [here](#)

<sup>[8]</sup> Miller, J.-A. “The Invention of Delusion”, *International Lacanian Review*, pp. 1-29

<sup>[9]</sup> Miller, J.-A. “Everyone is Mad, WAP 2024”, *op. cit.*

<sup>[10]</sup> Miller J.-A., « Enseignements de la présentation de malade », *La conversation d’Arcachon*, Agalma – Le Seuil, 1997, p. 294.

<sup>[11]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>[12]</sup> Lacan, J., « Vers un signifiant nouveau », texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller, *Ornicar ?*, n° 17/18, printemps 1979, p. 22.

<sup>[13]</sup> Miller, J.-A., “Paranoia, Primary Relation to the Other”, *The Lacanian Review*, no 10, December 2020, pp. 57-91.

<sup>[14]</sup> Lacan, J. “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis”, *Écrits, op. cit.* p. 88.

<sup>[15]</sup> Freud, S. “Negation”, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIX (1923-1925): The Ego and the Id and Other Works, pp. 235-239.

<sup>[16]</sup> Miller, J.-A., “Paranoia, Primary Relation to the Other”, *op. cit.* p. 83.

<sup>[17]</sup> Miller, J.-A., “Generalized Foreclosure”, *Lacanian Ink* 55/56, Fall 2021, pp. 10-19.

<sup>[18]</sup> Lacan, J. “The Direction of the Treatment and the Principle of its Power”, *Écrits, op. cit.*, pp. 501-502.

<sup>[19]</sup> Lacan, J. “On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis”, *Écrits, op. cit.*, p. 448.

<sup>[20]</sup> Miller, J.-A., “Generalized Foreclosure”, *op. cit.* p. 19. [Translation modified]

<sup>[21]</sup> Lacan, J. “Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School”, Available online.

<sup>[22]</sup> *Ibid.*