

FURTHER REMARKS ABOUT SCHREBER'S HALLUCINATIONS¹

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This paper is a sequel to one which I read two years ago at the Congress in Zürich (*Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 31, 1950). Let me state some of the conclusions reached in that first paper before commencing my present one.

Schreber, in the period preceding his psychotic delusional state, tried to ward off the demands of his unconscious homosexual urge. Yet one night his defences broke down and he experienced an outburst of six emissions. The castration danger involved in these orgasms caused him to sever his relations with reality, whereupon his psychosis began.

It should not be assumed that Schreber's contact with reality was now completely broken. A large part of his personality still remained in contact with reality. Only if a danger arises with which the ego cannot cope by reality means is contact with reality relinquished and a psychotic symptom formed instead.

During the early stage of Schreber's psychosis, every time that the *non-psychotic* part of his personality anticipated a situation in which his homosexual feelings would gain the upper hand and would lead to an orgasm, his ego did not wait until such a situation had fully developed, but set up an interference. With regard to the complicated process which then followed and which I have described in my previous paper, I wish to emphasize only that the cathexis of the dangerous homosexual urge is withdrawn and that this withdrawn energy is used in forming the hallucination. In this psychotic process a very primitive form of projection is employed. What was originally part of the id appears now, in a distorted form, to come from the outside.

We may say that the energy which was withdrawn from the dangerous urge evaporates in forming the hallucination. *The hallucination, therefore, is a discharge phenomenon!* The amount of energy which would lead to the development of danger is discharged, and the conflict is temporarily resolved. New stimuli

—either from within or from without—will again cause an increase of the homosexual urge, and the whole process is repeated.

Viewing the hallucination as a phenomenon through which energy is discharged before it can create a danger situation, we should not expect to find the hallucination accompanied by anxiety. Let us consider an example.

During the night, Schreber had visions in which certain stars or constellations of stars were lost. 'Whereas these visions occurred at night, I thought I could notice during the day the sun following my movements; if I walked to and fro in the one-windowed room which I occupied at the time, I could observe the sunshine corresponding to my movements, sometimes on the right wall, sometimes on the left wall. . . . It is difficult for me to regard as an illusion of my senses this observation, which, as mentioned, I made during the daytime; the more so, as I remember calling this observation, *which naturally horrified me*, to the attention of Dr. Tauscher, the assistant physician, on the occasion of one of his visits' (*Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken*, p. 70). At this point I want to stress that Dr. Tauscher, who was Professor Flechsig's first assistant, is mentioned in Schreber's autobiography a number of times. Schreber ascribes to Dr. Tauscher an influence similar to that of Professor Flechsig. Clearly, Dr. Tauscher was a substitute for Professor Flechsig and, as such, strongly aroused Schreber's sexual feelings. Of course, if Dr. Tauscher had not been present in person, the same situation might still have arisen as a result of Schreber's imagination.

Had this process been allowed to continue in the sphere of reality, Schreber would have been confronted with the danger of an erection and would have had to think continually about his penis. In anticipation of this danger, a hallucination was developed, the content of which we are now ready to examine.

The observation that the sun followed his

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movements '*naturally horrified*' Schreber. What was the meaning of the sun? According to Schreber, the sun and the stars were God's organs through which He created wonders on earth. For instance, He had at one time impregnated Schreber. Thus we may conclude that to Schreber the sun and the stars were God's genitals. Yet God obtained His power from the souls of the deceased. In the hereafter Schreber's soul would undergo a process of purification, at the conclusion of which his soul would attain a state of feminine bliss in beholding God. During the process of purification, a soul loses its masculinity, which goes to enrich God. It becomes clear, therefore, that God's organs, namely, the sun and the stars, were projections of Schreber's own genitals.

The sun and the stars have yet another meaning. May I digress here briefly. Schreber told of a group of voices belonging to what he called the 'Cassiopeia brethren'—souls which 'hung' under the constellation Cassiopeia and which on earth had been members of the student organization 'Saxonia'. These souls attempted to influence Schreber. They urged him to prove his masculine courage by beating the attendants; they sneered at him that he lacked the courage to commit suicide, etc. Schreber, in conversing with Flechsig's soul, asked continually for potassium cyanide or strychnine in order to poison himself. Flechsig's soul, in hypocritical fashion, agreed to prescribe the poison on condition that Schreber would drink it. When Flechsig the physician came to see him, however, he (Flechsig) refused to have anything to do with the giving of poison. The voices told Schreber that Professor Flechsig, too, had once been a member of the 'Saxonia'.

Who exactly were meant by the 'Cassiopeia brethren'? The fact that both Flechsig and the 'Cassiopeia brethren' belonged to the student organization 'Saxonia' is evidence that Schreber had in mind a particular group of people, among whom was Flechsig. Furthermore, the sneering of the 'Cassiopeia brethren' that Schreber's masculine courage failed him is evidence that Schreber was resorting to the code of honour of the German student organization 'Saxonia', according to which code one is called upon continually to prove one's courage. To this code can be traced the idea of living up to certain moralistic principles, as laid down by the voices, as well as Flechsig's hypocrisy in saying that he would prescribe the

poison only on condition that Schreber would agree to take it. Clearly, the sneers of the 'Cassiopeia brethren' and Flechsig's hypocrisy are projections of Schreber's own doubt as to his courage to fight the attendants or to commit suicide as an alternative. With reference to the 'duels' among students, we may consider these as being both a defence against the homosexual tendencies prevalent among members of these student organizations, and also an outlet for such tendencies. The same traits of pugnaciousness and homosexual attraction characterize Schreber's relations with the male attendants. It is highly probable, therefore, that the 'Cassiopeia brethren' symbolize these attendants. This conclusion is supported by the further fact that in Germany a male attendant is called a 'brother' and a female nurse a 'sister'. Here it is pertinent to remark that according to the language of the nerves, Schreber was to be abused sexually by Flechsig, but there was a certain period of time when the voices also told Schreber that he would be abused by the attendants as well. All these points, together with the fact that Schreber considered both Flechsig and the Cassiopeia brethren as belonging to the 'Saxonia', lead us to conclude that the attendants are the same as the 'Cassiopeia brethren'.

Finally, we may ask which particular personality was symbolized by the sun. Being the most prominent of the heavenly bodies, the sun clearly symbolizes the over-all importance of Flechsig.

To recapitulate: The sun following his movements '*naturally horrified*' Schreber. The sun symbolizes both Schreber's own penis and the person of Flechsig. The sun's movements in following Schreber symbolize the movements of Schreber's penis under the influence of his sexual excitement and seem to arouse in him anxiety, just as would have been the case if his penis had reacted. Also, because the sun is a symbol for Flechsig, the sun's movements in following Schreber are evidence of Schreber's inability to rid himself of Flechsig.

Schreber's horror at the abnormal behaviour of the sun forms a new feature of the hallucination. How do we explain this anxiety, which occurs notwithstanding the fact that the hallucination is a discharge of energy in an effort to keep the energy from becoming dangerous? In my opinion, this anxiety demonstrates the relative weakness of the defensive side of the hallucination. The formation process of the

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hallucination consists of two phases. The first is the withdrawal of energy from Schreber's non-psychotic relationship with Flechsig (or with Flechsig's substitutes). The attraction exerted by Flechsig, especially when he was present, was so powerful that it formed a strong resistance to this withdrawal. The second phase is the formation of the hallucination itself. Obviously the content of the hallucination—the displacement of the movements of the penis by the movements of the sun—is an indication of the intensity of this struggle by bearing too close a resemblance to the original.

We may conceive of this process in the following manner. Schreber's attachment to Flechsig is so strong that it forms a resistance to the withdrawal of energy. It is clear that this resistance prevents as much energy as possible from being withdrawn. There will then remain in the unconscious of the non-psychotic layer a certain cathexis of the attachment to Flechsig, and this attachment will still constitute a danger to the ego. As a result, only those ideas that are closely connected with the danger situation will lose their cathexis, and ideas bearing less resemblance to the original will remain cathected, i.e. within the sphere of reality. These latter ideas, because they do not lose their cathexis, do not become available for use by the attempt at restitution in forming the hallucination. Here we are reminded to a certain extent of the functioning of repression. An idea that is sufficiently remote from the repressed thought may serve as a compromise; i.e. the ego allows this remote idea to become conscious, notwithstanding that it also represents the id. This process is quite different from its psychotic counterpart. In the psychotic process, an idea does not lose its cathexis when it is remote from the danger situation, and therefore it cannot be utilized by the attempt at restitution.

The withdrawn energy is used by the attempt at restitution in forming the hallucination, the content of which still bears too close a resemblance to the danger. At the same time as the hallucination is formed, the non-psychotic ego reacts with anxiety because in the unconscious there still remains a remnant of the sexual desire for Flechsig. The anxiety, therefore, has a true phobic nature. Because this remnant of sexual desire is relatively small, it can be kept ineffective by the anxiety attack. It is amazing that the anxiety which the ego experiences in relation to the hallucination is formed,

not by the psychotic, but by the non-psychotic part of the ego in order to ward off a non-psychotic unconscious attachment to Flechsig. Here we observe neurotic and psychotic parts of the personality working in close cooperation to overcome the danger!

We see that the schizophrenic hallucination and the neurotic phobia have one trait in common: both are based on an anticipation of danger. The phobic anxiety is formed by the ego and, as described by Freud, serves the purpose of inhibiting further development in the direction of the danger. As a result of this anxiety formation, the situation in the id remains unchanged. The phobic mechanism, therefore, is *not* a discharge phenomenon.

In contrast to the phobia, the hallucination is not regularly accompanied by anxiety. The first phase of the hallucination, namely, the withdrawal of energy, interferes seriously with the id as well as with the ego. Cathexes of both ego- and id-material are withdrawn, thus changing the structure completely. The content of the hallucination consists of an idea which is recathected and behind which there is no unconscious hidden.

I want to discuss another feature of the hallucination. Schreber retained memories which led him to believe that for a time he had existed in a second, inferior shape in possession of a lesser intellect. Voices told him of the previous existence of another Daniel Paul Schreber who had been much more gifted mentally than he (Schreber) was. Since Schreber knew beyond a doubt that none of his forebears had been named Daniel Paul Schreber, he concluded that this name could refer only to himself when he was in complete possession of all his mental faculties. 'In the second, inferior shape I must have, if I may use the expression, quietly passed one day; I remember that I was lying in bed in a room which I cannot now recall as resembling any of the rooms familiar to me while at Flechsig's Clinic and that I was clearly conscious of a gradual extinction of my soul—an experience, by the way, which was similar to a peaceful dozing across into death, except for depressing memories of my wife, of whom I thought much during those moments. On the other hand, there was a time when the souls who were in nerve-connection with me spoke of a plurality of heads (i.e. a number of individualities in the same head) which they encountered in me and from which they drew back, as though frightened, with the utterance,

"Why, for heaven's sake, that is a man with a number of heads!"' (*Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken*, pp. 72 and 73).

This group of hallucinations contains a number of self-observations. In contrast to the previous hallucinations, which were concerned with the destruction of the starry sky, these later hallucinations portray severe damage to Schreber himself.

Let us consider two of these later hallucinations, namely, (1) that Schreber had existed for a time as an inferior shape, and (2) that subsequently this shape passed peacefully out of existence.

It was difficult for Schreber to understand how the Daniel Paul Schreber who figured in the first hallucination, a man no longer in possession of his complete mental faculties, could refer to himself—a sign, presumably, that he was already estranged from his former personality. Obviously, this feeling of estrangement served as a defence to prevent the outbreak of anxiety following his awareness of the loss of his capabilities. The second hallucination, too, is accompanied by feelings of estrangement, not about his own personality but about his environment—his room. Fortunately, in another chapter of his autobiography (Chapter VII, p. 81) Schreber gives an explanation of his death. He states that he remembers reading in a daily paper about the middle of March, 1894, an announcement of his own death. He regarded this as an omen that he could no longer expect to return to human society.

This explanation of Schreber's enables us to understand the meaning of the content of these two hallucinations: Schreber, in the shape in which he now exists, can neither return to human society again nor reacquire the personality he had when he lived in that society. We already know why a return to one of these former states is impossible: the danger caused by his homosexual feelings prevents such a return. Had Schreber experienced these self-observations with accompanying feelings of

depersonalization, he would have become aware that his defences against the danger were too weak. Therefore, whenever the danger approaches, the hallucinatory process interferes. Schreber's remark about depressing memories of his wife shows that she, too, was not of sufficient importance to him to be of any protective help against his homosexual feelings.

The third hallucination—that of the souls drawing back as though they were frightened at the sight of a man with a plurality of heads—plainly shows that under non-psychotic conditions a self-observation would have been made of the disintegration of the personality into separate parts, each part representing a personality in itself. Such a process might be interpreted as a disintegration into separate identifications. We may assume that the disintegration of the personality would lead to a weakening of the defence against the homosexual urge, with the result that an outbreak of anxiety would accompany the self-observation. In Schreber's case this non-psychotic reaction never occurred, for the obvious reason that it would not guarantee a strong enough defence against the homosexual urge. In the psychotic process, however, the hallucination is formed in the face of the approaching danger, the hallucination also serving to direct interest into channels far removed from the sexual area. Because in the hallucination the observation of the disintegration was not made by Schreber himself, but by the souls, the accompanying anxiety had also to be experienced by the souls.

In this second group of hallucinations we see demonstrated a very important feature. Their contents reveal defence mechanisms of the non-psychotic layer that were never used by Schreber. The various defences were too weak and for that reason could not be used to ward off the danger. It is the task of this second group of hallucinations to ward off a danger that cannot be fought successfully by the depersonalizations or by an anxiety attack.